MINOAN ART

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FRAGMENTS OF WALL-PAINTINGS FROM KNOSSOS

(*Scale* 1 : 2)

PREFACE

THE occasion of this Lecture was the publication of the second volume of Sir Arthur Evans's *Palace of Minos at Knossos*, of which the third volume has appeared since then, and the final, fourth volume is expected soon. It is therefore fitting that most of the material used here should already have been handled there; but it was in any case inevitable, for Sir Arthur Evans has assembled all the known documents of Minoan art in his great work, and has illustrated nearly all of them. In citing documents found elsewhere than at Knossos I have usually referred to their recent publication in *The Palace of Minos*, as well as to the original sources.

My own Figures 5 and 7, and Plates III b, VI a, VII b, are reproduced from Sir Arthur Evans's book, for which I have to acknowledge the permission of the publishers, Messrs. Macmillan and Company, as well as for the use of their blocks in my Plates II b, VI b, and Figure 2. I am indebted to the British School of Archaeology at Athens for the loan of the block of my Figure 8, and for permission to reproduce Plates I, IV, V a, and XII, from their drawings.

Where the locality of a place is not specified, it is Crete; and where material is not otherwise attributed, it is in the Cretan Museum at Herakleion.

E. J. F.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE TEXT

LIST OF PLATES

ABBREVIATIONS

Ἀρχ. Ἐφ. *Ἀρχαιολογικὴ Ἐφημερίς.*
B.S.A. *The Annual of the British School at Athens.*
J.d.I. *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts.*
J.H.S. *The Journal of Hellenic Studies.*
Mon. Ant. *Monumenti Antichi della R. Accademia dei Lincei.*
P.M. *The Palace of Minos at Knossos*, by Sir Arthur Evans.

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Read 6 February, 1929

IF we look at painted Cretan pottery of the best period, that is to say, of the seventeenth or sixteenth century before Christ (Middle Minoan III *b* and Late Minoan I), we shall generally find that it is very fully and effectively decorated,

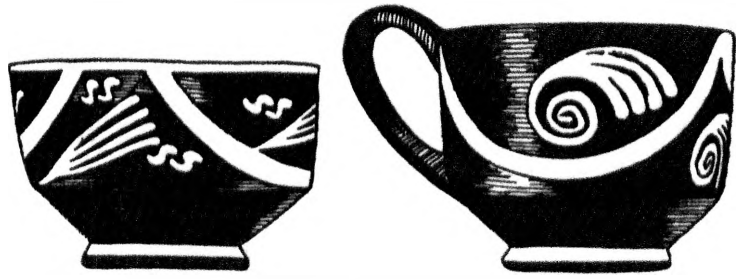


FIG. 1. Painted Pottery: Middle Minoan I.
(Scale 1:2)

that the subject-matter of the decoration is partly abstract and partly naturalistic, and that the style in which these motives are presented is dynamic: I mean that flowers and leaves are drawn as if they were alive or even moving, bent or ruffled by the wind, and even the spiral coils have energy. The decorative character, abstract ornament, and dynamic style were permanent elements of Minoan art, but naturalism is a feature that was only developed fully in this period, and it is this phase that I propose particularly to illustrate.

The naturalistic instinct is visible in the earliest efforts of Cretan painting. Two simple cups (Fig. 1)[1] made just before 2000 B.C. (Middle Minoan I *a*) show the fanciful exploitation of natural forms that was peculiarly Minoan. The

[1] From Palaikastro; British School at Athens.

white tufts here are flowers, perhaps crocuses, so strongly stylized as to be hardly recognizable. One has attached itself impossibly to a spiral coil, the others spring obliquely from broken ground. It is the oblique setting that is most significant, a vivid interest in the positions of things in space, rather than in their actual forms, which is in fact romantic.

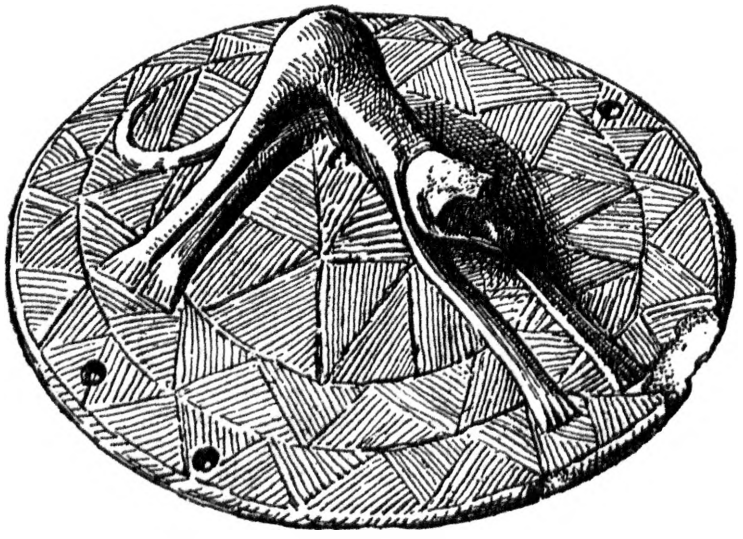


FIG. 2. Stone Lid: Early Minoan II.
(Scale 5:6)

Here we have caught the romantic spirit at its first entry into the world, at least in Europe. It has already selected, but not elaborated, its appropriate subject-matter. But we get more than a glimpse of future achievement in a still younger document (Fig. 2),[1] the figure of a dog which belongs to the middle of the Early Minoan age. It is carved in green steatite and forms the handle of the lid of a cylindrical box. In this precocious work the sculptor has not involved himself in problems of objective form. He has simply tried to express the character of his subject through its physical peculiarities and its pose, and has given an excellent idea of the sprawling, restless street-dog of a Cretan village. But this example of lively modelling is

[1] From Mochlos. Seager, *Mochlos*, fig. 5; *P.M.* i, fig. 62.

unique among the scanty survivals of this primitive time, unless we may add to it as a work of sculpture a comical earthenware jug in the shape of a young bird (Fig. 3).[1] Here the grotesque element comes in. The four human feet on which the greedy little creature stands so sturdily were doubtless meant to be amusing as well as practical. But the

FIG. 3. Earthenware Jug: Early Minoan II.
(Scale 1:2)

work contains the same strong interest in character, expressed by emphatic modelling and lively pose.

For the next five or six hundred years we find no attempt to indulge this tendency so freely. Design seems to have been dominated by decorative and abstract motives. A well-known Middle Minoan jar from Knossos (Fig. 4),[2] painted in the so-called Kamáres technique with kaleido-

[1] From Koumása. Xanthoudídes, *Vaulted Tombs of Mesará*, pl. II, 4121; *P.M.* i, fig. 85.

[2] *P.M.* i, pl. III.

scopic patterns and gay colours, represents the final achievement in that direction. A new source of inspiration was manifestly needed if the painted decoration of pottery was to go on; and a change did actually come at this moment, and with such completeness that we have to look for its origin elsewhere. Two similar jars, found together with other votive offerings in the Kamáres Cave on Mount Ida, are painted in the same technique and with kindred subjects, but in totally different styles (Plate I).[1] One bears an

FIG. 4. Polychrome Pottery: Middle Minoan II.
(Scale 1:4)

octopus, a natural motive so rare before this time that we may call it novel, but strongly schematized in the ancient manner. It is good decoration in colour as well as design. The thin clay walls are covered with black glaze, on which the fish's tentacles (reduced to six) are drawn and the body and borders outlined in white paint. The inside of the body and the suckers are orange-red barred or spotted crimson. But the other vase has the new manner as well as a new subject: crocuses in leaf and flower, ragged and windswept, growing in rocky ground. They are drawn quite freely, but without any loss of decorative effect, indeed with a stronger sense of being at home on the broad round shoulder of the

[1] *B.S.A.* xix, pl. X.

pot. The leaves and flowers are white, the anthers crimson. There is enough pottery to assure us that this naturalistic style was not invented by the vase-painters. It must have been lifted in full bloom from some other art, and we have good reason to believe that the master-art of Crete was fresco-painting.

The decoration of walls with painted plaster also goes back to the Early Minoan age, but very few remains of that date have survived, and only one pictorial piece is known so early even as the Kamáres pottery, the 'Blue Boy' of Knossos,[1] an archaic figure picking crocuses and putting them into bowls. But examples of Middle Minoan III wall-painting are more numerous, though not less fragmentary. In some cases it has been possible to reconstruct parts of the designs with more or less certainty, but we have generally to be content with isolated scraps. One of these, painted in the same broad manner as the Kamáres crocuses, is a study of Madonna lilies in their natural colours on a red ground (Plate II, *a*).[2] Sir Arthur Evans notes that below the flowers there seem to be some falling petals, a strange realistic touch that would be quite in keeping with Minoan fancy. The technique was also peculiar to Crete. The painting was done on a fine surface of pure lime plaster in true fresco, that is to say, the pigments were applied while the plaster was still soft. Egyptian wall-painting was done on a dry surface in distemper. The Cretan process meant that the painting must be swift and sure; and the rapid touch preserves the fresh and simple fancy of the artist. But plaster wall-paintings are exceedingly perishable. There are no standing walls in Crete that have kept their decoration as Egyptian tombs have done. The pictures are found in small pieces, if not in powder, on the floors of basements, where they have fallen from upper storeys. It is a tribute to the excavators' skill that so much of this fragile fabric has

[1] *P.M.* i, pl. IV.

[2] From the South-East House at Knossos. *P.M.* i, pl. VI.

been recovered. More has been saved at Knossos than at all the other sites, and largely pieced together with great care and knowledge. Even so we have no complete designs, and our view of this great art is mostly limited to odd details.

A series from Knossos is reproduced here in their actual colours (FRONTISPIECE) from drawings kindly lent by Sir Arthur Evans.[1] They are parts of landscape pictures, in which the spirit of wild nature is expressed with no very literal observance of the facts. But the plants are intelligible and beautiful, if not always real. There are vetches growing among rocks (*a*, from the foreground of the 'Blue Bird'),[2] reeds and other simple foliage (*b*, *f*, *h*), iris (*c*, *d*), tulip (*j*), and crocus (*e*, *g*, *i*, *k*). The forms are conventional, but not in the sense that they have been invented or applied without regard for living beauty. At their best these plants are decorative abstractions which reveal the soul of nature in delicate and ordered fancy. The same ideals and methods were brought to perfection some three thousand years later in Chinese painting. If the Minoan work is crude in comparison with a Sung landscape, let inexperience be its excuse for imperfect technique, and the conception rather than the execution be regarded. It is a surprising discovery that this sensitive simplicity, which modern European art has deliberately adopted from the Far East, was instinctive in the earliest art of Europe.

In spite of youthful leanings towards pattern and fantasy, there is a controlling consciousness of life. The whole habit of a plant is observed: dense spiky leaves of crocus and its oval buds as well as full-blown flowers. But the formal and fantastic elements are never very far away. The fan-like flower in *e* and *f* is the Egyptian symbol for papyrus, an effective geometrical figure which the Cretan decorator welcomed. It grows here plausibly from a green tuft, though its stem is yellow and its leaves blue. Actual colours

[1] From the House of the Frescoes, discovered in 1926. Some of these pieces have been illustrated by line-drawings in *P.M.* ii, figs. 266, 275.

[2] *P.M.* ii, pl. XI.

hampered the Minoan painter even less than forms. Iris and crocus flowers are red, foliage blue and yellow, backgrounds red, rocks all colours.

One of the recent finds at Knossos shows a purely decorative arrangement of growing plants.[1] Crocus clumps, so nearly alike that they look as if they had been stencilled or

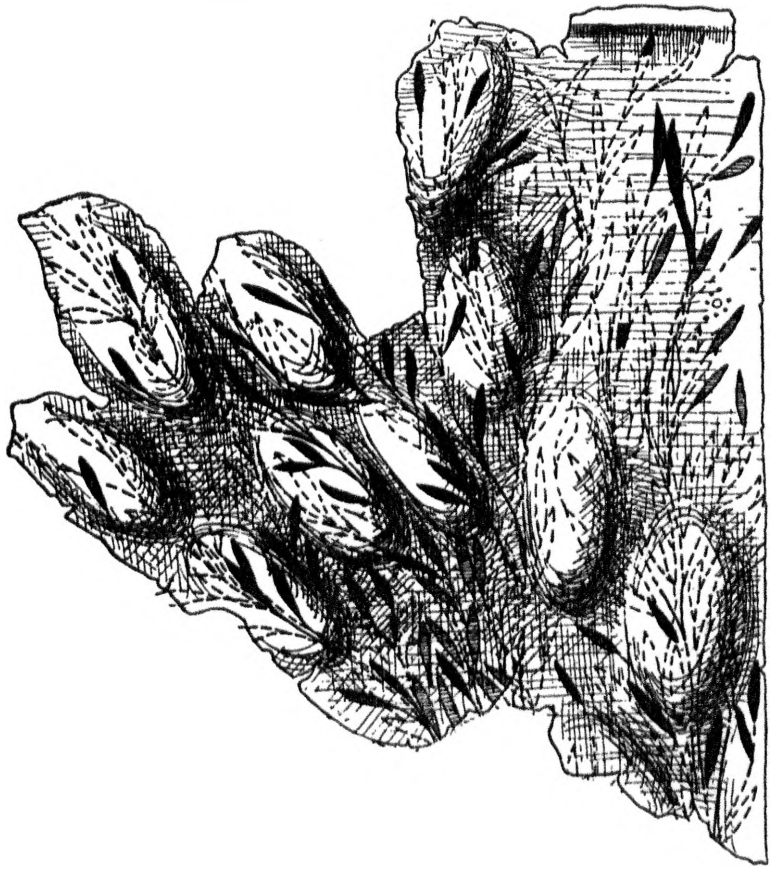


FIG. 5. Olive-leaf Fresco on Bossed Ground.
(Scale 1:5)

printed, are spaced diagonally at wide intervals in rhythmically alternating colours, pink on yellow ground, blue on white, yellow on red. The various fields are separated from one another by wavy bands which represent the contours of hilly ground. Some fragments from the Palace

[1] From the House of the Frescoes. *P.M.* ii, fig. 271.

bear a realistic rendering of olive foliage, which is painted on a bossed surface to give the illusion of swaying branches (Fig. 5).[1] The leaves themselves have autumn tints of red and black among the green, with occasional white flashes of their silvery backs as they rustle in the wind.

How different is this confident impressionism from the refusal of classical Greece to face such subjects A literal representation of landscape is impossible, and was therefore beyond the pale of classical art. The Greek would only try to indicate it conventionally, but this is not to say that he had no feeling for wild nature. There are exquisite Greek studies of small animals and birds on coins and gems. But the Minoan liked to show them in their own haunts. A group of flowering rushes was enlivened with a climbing mouse, whose tail alone is left (Plate II, *b*).[2] Some more fortunate survivals of this delightful *genre*, a deer leaping from rock to rock,[3] and the well-known Cat and Pheasant,[4] come from the Royal Villa of Hagia Triada. The two figures partially preserved in the latter picture, the sly laborious cat and the unsuspecting bird, reveal another spiritual quality of Minoan achievement, the illustration of the behaviour and even the mentality of animals. In the contemporary Egyptian version of the same theme all the actors might well be dummies, as the decoy duck on the prow of the fowler's punt probably is in fact.[5]

This power of imaginative interpretation existed in Minoan art alone, so far as we can tell, in the ancient world. It is the more remarkable because the Cretans were in close contact with the older and more accomplished cultures of Mesopotamia and Egypt, and took much from them on the material side. But the Minoan genius refused the limitations of their prudent discipline. Even at the end of

[1] *P.M.* iii, fig. 113. From the fresco-reliefs of the Northern Entrance Passage.

[2] From the South-East House at Knossos. *P.M.* i, fig. 390.

[3] *P.M.* ii, fig. 201. [4] *Mon. Ant.* xiii, pl. VIII; *P.M.* i, fig. 391.

[5] In the British Museum: 37977.

this period (Late Minoan I *b*), when the vitality of design was giving way to formalism, foreign influence is only visible in the use of some exotic motives. Thus in the gorgeous picture of the Blue Monkey (Plate III, *a*),[1] himself a stranger from West Africa probably introduced by way of Egypt, the papyrus flowers through which he peers have been imported from Egyptian art, but not the fashion of their growth. A new invention in plant life, helped again by Egypt, is the trailing ivy with flowers inside the leaves.[2] But the rocks are purely Cretan, and even more fantastic, though a certain truth underlies their unlikely colours. Their rugged contours belong to the native landscape, but the variegated eyes and veins are borrowed from slabs of marble that were used for dadoes on palace walls. As if it were a pity to lose so much potential splendour, the sophisticated painter cuts and polishes his rocks, and adds the bright colour of their insides to the romantic charm of their profiles.

The artificiality which is beginning in this picture soon turned into convention. In the Caravanserai at Knossos, a rest-house at the road-head outside the South-West Entrance of the Palace, is a pavilion which Sir Arthur Evans calls the dining-room because its walls were decorated with a frieze of partridges and hoopoes, birds which are table delicacies in Crete (Plate III, *b*).[3] Here the broken lines of the foreground are reduced to smoothly undulating curves. The contours have got mixed up with trailing briars, and the ground is frankly spotted with geometric rosettes. There is a true perspective effect in a pair of partridges coming out from behind these preposterous rocks, but a less convincing device is the cloud-like mass on the upper border of the frieze, hanging, it would seem, in the sky, but actually an inversion of the rocky background. This was an original and persistent contrivance in Minoan

[1] From the House of the Frescoes at Knossos, *P.M.* ii, pl. X.

[2] For the history of this form see Evans in *P.M.* ii, p. 478.

[3] *P.M.* ii, pt. 1, Frontispiece.

landscape. At one end of the picture the background changes from white to black, perhaps only in the regular alternation of pattern, but perhaps also, as the discoverer suggests, with intent to reproduce the dark depths of a cave, which these birds use for shelter in Crete and in which they are often trapped.

The vase-painter took what he wanted from the frescoes, but his wants were controlled by a fine sense of decorative values. He did not use men or animals, doubtless because their forms were not flexible enough to serve his purpose, and he was too much of a designer to paint mere pictures on his vases like a classical Greek. Nor did he transfer landscape-subjects indiscriminately from walls to vases. A single motive was usually excerpted, and adjusted to the size and shape of its new field. It is true organic decoration, in which pattern and surface blend in rhythmical design. The precision which the new interest in natural form and character demanded was obtained by an improved technique. The fine black glaze which had hitherto served for the ground-colour was now used for the designs. Coarser pigments, red and white, were applied at first in small enlivening touches, but in course of time these were abandoned altogether, and a subtler polychromy was discovered in the natural tones which clay and glaze acquired in firing. The clay varies from pale yellow to warm brown, the black glaze shades with the oxydation of its iron content through olive green and brown to red, and the whole surface shines with a soft brilliance. These processes, and indeed this whole idea of ceramic decoration, are of all Minoan inventions the most visible in the artistic heritage of classical Greece. It is worth noting that the corresponding revolution in their use in the archaic period at Athens, the change from black to red-figure drawing, was the response to a similar demand for clarity in the exploration of a new domain of nature.

The Cretan change came at the parting of the Middle and Late Minoan periods. Pottery of the new era is better

preserved than wall-painting, but the immense variety of its detail must be found in sherds, where individual motives are perhaps seen more effectively in isolation.[1] But there are enough whole vases to show the quality of the designs. An outstanding feature of the earliest ornament is its simplicity. Reeds and grasses are favourite motives. In a Cycladic example (Plate IV, *a*)[2] tall grasses fence the slim body of a tapered cup, which in its turn refines their elegance. A vigorous tensile jug supports a clump of windswept tulips, and looks as if its own shape has been distorted by the blast that bends the flowers (Plate IV, *b*).[3] This is also a Cycladic piece from Phylakopì in Melos, a local version of the Late Minoan style which is not the less effective here for its coarser fabric. The clay is rough and porous, the design painted broadly in dull pigment, but in two colours, black and red, to imitate the shading of Cretan glaze.

The formal elements which soon invade this field are hardly less vital than Nature's legitimate offspring. An imaginary plant bearing papyrus flowers leans fan-shaped heads on the round shoulder of a jug (Plate V, *a*).[4] The large rosettes which help to steady the design are the painter's note of what his flowers would look like at full face. An oval libation-vessel has its curves similarly reinforced by stiffly drooping plants (Plate V, *b*).[5] The larger figures here were apparently derived from inflorescent date-palms, modified perhaps by features of lesser flora, lily and crocus,[6] but the growth of the unlikely hybrid is not unconvincing. These two examples belong to the end of the period (Late Minoan I *b*), and tend towards the grandiose 'Palace style' (Late Minoan II), which led in due course to rigid Mycenaean formalism (Late Minoan III).

We have not so far met any human figures, and they are

[1] A series from Knossos is illustrated in *P.M.* ii, fig. 276.

[2] *B.S.A.* xvii, pl. VIII, 40. [3] *J. H. S.* Suppl. iv (1904), pl. XXIII, 5.

[4] From Palaíkastro: *B.S.A.* Suppl. i. (1923), pl. XVIII, *b*.

[5] Seager, *Pseira*, fig. 8. [6] Evans in *P.M.* ii, p. 497.

in fact not frequent in this phase of Minoan art. They do not seem to have been intruded into landscape and wild life, and are not often represented in wall-painting for their own beauty. But they are common enough in historical and narrative subjects, where they appear literally by hundreds. A remarkable series of miniature frescoes, recently assembled by Sir Arthur Evans in the third volume of his monumental book, is very largely occupied with the representation of crowds of people. They come mostly from theatrical scenes which included the spectators as well as the shows, and there are some battle-pieces and processions.

The best preserved example shows a building which was evidently the theatre of Knossos and closely related to that of Gaza, in which Samson made sport for the Philistines. The pillars which carried the roof, with studded oblong capitals, stand in pairs across the front; in the middle is a columnar shrine with horned altars; and on platforms beside the shrine ladies of the Court are seated.[1] Above and below them, in pit and gallery, is the populace in mass. The impression of the crowd is ingeniously conveyed by rows of heads in profile, of thumb-nail size. My illustration of this shorthand method (Plate VI, *b*) comes from another piece at Knossos.[2] The colours heighten the impression of reality, black hair, white eyes, white collars. Most of the heads are drawn on a dark red ground, and we may suppose that these are sunburnt men, for others grouped on white patches must indicate the sheltered complexions of women, in accordance with the general ancient convention. There is no trace of the performance in the larger scene, but part of a toreador survives from a similar fresco. In any case the fashionable ladies were not looking at the show, but are busily engaging one another's attention (Plate VI, *a*).[3]

The extent of Minoan interest in the human figure, for its value in action or narrative and its ornamental dress,

[1] *P.M.* iii, pl. XVI.

[2] *P.M.* i, fig. 384.

[3] *P.M.* iii, pl. XVII, B.

is clearly exhibited by these drawings. No considerations of accurate form or facts of detail can hinder this imaginative art, and the sketches of feminine conversation get their vivacious effect from the postures of bodies, heads, and hands. The extravagant costumes give a final touch of modernity to the scene. Another large composition shows noble maidens (a *choros* of Ariadne) performing a solemn dance in the shade of giant olive trees, evidently the ancestors of those that are established now in the fertile valley of the Kairatos. Beyond stands row on row of the assembled citizens, whose bare brown arms waving against the blue sky still echo their applause.[1] A fragment of a battle-piece has soldiers hurling spears, with some of the weapons actually in flight.[2]

This last subject brings to mind the small piece of a silver vessel found by Schliemann at Mycenae, which is embossed with a scene from the defence of a city (Plate VII, *b*).[3] Slingers and bowmen are skirmishing in front, champions in Homeric armour await the attack, and women, bravely cheering, throng the walls. Beyond are olive trees. Recent researches at Athens among Schliemann's smaller finds have produced some more pieces of this vessel, which has now been restored by Sir Arthur Evans to its proper shape. The well-known fragment appears as part of a very elaborate composition. It seems that the city is a coast-town, and is being attacked from the sea. An enemy boat has been sunk and men are swimming, while among them a sea-monster, a kind of Scylla, adds its fabulous terror to the reality of war.

A scene like this, or the Homeric combats engraved on signet-rings, goes far beyond the Egyptian sculptural records of triumphant Pharaohs. They are epic pictures which seriously raise the question, how far the Iliad and Odyssey owe their invention to Minoan poets. Much of their material is undoubtedly Cretan. Homer's description

[1] *P.M.* iii, pl. XVIII. [2] *P.M.* iii, fig. 45.

[3] *P.M.* iii, fig. 52, from a new drawing by E. Gilliéron, *fils*.

of the shield of Achilles and Hesiod's of the shield of Heracles both contain episodes like the scenes on the Mycenae siege-cup. And these marvels of craftsmanship, works of divine Hephaistos, were manifestly executed in that curious technique of flat inlaid metal which was a Minoan speciality, and which was certainly not practised by later Greeks. There is no example of this technique that can be placed later than our culminating period, in the early sixteenth century B.C. (Late Minoan I *a*). Its effect is polychrome, painting in metals, as it has been called. Homer's description of the colours of Achilles' shield applies equally well to the dagger-blades which have survived at Mycenae: there a golden vineyard clustered with black grapes on silver poles, here (among other pictures) gold leopards chasing gold and silver ducks beside a silver river in a black (*niello*) field.[1] A newly identified blade from the Vaphio tomb bears a realistic picture of men swimming, one of whom is ducking his head.[2]

But human figures are more severely tried in sculpture, that logical art which the Hellenic mind ultimately reduced to an exact science. There is not much evidence of large free sculpture in prehistoric Crete, but enough perhaps to indicate that Greek chryselephantine statues had their beginning there. Some large bronze locks of hair at Knossos seem to have belonged to the colossal wooden statue of a goddess,[3] and it is certain that the most ancient idols of historical Greece, works of Daedalus or gifts of heaven, were a legacy from Minoan ancestors. They did not commend themselves to classical taste. 'Daedalus', said Socrates, 'would be laughed at if he made such statues now'; but Pausanias in a mellower age saw something godlike in them. We do not know these wooden deities, but in lesser bronze and ivory figures of their human votaries life is not daunted by its forbidding medium. A bronze acrobat somersaulting over a charging bull is arched backwards

[1] *P.M.* iii, pl. XX, from a new drawing in colours by E. Gilliéron, *fils*.

[2] *P.M.* iii, fig. 81.

[3] *P.M.* iii, p. 522.

in mid-air between the animal's horns and tail.[1] An ivory youth engaged in the same strenuous rite has no visible means of suspension, but must have hung free in complete illusion of flight.[2] Scarcely less violent is the pose of a motionless bronze man who is usually identified as a flute-player, but who may only be praying with his hands held up to his face (Plate VII, *a*).[3] The suggestion of tense effort is often out of place, but it was a notable achievement, and not the less admirable as such because the inventors exhibited it at every opportunity.

They were happier, however, as sculptors in relief, and their masterpieces of relief in stone are the three black steatite vases from Hagia Triada.

The largest of these, a conical libation-vessel covered with four zones of figures, is chiefly notable for its size and the ambitious nature of its subjects, bull-fights and boxing-bouts.[4] But the smallest, the Chieftain Cup, is better decorated and its figures are full of character (Plate VIII, *a*).[5] The chieftain is an imperious personage, long-haired, jewelled, and sceptred like a Homeric prince. In front of him stands a submissive youth who bears a sword and a curved implement which Sir Arthur Evans has explained as a horsetail *aspergillum*, such as formed part of the insignia of the Pontifex Maximus at Rome.[6] On the other side of the cup are three men carrying shield-like hides which overlap one another and conceal the bearers' limbs and bodies. The figures of the chieftain and his officer have often been called classical in spirit. One would say rather that the group is classical in design, and that its resemblance to an archaic Greek vase-painting is superficial. The scene is made dramatic here by the poses of the two figures. Their different

[1] In the collection of Captain E. G. Spencer-Churchill, *J.H.S.* xli, p. 247, fig. 2; *P.M.* ii, fig. 416; iii, fig. 155.

[2] From Knossos, *P.M.* iii, fig. 296.

[3] In the Rijksmuseum of Leiden, *J. d. Inst.* xxx, pl. I; *P.M.* iii, fig. 322.

[4] *J. d. Inst.* xxx, p. 248, fig. 3; *P.M.* i, figs. 508, 511.

[5] *J. d. Inst.* xxx, p. 244, figs. 1 and 2.

[6] *P.M.* ii, p. 792.

characters are defined with unusual restraint, yet with an emphasis that approaches caricature. The fine material too, as seductive as ivory, has tempted the craftsman to an elaboration of detail for which he was not prepared, though the scale is fortunately small.

But the immature technique is almost hidden in the crowd that adorns the Harvester Vase (Plate VIII, *b*).[1] This was an ovoid libation-jar with a pierced base. In spite of the loss of its lower half, which must have contained a very effective part of the design, it is still a triumph of plastic decoration. The pliant tines of the pitchforks (or whatever it is that the 'harvesters' are carrying) grip the shoulder of the vessel like the plants that grow on painted vases. And the picture is a powerful illustration of crowded movement. It shows a festal procession led by an old man in a fringed ceremonial cape, and enlivened by a musician with a rattle and a choir of girls. The impression of an exhilarated but orderly mob is perfectly conveyed. All are happy, but some march quietly to the ceremony, content with their own thoughts, others bawl with mouths wide open. One turns round shouting in the ranks, hit in the back apparently by a clumsy fellow who has stumbled. The composition is excellent, the relief most skilfully managed. Most of the figures are two deep, and the rank behind the rattle-player contains four. Solemnity, gaiety, movement, even noise, are freely rendered. The only monument of classical Greek sculpture that can compare with this in composition is the procession of horsemen in the frieze of the Parthenon, and there are other successful ventures here which were not attempted there.

The same powers of dynamic representation and emotional narrative are displayed in lesser degree on the two gold cups from the Vaphio tomb.[2] They are a pair, and the subjects embossed on them are complementary, the handling of wild

[1] *Mon. Ant.* xiii, pl. I, II; *J. d. Inst.* xxx, p. 251, figs. 4–6; a restored drawing in *P.M.* ii, suppl. pl. XVII.

[2] *Ἀρχ. Ἐφ.* 1889, pl. 9; *P.M.* iii, figs. 123–7.

and domesticated cattle. The wild scene is a riot of speed and violence; its only point of rest is the bull caught in a net-fence which is tied between two olive trees (Plate IX, *a*). This part of the perspective is correctly managed, and contrasts strangely with the old convention that appears beside it, in which the distant rocky ground is shown as if inverted in the sky. The trapped bull bellows in anger, and his hind-quarters are twisted the wrong way round. Such distortion is manifestly impossible, but the Minoan artist would not check at the exaggeration, so long as it served to emphasize a mighty struggle, and disposed a pair of legs nicely for his design. The heels above the nose of this animal belong to a companion who gallops away. The domestic scene is full of homely sentiment: a farmer hobbling a docile bull, who bellows perfunctorily; two great beasts leering affectionately at each other (Plate IX, *b*); and a single bull nosing the ground.[1] This exploitation of sentiment in animals is nearly ludicrous in effect, but it reveals a profound sympathy with nature. Landscape does not usually occur with human beings, but the humans are subordinate here, a view of life unheard of in any other people before Hellenistic times.

Another kind of sculpture, smaller in scale, but not less in achievement, is gem-engraving. This was a very ancient process in Crete, as in Mesopotamia and Egypt, for making decorative and hieroglyphic seals, but the Minoans seem to have been alone in making a pictorial art of it, as the Greeks were after them. In no other artistic activity did prehistoric and classical Greece come so near together, largely because they had a similar subject-matter here. It was one of the few occasions on which the Hellenic artist came down to the lower orders of animal life. Such subjects were invited to some extent by the size and shape of the

[1] Sir Arthur Evans points out that these are episodes in the capture of a bull by means of a decoy cow: (*i*) the bull following the cow's trail; (*ii*) the bull and cow conversing; (*iii*) the bull captured. *P.M.* iii, p. 183.

gems, but they really belonged to a direct native tradition which was doubtless kept alive by the large numbers of prehistoric seals that must have been in use in later times. The styles, however, are distinct, though their differences are not always obvious: Hellenic art worked by elaboration, Minoan by suggestion. Even in similar designs the literal Hellenic rendering contrasts with the impressionist Minoan manner. But the small scale of the work imposed restrictions upon both their tendencies.

Only a Minoan could have conceived the picture of a goat and a dog in humorous altercation (Plate X, 2).[1] Its sketchy execution is exaggerated by enlargement: the stone is little more than half an inch high. The rock is more than a stage-fitting in this comedy, and its romantic beauty is enjoyed as keenly as the acting of the two animals. Another gem (Plate X, 5)[2] presents the tragic side of animal life, a calf struck in the flank with an arrow. As his forelegs collapse he kicks vainly at the wound, and with upflung head and tail bellows in agony. The action conveys a powerful sense of pain and helplessness, but it was probably designed as a study of expressive movement, and not with any sentimental feeling for the sorrows of dumb animals. Nor was there any sporting interest: the arrow is merely an external stimulus of the victim's action. This is a common motive in later Mycenaean gems. In the wild stampede of two young bulls (Plate X, 6)[3] there is no hint of the cause of flight, which may be due to their own panic just as well as to a human intruder. But a promenade of two stiff-legged mules (Plate X, 7)[4] is free from any outside interference. The two friends stride masterfully through a world of their

[1] Chalcedony flattened cylinder. This and the other gems described here belong to the collection of Sir Arthur Evans, who has very kindly supplied the impressions from which my illustrations are made.

[2] Chalcedony lentoid.

[3] Dull sard lentoid.

[4] Green steatite lentoid. Sir Arthur Evans assigns this gem to the Hellenic 'Melian' class because of its technique; Mr. Casson has published it as 'Geometric' (*Antiquaries Journal* vii, pl. V, 12).

own, intent on a single purpose. The coarse cutting of this stone belongs to a much later date than the other examples, at the end of the Mycenaean Age (Late Minoan III *b*), but its spirited design is a rare reminiscence of the greatest period of Minoan art. A study of three swans beside a river (Plate X, 1)[1] has an air of tranquillity made more intense by the curiously smooth plastic style in which the stone is cut. The birds are scarcely conscious of their own existence. It is true that one of them (dipping in the river) is so lightly indicated that he is not quite intelligible, but the running water is a masterpiece of sensitive realism. Another version of the same subject is more precise and less spiritual (Plate X, 3).[2] Here the birds have been surprised in their papyrus thicket, and there is alarm in the darting eyes and beaks among the crowded flower-heads. The hard cutting too is restless. Its decorative tendency assigns this gem to the end of our period (Late Minoan I *b*); the other belongs to its beginning (Middle Minoan III *b*). Another early stone, cut in a hard but vigorous style, bears a bold picture of a fish diving between seaweeds, and turning with a curious perspective effect as if it were seen through the glass wall of an aquarium (Plate X, 4).[3] Sir Arthur Evans identifies the species with the Cretan *skaros*, and notes Pliny's observation of its vegetable dietary, which seems also to be recorded here. On the back of the stone is cut a lively impression of a little owl.

The submarine motive introduces a new field of art, in which Minoan interest and achievement were both unique. Its exploitation was solely decorative, and therefore well suited to the Cretan genius. There are a few examples in the greater art of wall-painting. Best and best-known is the frieze of flying-fish which was found in a Cycladic palace at Phylakopì in Melos but is undoubtedly a Cretan work.[4] There the fish rise and glide and fall in easy rhythm against

[1] Dull greenstone lentoid. [2] Green jasper lentoid.

[3] Cornelian amygdaloid. *P.M.* i, p. 677.

[4] *J.H.S.* Suppl. iv. (1904), pl. III; *P.M.* i, fig. 393.

a background of rocks and spray. The Queen's Megaron at Knossos has remains of a dolphin frieze,[1] and parts of a more comprehensive seascape come from the House of the Frescoes.[2] But the most varied studies have been preserved on painted pottery. Two large burial-jars from Pachyam-

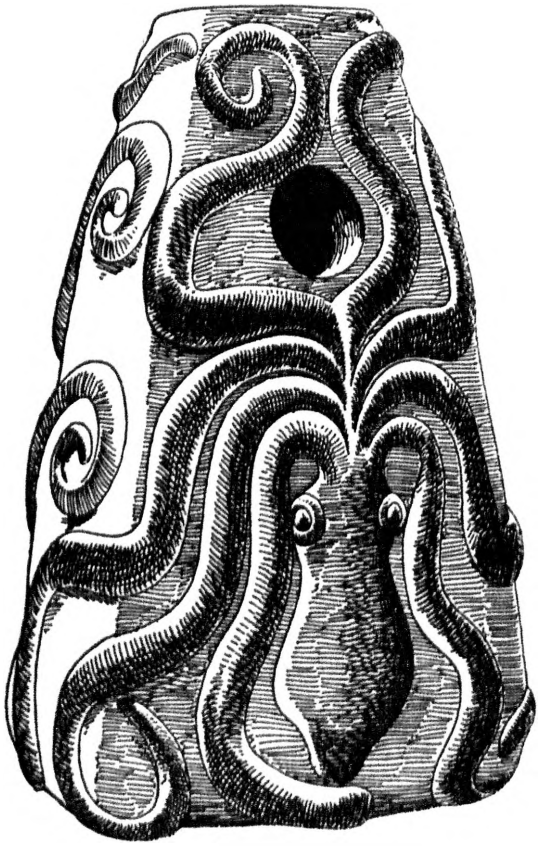


FIG. 6. Red Stone Weight.
(Scale 1:4)

mos, of nearly equal dates but different techniques, bear designs of swimming dolphins. The earlier (Plate XI, Middle Minoan III *b*),[3] painted in white on black, seems, like the *skaros* gem, to show a section of the sea: its shingle floor, fish filing by in its clear depths, and spray above its rippled surface. But the artist's conception was probably

[1] *P.M.* i, p. 543.
[2] *P.M.* ii, p. 501.
[3] Seager, *Pachyammos*, pl. XIV.

not so literal as this. The upper wavy contour is more likely to stand for the profile of rocks, whitened perhaps with foam, but set upside down at the top of the picture in conventional perspective, and the pebbles at the bottom are the beach. The later jar (Late Minoan I)[1] has purely decorative fish, conventional in shape and disposition but buoyant with life.

But ordinary fish were not so attractive for the decorator as the more fantastic creatures that haunt the Cretan shore, which is an actual fairyland. The prince of sea-monstrosities is the octopus. He has an elastic shape which will fit any surface, and a natural repertory of spiral coils, a happy combination of real and abstract form which was ready-made material for the Minoan artist. It is applied nakedly to a large red stone weight, which the figure covers with the writhing pattern of its tentacles as the fish itself might clasp an anchor-stone (Fig. 6).[2] On a black steatite vase from Mycenae the design is still simple, but with a hint of the watchful habits of the creature and of its rocky lair.[3] These suggestions are elaborated on a fragment of a steatite vessel from Knossos, where the artist has given a great air of cunning to a realistic octopus by hiding one of its eyes behind the rock (Fig. 7).[4]

The decorators achieved a perfect balance in this material. They produced an endless series of designs on painted pottery, with patterns variously adapted to the form and articulation of the vessels. Large soft octopods invade the whole surfaces of baggy pots. In pleasant conceit one winds an arm around the spout of a false-necked jar,[5] and sea-weeds grow from the handles of a large flask (Plate XII, *b*).[6] A tighter metallic shape (Fig. 8)[7] has starfish and plumes of seaweed on its shoulder, sharp trumpet-shells at the base, and sea-anemones clustered on its narrow neck. One of

[1] Ibid., pl. IX. [2] *B.S.A.* vii, p. 42. [3] *Ἀρχ. Ἐφ.* 1888, pl. 7.
[4] *P.M.* ii, fig. 307. [5] *Gournia*, pl. H; *P.M.* ii, fig. 312 *c*.
[6] From Palaikastro. *B.S.A.* Suppl. i. (1923), pl. XVIII, *a*.
[7] Ibid., fig. 41.

more rigid form (Plate XII, *a*)[1] is clothed with a fantastic web of rocks, where conch-shells lie in crevices under waving weeds, and little cuttle-fish lurk in pools. Another bears a more strongly rhythmical design of argonauts sailing stiffly among jagged rocks (Plate XII, *c*).[2]

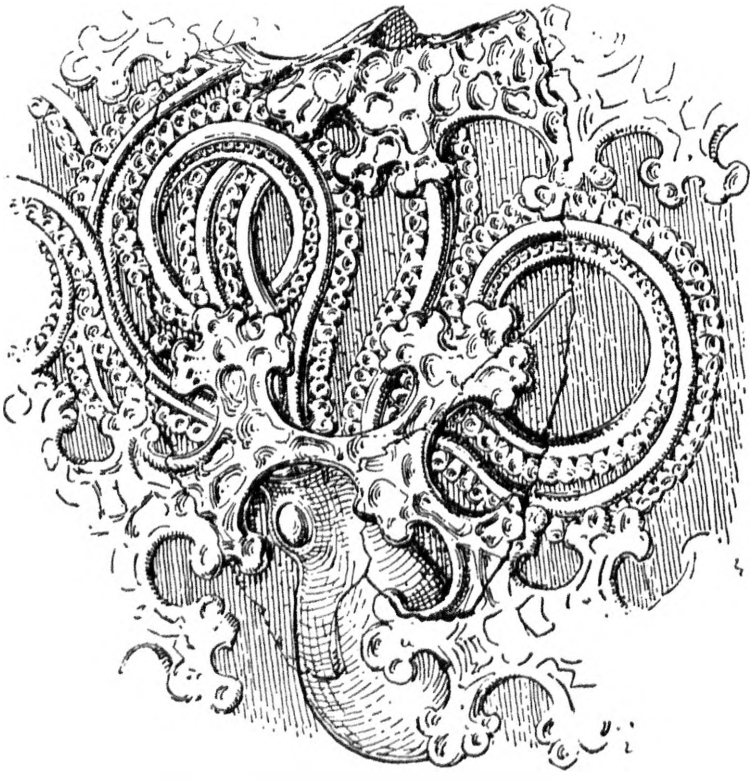


FIG. 7. Fragment of Black Stone Vase.

These vases from Palaíkastro belong to a set of seventeen which were found standing side by side on the floor of a room. They were evidently used for ritual purposes; we see them borne by ministrants in solemn processions, and their pierced bases give reason to suppose that they were meant for pouring drink-offerings to the gods. They were therefore sacred vessels, and it is likely that their decoration was also sacred, certain indeed, for the divine emblem of the double-axe sometimes appears on them among the creatures

[1] Ibid., pl. XIX, *a*.

[2] Ibid., pl. XXI.

of the sea,[1] and the giant starfish (Fig. 8), if a fish is meant, was probably thus glorified as a symbol of the radiant sun.

Here is an explanation of the love of nature revealed in the art of Crete. The Minoan religion was a universal nature-worship. Its sanctuaries were in mountain solitudes, like Buddhist monasteries, but untouched by man: gorges or caves where pure water springs, and holy trees are nurtured by the divine element which clothes Cretan valleys in the flowers of Paradise. Spiritual devotion in such surroundings must have led, as in medieval China, to an intimate and emotional understanding of life and beauty in all the works of nature. Here too is a reason for the apparent break between these romantic origins and the classical ideals of later Greece. Though Minoan Delphi was still the national shrine of art, and though the ancient cults of nature everywhere underlay the Olympian worship, yet the new anthropomorphic religion, the intellectual bent of the new age, and the models offered by the monumental arts of Egypt and Assyria, together turned the activity of the Hellenic renascence in a new direction. But its artistic ability must have been a Minoan inheritance, for it is incredible that art can have flowered so brilliantly twice in the same place and independently. There is no reason for assuming a very considerable change of population in Greece between prehistoric and historical times. Crete and Ionia, the old and the new countries of the ancient race, led the way in the revival, and the technical methods

FIG. 8. Painted Pottery Libation-vessel.
(Scale 1:3)

[1] Ibid., pl. XX.

invented by the Minoans, the painting of pottery with black alkaline glaze, casting and embossing metal, gem-engraving, and carving in stone, wood, and ivory, were received and perfected by Hellenic hands.

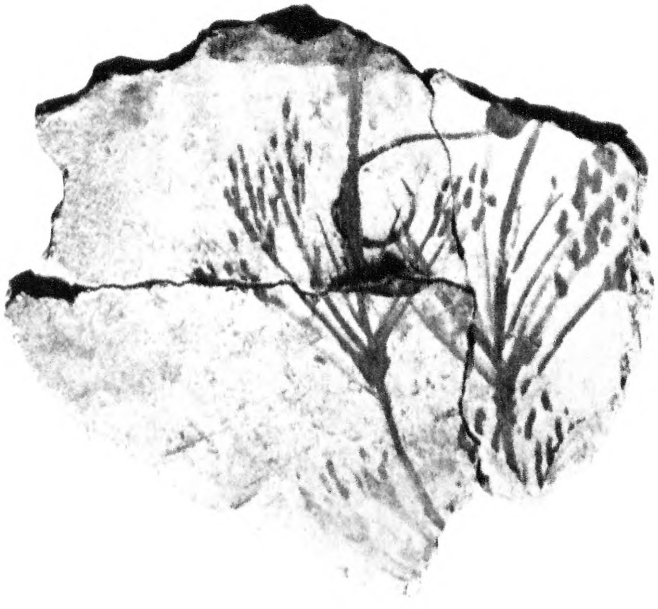
We have been too literal in our search for this connexion, looking rather for identity of aims or even of artistic forms. But we do in fact get glimpses of the Minoan spirit in classical Greece, if only to see them extinguished by Hellenic discipline. The archaic period presents many bold experiments in modelling, particularly in the small bronze statuettes that decorate Ionian furniture. Here are running, dancing, tumbling figures, a lively family of which the Discobolos of Myron is a severe and lonely representative in monumental sculpture. Now Myron was a modeller of animals; his masterpiece was not the Discobolos, but a bronze cow. But these aspects of nature were excluded from the classical ideal, and Myron, Petronius tells us, who had almost caught the breath of life in men and animals, had no successor. *Myron, qui paene hominum animas ferarumque aere comprehenderat, non invenit heredem.* How and when the Greeks resumed the tradition of Myron and the Minoans, and with what success, is another story.

PLATES

POLYCHROME POTTERY FROM THE KAMARES CAVE

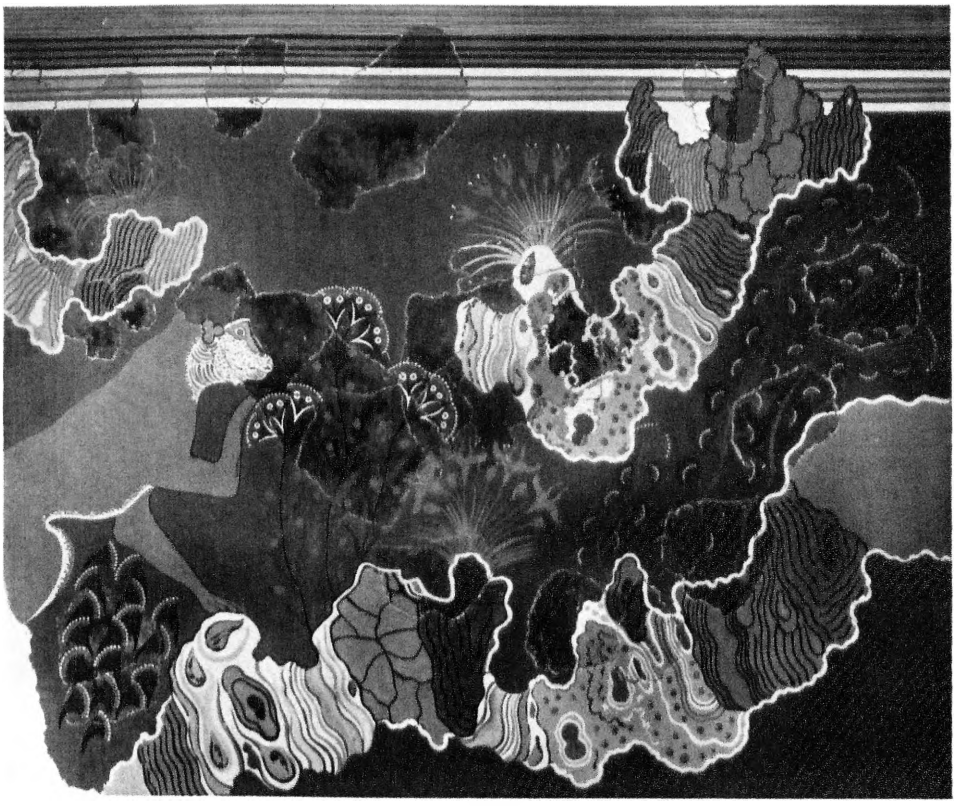
(*Scale* 1 : 2)

a

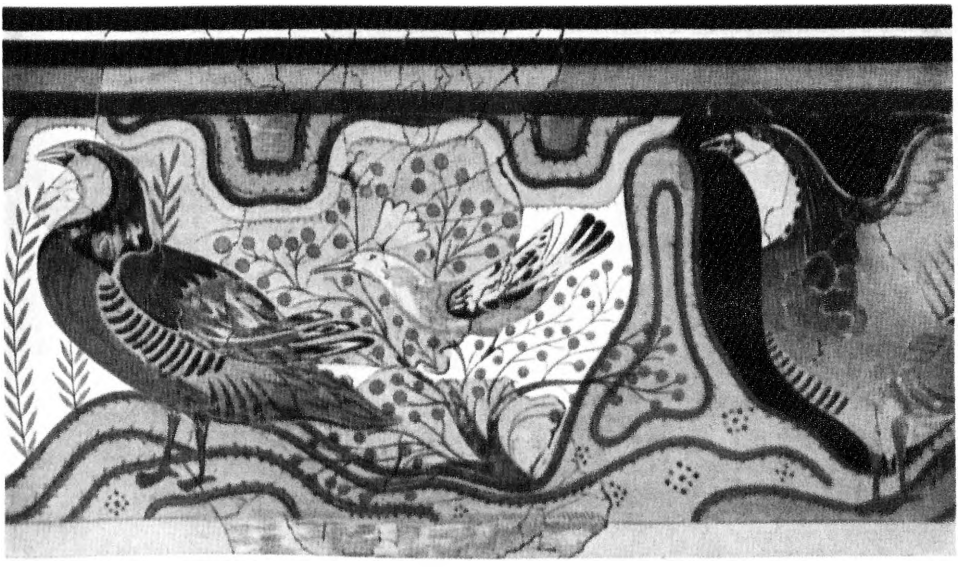


b

FRESCO-PAINTINGS FROM KNOSSOS



a



b

RESTORED FRESCO-PAINTINGS FROM KNOSSOS

a *b*

PAINTED POTTERY FROM PHYLAKOPI IN MELOS

(*Scale* 1 : 2)

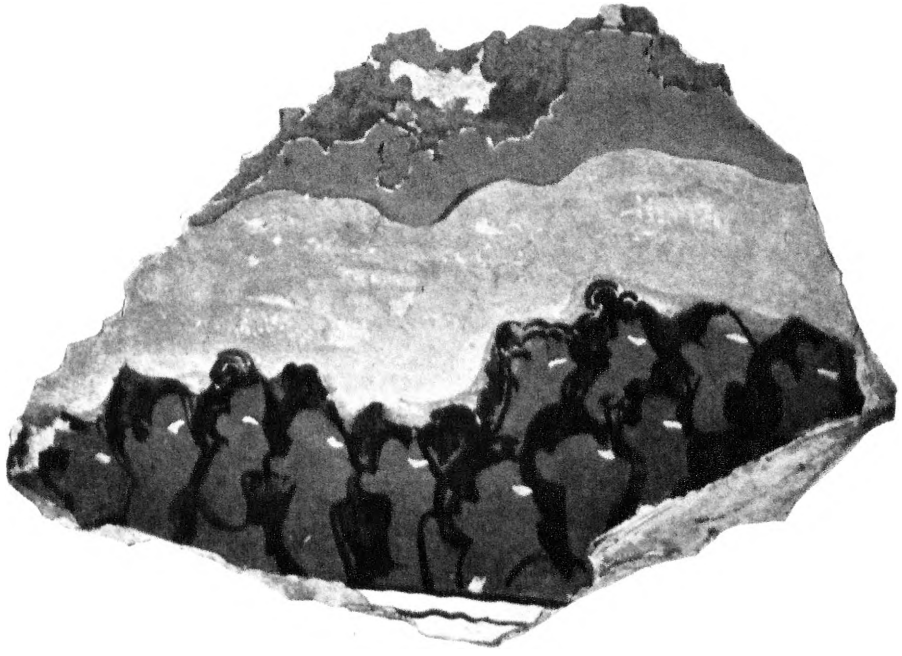
a

b

PAINTED POTTERY FROM PALAIKASTRO AND PSEIRA

(*Scale* 5 : 12)

a



b

MINIATURE FRESCO-PAINTINGS FROM KNOSSOS

(*Scale* 1 : 1)

a. BRONZE STATUETTE FROM CRETE

b. EMBOSSED SILVER FRAGMENT FROM MYCENAE

PLATE VII

a

b

BLACK STEATITE VASES FROM HAGIA TRIADA

(*Scale nearly* 1 : 1)

a *b*

GOLD CUPS FROM THE VAPHIO TOMB NEAR SPARTA

(*Scale nearly* 1 : 1)

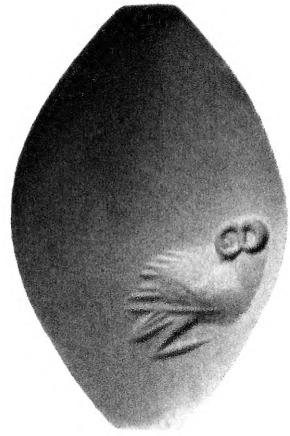
PLATE IX

1

2

3

4*a*



4*b*

5

6

7

IMPRESSIONS OF ENGRAVED GEMS

(*Enlarged* 2 : 1)

PAINTED BURIAL JAR FROM PACHYAMMOS

a

b

c

POTTERY PAINTED WITH MARINE DESIGNS

(*Scale* 1 : 3)

PLATE XII