

## Lilies in Bloom: An Investigation into the Iconography of Lilies in Aegean Wall Paintings

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**Lilies in Bloom: An Investigation into the Iconography of Lilies in Aegean Wall  
Paintings**

by

Chase Brittany Palliser

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

Art History

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The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of the Master of Arts in Art History for acceptance, a thesis/dissertation which is an original, unpublished, independent work by the author, entitled:

*Lilies in Bloom: An Investigation into the Iconography of Lilies in Aegean Wall Paintings*

here submitted by Chase Palliser in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Art History

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## Abstract

The ancient Bronze Age civilizations of Greece have long fascinated scholars. In particular, the civilization's deep reverence for nature and its symbolism is at the forefront of most Aegean art forms. While academic studies have traditionally focused on depictions of flora and fauna, such as the crocus flower and the swallows, the delicate lily has yet to garner such attention. This study seeks to rectify this overlooked flower by analyzing its depiction across three distinct types of wall paintings – landscape, figurative, and decorative – while employing the methodologies of iconography and context. All in the effort to answer this question: does lily iconography reflect elite status, authority, or something else altogether? Through meticulous case studies, *Lilies in Bloom: An Investigation into the Iconography of Lilies in Aegean Wall Paintings*, delves into the botanical intricacies of the lily flower and its portrayal as a symbol of cultural identity. The study of lilies in Aegean art is long overdue, and it is hoped that this study will lead to further discussion about this vastly understudied flower.

## **Lay Summary**

This study is a deep dive into the ancient Bronze Age civilizations of Greece that thrived along the Aegean Sea. The Aegean civilizations, including the Minoans (Crete), the Cycladics (Cyclades), and the Mycenaeans (Mainland of Greece under the Cretan influence), have left behind a profound artistic legacy. During the archaeological excavations in these regions, nature imagery emerged as a prominent theme in Aegean art. The lily flower, a recurring motif, holds a significant place in this artistic narrative. This study aims to shed light on the lily's importance in three styles of Aegean wall paintings, focusing on its portrayal and the diverse contexts in which it appears.

*I dedicated this thesis to my family...*

*Who encouraged me to chase my dreams and obtain my master's degree in Rome, Italy.*

*Without your support, I wouldn't be where I am today. I love you all so much and thank you  
for supporting me on this journey.*

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## Introduction

The art of the Bronze Age civilizations of the Aegean has long fascinated scholars. While academic studies have traditionally focused on depictions of flora and fauna, such as the crocus flower and the swallow, the delicate lily has yet to garner such attention. It is clear that the Minoans had a deep reverence for nature and the cycles of life, as its symbolism is at the forefront of most Aegean art forms.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the lily motif appears prominently in the arts of various media across the Aegean, and across many centuries.<sup>2</sup> Research conducted for this thesis has shown that the likely reason that the lily motif has not yet been widely studied is that scholars may not have known how to recognize them – they may have been overlooked, the corpus thus remaining invisible. This study aims to correct this, and provide a starting corpus for study. Furthermore, it aims to further unravel the mysteries and complexities of the Minoan lily by examining its different artistic depictions and cultural contexts within Aegean wall paintings, thereby shedding new light on the significance to its original audience of this prominent and favored motif.

Lily iconography appears everywhere in Aegean art, from wall paintings to minor arts such as pottery and jewelry. Its portrayal on luxury items such as gold jewelry (Fig. 1.) and seal stones (Fig. 2.) suggests an association with elite status and aristocratic patronage.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, its recurrent appearance in Minoan seals suggests its role as a symbol of authority,

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<sup>1</sup> Chapin, Anne P. "Power, Privilege, and Landscape in Minoan Art." *Hesperia Supplements* 33 (2004): 47–64. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1354062>.

<sup>2</sup> The lily motif has appeared as an important symbol in many cultures. In later Greek and Roman times, the lily was seen as a symbol of love, fertility, and ceremony. In the Jewish and Christian cultures, lilies were used as a symbol of youth and virginity. To learn more about the symbolism of lilies in other cultures, please reference Kandeler, Riklef, and Wolfram R. Ullrich. "Symbolism of Plants: Examples from European-Mediterranean Culture Presented with Biology and History of Art." *Journal of Experimental Botany* 60, no. 7 (2009): 1893–95. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24037881>.

<sup>3</sup> To read more about adornment of Aegean jewelry and seals, please reference Verduci, Josephine, and Brent Davis. "ADORNMENT, RITUAL AND IDENTITY: INSCRIBED MINOAN JEWELLERY." *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 110 (2015): 51–70. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44082106>.

reflecting its deep integration into the fabric of Minoan society.<sup>4</sup> But the lily also frequently appears in large scale wall paintings. Do these depictions also reflect elite status, authority, or something else? This question is at the heart of this thesis and will be the primary focus of this study. Lily iconography appears in three distinct types of wall paintings, in Bronze Age contexts: landscape (Fig. 3), figurative (Fig. 4), and decorative (Fig.5). In an attempt to answer the above question, this thesis will investigate the way that lilies are portrayed in each of these three types, using three case studies for each type.

In the chapters that follow, this study will delve deeper into the various contexts in which the lily appears, examining its depictions in different media, as well as its role in religious rituals and ceremonies, in an attempt to understand its resonance within Aegean society. The discussion of floral iconography in Aegean art, in particular, has become a prominent topic in Aegean scholarship. The history of scholarship in this discipline, and the research into floral iconography in particular, will be further discussed in Chapter One, Literature Review. Chapter Two investigates the botanical elements of the lily flower and the floral depictions found in Aegean art. Along with the investigation of the Madonna Lily as the descendant of the Minoan lily seen in Aegean art, this chapter will analyze the iconography of lilies in four styles: budding, partially bloomed, fully bloomed, and hybrid lilies.

The Third Chapter will examine lilies in Minoan landscapes and in particular, focus on the way that lilies were viewed within nature. Beyond its botanical and religious connotations, the lily may have held significance in social hierarchy and cultural identity.

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<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, this study will not dwell too much into the iconography of lilies on Minoan seals. However, the iconography of lilies as both fully bloomed and waz lilies appear on multiple seals and gold signet rings. To learn more about Minoan seals and gold signet rings please reference, Jennifer M., and Judith Weingarten. "Seals and Seal Use: Markers of Social, Political and Economic Transformations on Two Islands." *British School at Athens Studies* 20 (2012): 85–104. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23541203>. And Maria Anastasiadou. "Drawing the Line: Seals, Script, and Regionalism in Protopalatial Crete." *American Journal of Archaeology* 120, no. 2 (2016): 159–93. <https://doi.org/10.3764/aja.120.2.0159>.

Chapter Four focuses on figural wall paintings. In this chapter, the iconography of lilies will be investigated as offerings, or as personal ornamentation. The Fifth Chapter focuses on decorative wall paintings, examining the way that lilies are presented in a decorative function within the room or the object they are depicted on, what they may symbolize to the owner, and how they would have been viewed within the culture. This chapter concludes by investigating lily iconography in funerary larnakes, focusing on the question of the way that lilies are portrayed in funerary media and what the iconography of lilies may have represented to the deceased.

This thesis will focus on the methodologies of iconography and context to further understand the lily motif in Aegean wall paintings and its cultural significance to the Aegean people. The discussion of lilies in Aegean art is long overdue, and it is hoped that this thesis will lay the groundwork and raise awareness for a deeper discussion of this prominent and proposed culturally significant flower.

## Chapter 1: Literature Review

The discussion of floral iconography in Aegean art has become a prominent topic among Bronze Age specialists, though scholarship regarding the lily flower has been largely overlooked. To understand why there is such a lack of current scholarship regarding the lily flower, it is essential to discuss the historiography of Bronze Age Aegean scholarship. The interest in Bronze Age Aegean civilizations first emerged during the nineteenth century, when Cretan antiquarian Minos Kalokairinos first discovered the remains of large storage jars near modern-day Heraklion.<sup>5</sup> The discovery of this new unidentified culture sparked an intense reaction among scholars. One of the most influential figures of this period was Sir Arthur Evans (Fig. 6), who became fascinated with the culture and made it his mission to excavate what would later be known as Knossos.<sup>6</sup> During his excavations at Knossos from 1900 to 1931, Evans revealed magnificent wall painting fragments, and expressed his joy through his journal writing, “A great day! Early in the morning the gradual surface uncovering of the Corridor... revealed two large pieces of Mycenaean fresco... The figure was life size, the flesh color of a deep reddish hue like that of figures on Etruscan tombs and the Keftiu of Egyptian paintings... It is far and away the most remarkable human figure of the Mycenaean age that has yet to come to light...”<sup>7</sup> His

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<sup>5</sup> Preziosi, Donald, and Louise A. Hitchcock. *Aegean Art and Architecture*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> To learn more about the Arthur Evans and his discovery of Knossos please reference: Evans, Joan. “SIR ARTHUR EVANS AND KNOSSOS.” *Archaeology*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1950, pp. 134–39. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41662388>. Accessed 8 Apr. 2024. and Poursat, Jean-Claude. “Introduction.” Chapter. In *The Art and Archaeology of the Aegean Bronze Age: A History*, translated by Carl Knappett, 1–8. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Evans, SIR ARTHUR EVANS AND KNOSSOS, pg. 137-138



discovery would label him the father and pioneer of the Aegean Bronze Age.<sup>8</sup> As the leading archaeologist at the site of Knossos, Evans would be one of the first to reconstruct the many fresco fragments found in the palace of Knossos. He was also one of the first few people to develop a relative chronology for the Bronze Age in Crete.<sup>9</sup> However in 1920, a full complete chronology for the Bronze Age Greece, parallel to the Minoan chronology of Crete, would be achieved by Carl William Blegen which he named the Helladic.<sup>10</sup> Modern scholars still use Evan's chronology of Aegean culture (and his reconstructions) for their research, but many in recent years have adapted it to fit their work, using different media as guidelines. Philip P. Betancourt, for example, illustrates the chronological main subdivisions of the Bronze Age based on the different pottery styles discovered in the excavations (Fig.7).<sup>11</sup> Nicholas Platon, instead, proposed to broaden the chronological divisions of Minoan prehistory based on the architectural phases of the Minoan palaces.<sup>12</sup> Today, modern scholars (and this thesis) in three phases: Early Minoan period dated 3000-2000 BCE (EMP), Middle Bronze Age dated 2000-1700 BCE, and Late Bronze Age dated 1700-1000 BCE (LBA).<sup>13</sup>

With the discovery of many archeological artifacts and a now proposed timeline for the Aegean civilization, Aegean frescoes became a prominent research topic and area of academic interest during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Particularly important for what they could

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<sup>8</sup> Preziosi, Donald, and Louise A. Hitchcock, *Aegean Art and Architecture*, pg. 1

<sup>9</sup> Evans describes the timeline for the Aegean Bronze Age as a tripartite chronology, referencing the periods as Early, Middle, and Late. To read more about Evans, please reference Hemingway, Seán. "Art of the Aegean Bronze Age." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 69, no. 4 (2012): 4–48. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23223028>.

<sup>10</sup> Higgins, Reynold. *Minoan and Mycenaean art*. New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1981.

<sup>11</sup> Betancourt, Philip P. "Introduction to Aegean Bronze Age Art." In *Introduction to Aegean Art*, 1–8. INSTAP Academic Press, 2007. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt5vj92r.6>. pg.2

<sup>12</sup> Immerwahr, Sara Anderson. *Aegean painting in the bronze age*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990.

<sup>13</sup> To learn more about Aegean Bronze Age chronology and the different chronologies, please reference Manning, Sturt W. *The Absolute Chronology of the Aegean Early Bronze Age: Archaeology, radiocarbon, and history*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic and Press, 1995. Pg. 217

inform about Minoan culture: the frescoes visually portrayed the culture, evident from the figures and narratives of the fragments.<sup>14</sup> Even describing the Minoan world as “an artistically brilliant and technologically advanced civilization.”<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, the Minoans were one of the few ancient civilizations that included wall paintings in public settings as well as domestic dwellings such as country villas or townhouses.<sup>16</sup> This was discovered by archeologist Spyridon Marinatos (Fig. 8) in 1967 where he led six seasons of excavations throughout Crete. All in an effort to prove his hypothesis, which claimed that the widespread abandonment of sites on Crete was caused by an eruption in the sixteenth century BCE.<sup>17</sup> From his excavations at various sites in Crete, Marinatos discovered buildings that held and preserved numerous frescos and vessels, proving his hypothesis and helped paint a picture of the Bronze Age as a vivid and remarkable culture endowed with nature.<sup>18</sup>

As Lyvia Morgan mentions in her article, “New Discoveries and New Ideas in Aegean Wall Painting,” early ancient civilizations such as Egypt and Mesopotamia traditionally portrayed wall paintings only within private settings, and the depiction of wall paintings in public spaces would not be seen in history until the later Roman period.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the inclusion of private and public wall paintings excavated throughout Crete brought even more interest into the culture. Another unique feature of Minoan wall paintings (not traditionally seen in the arts of other ancient civilizations) was their depiction of nature scenes and the immersive experience they created.<sup>20</sup> The artistic portrayal of animation and living movement, the ability to transport the viewer into the scene and make them a part of the natural world, real or spiritual, was a

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<sup>14</sup> Morgan, Lyvia. “New Discoveries and New Ideas in Aegean Wall Painting.” *British School at Athens Studies* 13 (2005): 21–44. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40960392>.

<sup>15</sup> Preziosi, Donald, and Louise A. Hitchcock, *Aegean Art and Architecture*, pg. 14

<sup>16</sup> Morgan, “New Discoveries and New Ideas in Aegean Wall Painting,” pg. 21

<sup>17</sup> Thompson, Homer A. “Spyridon Marinatos—November 4, 1901-October 1, 1974.” *Archaeology* 28, no. 1 (1975): 59–60. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41685618>.

<sup>18</sup> Thompson “Spyridon Marinatos—November 4, 1901-October 1, 1974.” pg. 59

<sup>19</sup> Morgan, “New Discoveries and New Ideas in Aegean Wall Painting,” pg. 21

<sup>20</sup> Morgan, “New Discoveries and New Ideas in Aegean Wall Painting,” pg. 24

testament to the advanced artistic techniques of the time.<sup>21</sup> The narrative of nature in landscape wall paintings, such as the Spring Fresco, which was discovered in the Delta Complex of the archaeological site of Akrotiri on the southern coast of the island of Santorini (Thera) in Greece (Fig. 9), has been suggested by scholars such as Maria C. Shaw to convey the devotion and appreciation the Minoans had for nature in her 1993 article “The Aegean Garden.” In particular, specific flora and fauna, such as lilies, ivy, papyrus, and crocuses, have been found depicted in numerous Aegean wall paintings. This led art historians to question the significance and symbolism of the flowers portrayed in these immersive spaces and the way that the original audience would have viewed them.<sup>22</sup> The academic discussions regarding Minoan floral iconography and its symbolism continue to be the one of the leading research topics in Aegean scholarship. Of the many floral motifs depicted in Aegean art, one flower continues to be at the center of this discussion: the crocus.

The crocus flower (Fig. 10) has long been recognized in Aegean scholarship as a popular motif within Aegean art, primarily for its depictions within wall paintings such as those discovered in the building Xeste 3, the second largest building excavated at the site of Akrotiri, the “Saffron Gatherers” (Fig. 11) and “Saffron Goddess” or “Mistress of Animals” (Fig. 12).<sup>23</sup> The earliest archeological evidence of the crocus flower iconography appeared on a painted

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<sup>21</sup> Immerwahr. Aegean painting in the bronze age. pg.41

<sup>22</sup> H. Groenewegen-Frankfort interpreted nature scenes as channels for “mystic communion” in timeless and unlocalized contexts. Maria C. Shaw investigated the form of nature in a cultivated form, comparing scenes such as Lily Fresco in the Villa Amnisos to sacred Egyptian gardens. To learn more about their theories, please reference Shaw, Maria C. “The Aegean Garden.” *American Journal of Archaeology* 97, no. 4 (1993): 661–85. <https://doi.org/10.2307/506717>.

<sup>23</sup> Jo Day. “CROCUSES IN CONTEXT: A Diachronic Survey of the Crocus Motif in the Aegean Bronze Age.” *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens* 80, no. 3 (2011): 337–79. <https://doi.org/10.2972/hesperia.80.3.0337>.

Kamarens Cup from the Town Drain at Knossos (Fig. 13) dated 2100 BCE to 1875 BCE.<sup>24</sup> Here, the flower was depicted as a goblet-shaped flower with three pointed petals sprouting two stigmas (Fig. 14).<sup>25</sup> The crocus flower indeed appeared on numerous wall paintings and examples of painted pottery during the Bronze Age, but gained further popularity in Aegean scholarship as an ideographic symbol in 1952 when Michael Ventris deciphered one of the few written records of Aegean culture, the Linear B tablets.<sup>26</sup>

While the crocus flower is an important flower in Minoan iconography, scholarship has also focused on a prized aspect associated with the crocus flower in antiquity: saffron. During the early twenty-first century, scholars such as Rachel Dewan, Iris Tzachili, and Jo Day began to question the use of saffron and its symbolism to the Minoans: its function, and primarily examining its medicinal powers, dying properties, and possible food uses.<sup>27</sup>

Saffron crocuses bloom only a few days per year, during the fall season, making for a harvest that is as laborious as it is rapid. In order to produce quality saffron, workers would have had to accumulate a generous sum of crocus flowers, with estimations of about 400 hours (about 2 and a half weeks) of labor needed to produce one kilogram of saffron.<sup>28</sup> While the retrieval of

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<sup>24</sup> It is important to note that this is the earliest depiction of the crocus flower found in archeological excavations. However, this does not mean it is the earliest depiction of the crocus flower in the Bronze Age, as there may be earlier depictions on objects not yet excavated or discovered.

<sup>25</sup> Dewan, Rachel. "Bronze Age Flower Power: The Minoan Use and Social Significance of Saffron and Crocus Flowers." *Chronika* 5 (2015).

<sup>26</sup> Sir Arther Evans first discovered the Linear B Tablet in the palace of Knossos and was deciphered by Michael Ventris. The tablet consists of 87 syllabic signs and over 100 ideographic signs, which are believed to symbolize objects or commodities. For deeper discussions of the subject in the Linear B tablets, see M. Ventris and J. Chadwick, *Documents in Mycenaean Greek* (Cambridge 1956) 129-31, 213-31. And Higging, *Minoan and Mycenaean art.*, pg. 12

<sup>27</sup> To read more about their research on saffron please reference Dewan, "Bronze Age Flower Power: The Minoan Use and Social Significance of Saffron and Crocus Flowers." pg. 46, Tzachili, Iris, and J. M. Edmonds. "Anthodokoi Talaroi: The Baskets of the Crocus-Gatherers from Xesté 3, Akrotiri, Thera." *British School at Athens Studies* 13 (2005): 113–17. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40960396>., and Day, "CROCUSES IN CONTEXT: A Diachronic Survey of the Crocus Motif in the Aegean Bronze Age." Pg. 337

<sup>28</sup> Dewan, "Bronze Age Flower Power: The Minoan Use and Social Significance of Saffron and Crocus Flowers." Pg. 44

saffron is taxing, the iconography of saffron crocuses in the Saffron Gatherers and Saffron Goddess or Mistress of Animals suggests it was a rewarding experience for the Minoans, as the deity is shown wearing a crocus flower on her clothing (Fig. 15) and is presented saffron as offerings from the women who picked them.<sup>29</sup> Iris Tzachili and J. M. Edmonds in 2005 argued that the scene of the Saffron Gatherers is divided into three stages, creating the narrative of women in nature gathering saffron from the crocus flower and proceeding to offer it to a Minoan Goddess.<sup>30</sup> Suzanne Amigues, instead, in her 1998 article “Le Crocus et Le Safran sur une Fresque de Thera” argues that the scene from Saffron Gatherers in the building Xeste 3 shows the production and retrieval of saffron during ancient Thera and the way that women may have used saffron as a source of dye and food.<sup>31</sup> Rachel Dewan agrees with Amigues in her 2015 article “Bronze Age Flower Power: The Minoan Use and Social Significance of Saffron and Crocus Flowers” that saffron was a functional ingredient with multiple uses, and that it was particularly favored by women, to the point that it may have even represented a female identity within the culture.<sup>32</sup> In sum, the crocus flower has become one of the most studied floral iconographies with ties to functionality and religion, is still a favored subject of study. And, while the flower is undoubtedly important in the pursuit of understanding floral iconography in

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<sup>29</sup> Dewan, “Bronze Age Flower Power: The Minoan Use and Social Significance of Saffron and Crocus Flowers.” Pg. 50

<sup>30</sup> To learn more about Iris Tzachili and J. M. Edmonds's thoughts regarding crocus flowers and the differences in modern women vs. ancient Thera women gathering styles in Xeste 3, the Saffron Gatherers wall painting, please reference Tzachili, Iris, and J. M. Edmonds. “Anthodokoi Talaroi: The Baskets of the Crocus-Gatherers from Xeste 3, Akrotiri, Thera.” *British School at Athens Studies* 13 (2005): 113–17. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40960396>.

<sup>31</sup> Translated by Rehak, Paul. “Crocus Costumes in Aegean Art.” *Hesperia Supplements* 33 (2004): 85–100. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1354064>. In her French article Amigues, Suzanne. “LE CROCUS ET LE SAFRAN SUR UNE FRESQUE DE THÉRA.” *Revue Archéologique*, no. 2 (1988): 227–42. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41736589>.

<sup>32</sup> To read more about Rachel Dewan's article about crocuses in the bronze age, please reference Dewan, Rachel. “Bronze Age Flower Power: The Minoan Use and Social Significance of Saffron and Crocus Flowers.” Institute for European and Mediterranean Archaeology. Accessed April 12, 2024. <https://www.chronikajournal.com/resources/Dewan%202015.pdf>.

Aegean art, there is another flower, potentially equally symbolic, found within Minoan art: the lily flower.

Early twenty-first century scholars such as Lyvia Morgan, Anne P. Chapin, and Maria C. have contributed to scholarship on the flower in Bronze Age depictions by observing lily iconography within their research. Lyvia Morgan discusses the iconography of the lily flower in her 2005 article “The Cult Centre at Mycenae and the duality of life and death,” where she investigates larnakes in Mycenae and the depiction of lilies on a specific funerary larnax.<sup>33</sup> Anne P. Chapin discusses lilies as floral iconography in numerous Minoan landscape frescos in her 2004 article “Power, Privilege, and Landscape in Minoan Art.”<sup>34</sup> Finally, Maria C. Shaw observes lily iconography in her 1993 article, “The Aegean Garden,” purposing Minoans cultivated sacred gardens that included growing the lily flower.<sup>35</sup> The works of these three early twenty-first century scholars led to the purpose of this study, learning more about the lily flower within Aegean art and its prominence within the culture. That said, of all depictions of the lily in Minoan art, there are two particular paintings that have raised the most awareness of the potential cultural significance of the flower: the Priest-King discovered in the South Wing of the Palace of Knossos in Crete and the Spring Fresco discovered in Akrotiri.

Arthur Evans was the first to label the Priest-King as “The Prince of Lilies,” and suggested that the figure represented the ruler of Knossos because of his prominent lily headdress.<sup>36</sup> Questions regarding the figure's identity soon became a favored discussion within

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<sup>33</sup> Morgan, Lyvia. “The Cult Centre at Mycenae and the Duality of Life and Death.” *British School at Athens Studies* 13 (2005): 159–71. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40960401>.

<sup>34</sup> Chapin, Anne P. “Power, Privilege, and Landscape in Minoan Art.” *Hesperia Supplements* 33 (2004): 47–64. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1354062>.

<sup>35</sup> Shaw, “The Aegean Garden.”, pg. 661

<sup>36</sup> Heraklion Archeological Museum Lily fresco - Heraklion Archaeological Museum. Heraklion Archaeological Museum - Heraklion Archaeological Museum. (2022, May 10). Retrieved May 8, 2023, from <https://www.heraklionmuseum.gr/en/exhibit/lily-fresco/>

Aegean scholarship. In her 2004 article, “The ‘Priest-King’ Fresco from Knossos: Man, Woman, Priest, King, or Someone Else?,” Maria C. Shaw discusses the placement and depiction of the Priest-King fresco, and while she does mention the lily ornamentation in her research, she primarily focuses on the identity and gender of the figure with the goal of better understanding the figure’s identity.<sup>37</sup> In his 1987 study, Hans Georg Niemeier suggested the figure was the depiction of a Minoan god, proposing that the lily crown seen in the fresco would have not have belonged to him, but instead to either a now-missing sphinx or a priestess presiding next to the figure.<sup>38</sup> While the lily flower is one of the key components of the figure, scholars have yet to determine the significance of the lily flower is in this context. This topic will be further explored in Chapter Five.

Also bringing awareness to the iconography of lilies in Aegean art is the Spring Fresco, from Akrotiri. The Spring Fresco is regarded in Aegean scholarship as the earliest example of a pure landscape painting portraying nothing but nature and the natural world. Nanno Marinatos proposed in his 1984 book “Art and Religion in Thera: Reconstructing a Bronze Age Society” that the Spring Fresco adorned a shrine, and further suggested that the fresco was meant to transport the viewer into an immersive world during a religious ceremony.<sup>39</sup> Other scholars, such as Mary B. Hollinshead’s 1989 article “The Swallows and the Artist of Room Delta 2 at Akrotiri Thera” and Karen Polinger Foster’s 1995 article “A Flight of Swallows” examined the significance of the

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<sup>37</sup> Maria C. Shaw focuses her research on the figure's identity known as the “Priest-King,” hypothesizing that the figure could be viewed in different contexts and the positioning of the figure. To read more about her study, please reference Shaw, Maria C. “The ‘Priest-King’ Fresco from Knossos: Man, Woman, Priest, King, or Someone Else?” *Hesperia Supplements* 33 (2004): 65–84. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1354063>.

<sup>38</sup> Shaw, The ‘Priest-King’ Fresco from Knossos: Man, Woman, Priest, King, or Someone Else?” pg. 70

<sup>39</sup> Shaw, The ‘Priest-King’ Fresco from Knossos: Man, Woman, Priest, King, or Someone Else?” pg. 70, referenced from N. Marinatos, *Art and Religion in Thera: Reconstructing a Bronze Age Society* (Athens 1984)

flying swallows within the composition.<sup>40</sup> Compared to the previous case study, which observed lilies on a figure, the Spring fresco contains the best discussion of the iconography of lilies in a pure nature landscape. Despite these last important studies, the significance of the iconography of lilies requires further research and will be explored in upcoming chapters.

So far in this chapter, lily iconography has appeared more frequently in Minoan art, but it has also appeared in Mycenaean art, particularly associated with funerary or ceremonial contexts. In their 2018 article, “The Gold Necklace from the Grave of the Griffin Warrior at Pylos,” Jack L. Davis and Sharon R. Stocker investigate a lily necklace (Fig. 16) that was discovered within a Mycenaean grave and question its significance in martial contexts.<sup>41</sup> This study will particularly investigate Mycenaean jewelry and its iconography of the lily flower when investigating the lily necklace depicted on the Priest-King. As previously mentioned, Lyvia Morgan is another scholar who discusses the iconography of the lily flower in her 2005 article “The Cult Centre at Mycenae and the duality of life and death” and will be a case study further investigated in Chapter Five. In this article, she observes numerous Mycenaean frescos and larnakes that contain imagery of life and death; from these depictions, the lily seems to appear in multiple funerary contexts.<sup>42</sup> While this study will investigate Mycenaean wall paintings with lily imagery and how it is viewed within each context, lily iconography appears more prominently in Minoan wall paintings and will become the primary focus of this study.

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<sup>40</sup> To read more about their discussion of Swallows in the Spring Fresco, please refer to Hollinshead, Mary B. “The Swallows and Artists of Room Delta 2 at Akrotiri, Thera.” *American Journal of Archaeology* 93, no. 3 (1989): 339–54. <https://doi.org/10.2307/505585>; and Foster, Karen Polinger. “A Flight of Swallows.” *American Journal of Archaeology* 99, no. 3 (1995): 409–25. <https://doi.org/10.2307/506942>.

<sup>41</sup> To read more about the excavation and study, please reference Jack L. Davis and Sharon R. Stocker. “The Gold Necklace from the Grave of the Griffin Warrior at Pylos.” *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens* 87, no. 4 (2018): 611–32. <https://doi.org/10.2972/hesperia.87.4.0611>.

<sup>42</sup> Morgan. “The Cult Centre at Mycenae and the Duality of Life and Death.” pg. 159



The study of Bronze Age Aegean civilizations is a complex and challenging endeavor, primarily due to the scarcity of historical records. The surviving architecture and objects represent only a fraction of what originally existed, necessitating a meticulous process of reconstructing the past from a wide array of fragmentary evidence. Each new discovery adds to this puzzle, requiring a constant reevaluation of the archaeological record and contributing to the evolving understanding of Aegean civilization. Aegean scholarship has recognized the iconography of lilies in Aegean art, but it is discussed by scholars in only a few case studies. For too long, the lily flower has been overlooked in Aegean scholarship, and it is the hope of this thesis that by studying the lily motif in three different categories of Aegean wall paintings landscape, figural, and decorative, a more significant understanding of the role of the lily flower in the ancient Aegean may be obtained.

## Chapter 2: How to Identify the Lily Motif in Aegean Art

During the Aegean Bronze Age, the theme of nature was prevalent within the arts. In particular, flowers and plants were among the most distinctive motifs in Minoan art, visible in frescoes, ceramics, votive objects, and jewelry, among other things. As seen in Chapter One, scholarly investigation over the years has revealed that specific plants and animals were regarded with particular esteem within ancient Aegean culture, and the desire to understand the meaning of these aspects of the natural world would become a focal point within the art historical field. Interestingly, the lily flower has appeared prominently within Aegean art, arguably more so than its popular counterpart the crocus flower, and yet more research needs to be conducted. This study proposes that one reason why scholarship is lacking in regard to the iconography of the lily flower is that scholars may not know how to properly identify the lily within Aegean art. In order to understand the significance and abundance of the lily iconography within the Aegean Bronze Age, it is important to be able to identify the artistic elements that suggest the lily flower. This study thus begins by comparing the Minoan lily to the modern-day Madonna Lily and illustrating the four styles of lily iconography depicted in Aegean wall paintings.

It has been suggested by scholars such as Anne P Chapin that Minoan artists were highly motivated to create very naturalistic depictions of people, plants, and animals.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, Minoan artists have also been said to have generalized and invent new artistic

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<sup>43</sup> Chapin, Anne P. "Power, Privilege, and Landscape in Minoan Art." *Hesperia Supplements* 33 (2004): 47–64. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1354062>.

subjects, moving away from realism.<sup>44</sup> The depiction of the lily flower found within Aegean art may be a reflection of that generalized style. Maria C. Shaw and Nanno Marinatos, in Lyvia Morgan's article "New discoveries and new ideas in Aegean wall painting," propose that the Minoan lily depicted on Aegean wall paintings no longer exists, as those flowers appear in different forms that are not commonly associated with a natural lily flower.<sup>45</sup> With the notion that the lily flower portrayed in Aegean art no longer exists, art historians have speculated that the modern Madonna Lily, scientifically known as *Lilium candidum*, may be the closest living representation of the Minoan lily (Fig. 17).<sup>46</sup> The Madonna Lily traditionally blooms through the hot summer months of May and June, producing a long stem that grows to 50-150 cm (about 1.64 ft to 4.92 ft), with long, scattered lance-shaped leaves. When in bloom, it delivers five to twenty outward funnel-shaped white flowers with petals slightly curving at the tip.<sup>47</sup> The Madonna lily is traditionally an eastern Mediterranean flower that has been found cultivated in various areas such as Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, the Greek Islands, and the Balkans.<sup>48</sup> Along with being one of the oldest cultivated flowers throughout ancient civilizations, the Madonna Lily is also known for being marketed for its fragrance and the medicinal properties of the bulb.<sup>49</sup> While the flower naturally grows in areas such as the eastern Mediterranean because of its vast cultivation by diverse cultures over time, the true origin of the Madonna Lily remains unknown. Still, as seen in the

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<sup>44</sup> Chapin, "Power, Privilege, and Landscape in Minoan Art." pg. 56

<sup>45</sup> Morgan, Lyvia. "New Discoveries and New Ideas in Aegean Wall Painting." *British School at Athens Studies* 13 (2005): 21–44. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40960392>.

<sup>46</sup> Kandeler, Riklef, and Wolfram R. Ullrich. "Symbolism of Plants: Examples from European-Mediterranean Culture Presented with Biology and History of Art." *Journal of Experimental Botany* 60, no. 7 (2009): 1893–95. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24037881>.

<sup>47</sup> Brickell, Christopher. *American Horticultural Society Encyclopedia of Plants & Flowers*. London: DK Pub., 2011.

<sup>48</sup> Özen, Fazıl & Temeltaş, Hacı & Aksoy, Özlem. (2012). The anatomy and morphology of the medicinal plant, *Lilium candidum* L. (Liliaceae), distributed in Marmara region of Turkey. *Pakistan Journal of Botany*. 44.

<sup>49</sup> The bulb of the Madonna Lily is believed relieve a variety of ailments, including age-related diseases, burns, ulcers, and coughs. *Zaccai M, Yarmolinsky L, Khalfin B, Budovsky A, Gorelick J, Dahan A, Ben-Shabat S. Medicinal Properties of Lilium candidum L. and Its Phytochemicals. Plants (Basel). 2020 Jul 29;9(8):959. doi: 10.3390/plants9080959. PMID: 32751398; PMCID: PMC7465089.*

iconography discovered on Aegean wall paintings, it can be traced back as far as the Aegean Bronze Age.<sup>50</sup>

Susan Petrakis is one of the few scholars who has investigated the Madonna Lily in Aegean art and has created illustrations that portray how the lily flower is depicted in wall paintings and will be used as a guide throughout this study. In “Madonna Lilies in Aegean Wall Paintings,” she identifies lilies in three stages: fully bloomed, partially bloomed, and budding.<sup>51</sup> Mature blossoms typically have three stamens rising from the flower's center with two petals in a spiral-like design curving inward (Fig. 18). Less mature lilies depict two stamens with three petals (Fig. 19). Compared to the mature flower, the less mature petals are portrayed vertically with a tiny curve at the ends, as two stamens peek out from behind the central petal. In the final category, buds appear as long ovals that grow in groups of three to five members at the tips of stalks (Fig. 20). In investigating Aegean wall paintings, art historians have traditionally identified lilies in these three stages; the fully bloomed lily appears more frequently than its counterparts. This study proposes an additional phase of lily iconography, which heightens the number of lily depictions (and potential significance) within Aegean art: the hybrid.

Hybrid flowers are described as “imaginary” flowers that do not exist within Aegean nature and are a generalized interpretation of Minoan artistry. For that reason, modern scholars may find it challenging to determine precisely the blend of flowers they are creating when identifying hybrid flowers. In order to determine if a hybrid flower contains lily iconography, this study focuses on the two curving petals associated with mature lily blossoms as an identifier (Fig. 21). Through this study's investigation, one of the most

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<sup>50</sup> According to the 1925 United States Department of Agriculture, the Madonna Lily is one of the oldest lilies in cultivation, going back 3,000 years. *Griffiths, David. The Madonna lily. Vol. no.1331. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, 1925.*

<sup>51</sup> Petrakis, Susan. “Madonna Lilies in Aegean Wall Paintings.” In *Temple University Aegean Symposium: A Compendium*, edited by Philip P. Betancourt, 233–38. INSTAP Academic Press, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt18z4gjq.37>.

repeated lily hybrid iconographies seen throughout Aegean media is described as a “waz-lily.” Waz-lilies are a combination of both a lily flower and a papyrus plant according to Arthur Evans, depicting the two curved petals of the lily and including a papyrus flower growing from between the petals (Fig. 22).<sup>52</sup> It is important to acknowledge that the waz-lily likely does not depict a real Minoan flower, but it was a popular motif that was traditionally associated with and portrayed in jewelry and decoration. This will be discussed further in the following chapters.

If we include the depictions of hybrid lilies in our consideration of the lily flower in Minoan art, the size of the corpus grows, and with it, the potential significance of the flower. In addition, we may also understand that the lily flower was significant enough to that culture to be portrayed in unique and varied styles. It is important to note that through this study's current investigation of floral iconography in Aegean art, the lily flower is the only floral motif depicted in different stages of bloom. The unique inclusion of lilies portrayed in this way suggests the Minoans wanted to depict the flower in a specific and significant way. This study proposes the iconography of lilies in this context represents a cultural relationship between nature and creation: a bud representing birth, partially bloomed representing childhood, and fully bloomed representing adulthood. With the four styles of lily iconography firmly established, this study now begins to investigate the lily flower depicted in Bronze Age Aegean wall paintings by focusing on the three main types of depiction in which the flower appears in wall paintings: landscape, figural, and decorative.

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<sup>52</sup> Morgan, Lyvia. *The miniature wall paintings of Thera: A study in aegean culture and Iconography*. Cambridge etc.: Cambridge university press, 1988. Pg. 23

## Chapter 3: The Natural Beauty of Lilies in Landscape Wall

### Paintings

Wall paintings are arguably one of the most valuable resources when studying the ancient world, as they illuminate the original appearance of the material world of a particular culture. The Minoan style of landscape wall painting is no exception, as it emphasizes the iconography of local flora and fauna, giving artists several types of flowers, animals, and landscapes to reference. These items were used to depict themes of everyday life, as well as courtly scenes.<sup>53</sup> In addition, an interesting aspect of Minoan landscape wall paintings was the particularly immersive experience they created for the viewer.<sup>54</sup> By investigating the lily iconography depicted in three mural paintings, specifically the Spring Fresco, the Lily Fresco, and the Monkeys and Blue Birds Fresco, this chapter suggests that lilies were used as prominent flowers that portrayed not only the importance of nature itself but also the cycle of life. In these case studies, the depiction of lily flowers in a natural setting will be viewed in three different contexts: Minoan nature in a pure landscape, a cultivated garden setting, and a symbolic ideal Minoan spring. By understanding the iconography of lilies in each context, we can begin to understand how lilies may have contributed to the deep reverence Minoans had for nature.

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<sup>53</sup> Immerwahr, Sara Anderson. *Aegean painting in the bronze age*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990. pg.41

<sup>54</sup> Morgan, Lyvia. "New Discoveries and New Ideas in Aegean Wall Painting." *British School at Athens Studies* 13 (2005): 21–44. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40960392>. pg. 24

## The Spring Fresco

The Spring Fresco (c. 1600 BCE) discovered in the Delta Complex of the archaeological site of Akrotiri on the southern coast of the island of Santorini (Thera) in Greece in Building Delta, Room 2 at Akrotiri, is one of the best-preserved nature wall paintings in Aegean art (Fig. 23). It is renowned above all for its intriguing depiction of the natural world in movement; what Sarah Immerwahr describes as the “sheer joy in the beauty of nature.”<sup>55</sup> The decoration of Room 2 features an uninterrupted landscape along three of its four walls, complete with a door and a double window that opened to a little courtyard.<sup>56</sup> At the end of the room, a red shelf and cupboard are said to have originally held over two hundred types of vases, some of which are hypothesized to have been used for ritual purposes.<sup>57</sup>

Walking through the room, a viewer’s eyes would gaze upon vibrant red, yellow, and blue colors that could have been seen at any time of day and which surrounded and thus immersed the viewer on all sides. The bold colors are painted vertically in a striped-like pattern in three intervals, as the large organic rocky landscape encases most of the scene, undulating in peaks that stretched from the ground to the middle of the wall (Fig. 24). The rise and fall of the rocky terrain draws the viewer’s attention in an upward and downward movement, bringing the viewer’s eyes to the contrasting red lily flowers blooming at the high and low peaks of the landscape (Fig. 25). Similar to the tripartite arrangement of the rocky

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<sup>55</sup> Chapin, Anne, and Giorgos Rethemiotakis. “Iconography in Context: The Visual Elements of Aegean Art.” *Current Approaches and New Perspectives in Aegean Iconography*, Edited by Fritz Blakolmer. Aegis 18 (2020), 369-384., 2020.

<sup>56</sup> Immerwahr. *Aegean painting in the bronze age*. pg.46

<sup>57</sup> It is worth noting that in recent Aegean scholarship rooms such as the Spring Fresco are suggested to have been inspired by pottery, a prominent art medium in Aegean culture. The motif of lilies is one of the more common depictions in Aegean pottery, with many depicting fully bloomed lilies. Andreas G. Vlachopoulos comments that when investigating the iconography of lilies on pottery, the lily flower is traditionally depicted with three stamens or flat anthers, which more commonly correspond to the pictorial type of wall paintings seen in the Spring Fresco.

Immerwahr. *Aegean painting in the bronze age*. pg. 47

landscape, each grouping of red lilies contains three curvilinear stemmed lilies portrayed in different life stages.<sup>58</sup> Finally, above the lily flowers are pairs of swallows carefully spaced and depicted “flying” within the composition (Fig. 26). To create a sense of depth in the scene, the artists used a solid white background, further highlighting the vibrant and colorful rocky landscape and blooming red lily flowers.<sup>59</sup> The Spring Fresco’s bright landscape colors create an intimate and tranquil setting by using the room’s darkness and lack of windows. Along with the composition’s almost life-size flora and fauna and the enclosed space of the room, the adornment creates the feeling or memory of walking through nature.<sup>60</sup>

The question of the room’s original purpose continues to be an ongoing discussion in Aegean scholarship. Nanno Marinatos proposed that the Spring Fresco was viewed as a shrine, and suggested that it was used as a backdrop to transport the viewer into an immersive world during a religious ceremony.<sup>61</sup> While the subject of many art historical debates regarding the Spring Fresco focuses on the flying swallows and the symbolism of nature within the culture, this study suggests that the composition’s iconography of lilies is used as the primary focal point of the scene and is a symbol of nature.<sup>62</sup> Following the colorful organic rocky landscape’s movement, the viewer gazes upon multiple lilies blooming during various stages of life: fully bloomed, partially bloomed, and budding (Fig. 27).

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<sup>58</sup> Lilies are depicted as either buds, partially or fully bloomed.

<sup>59</sup> Chapin, Anne, and Giorgos Rethemiotakis. “Iconography in Context: The Visual Elements of Aegean Art.” pg. 373

<sup>60</sup> Palyvou, Clairy. “Wall Painting and Architecture in the Aegean Bronze Age: Connections Between Illusionary Space and Built Realities”. In *Minoan Realities*, edited by Diamantis Panagiotopoulos and Ute Güntel-Maschek. Louvain-la-Neuve: Presses universitaires de Louvain, 2012. <https://books.openedition.org/pucl/2835>. 373

<sup>61</sup> Shaw, Maria C. “The Aegean Garden.” *American Journal of Archaeology* 97, no. 4 (1993): 661–85. <https://doi.org/10.2307/506717>.pg. 70

<sup>62</sup> To read more about the discussion of Swallows in the Spring Fresco, please refer to art historians such as Hollinshead, Mary B. “The Swallows and Artists of Room Delta 2 at Akrotiri, Thera.” *American Journal of Archaeology* 93, no. 3 (1989): 339–54. <https://doi.org/10.2307/505585>; And Foster, Karen Polinger. “A Flight of Swallows.” *American Journal of Archaeology* 99, no. 3 (1995): 409–25. <https://doi.org/10.2307/506942>.



The iconography of blooming lilies is found in other Aegean landscapes. This chapter's next case study, the Lily Fresco, investigates the iconography of blooming lilies. Instead of depicting lilies in a natural landscape, this example shows them within cultivated garden scene.

### **The Lily Fresco**

Discovered within a private setting in an upper-story room of the “Villa of the Lilies” at Amnisos, outside of modern-day Heraklion in 1600 BCE TO 1500 BCE, the Lily Fresco is a 1.8-meter-tall fresco that depicts a scene of planted lilies growing in front of an unknown architectural structure (Fig. 28).<sup>63</sup> The three large white-stemmed lilies bloom symmetrically from an “aloe-like” bush with green leaves spreading outwards and away from the stems at the bottom of the scene. As seen in the Spring Fresco, each branch contains 10 to 12 lilies in various stages of bloom, portraying fully bloomed, partially bloomed, and budding lily flowers (Fig. 29). Behind the lilies is a red and white architectural structure with a cascading geometric pattern (Fig. 30). In using a monochromatic background, the artist created a color perspective by contrasting the red background against the pure white lilies, portraying an illusion of depth and space without including other imagery. Interestingly, upon closer examination of the lily flowers, it becomes evident that each lily petal is three-dimensional, an effect achieved by creating grooves around the outline of the flower (Fig. 31). In order to create this particular effect, the artist would have used a combination of the typical fresco technique of the Minoan wall paintings with the “in-cavo” technique, which involves carving out part of the surface of the still-damp plaster and inlaying it with thick paint or fresh plaster. This technique is not commonly found in Aegean wall paintings, and it is proposed to be a

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<sup>63</sup> Spyridon Marinatos 1999 series: Excavations of Thera I-VII. (2nd ed.). Athens: Archaeological Society of Athens

rare technique during this period.<sup>64</sup> The inclusion of a rare technique within this composition suggests that the iconography of lilies on this fresco was similarly and thoughtfully chosen thus quite significant. This fact is also suggested by the large size of the lilies, which are the main living aspect of the otherwise architectural imagery.

Following M. Cameron's reconstruction of the proposed ceremonial hall (Fig. 32), next to the Lily Frescoes painting was a series of two wall-to-ceiling frescoes depicting large red lilies and unknown plants in an curved planter (Fig. 33).<sup>65</sup> At the center of the fresco is a sizeable two-leveled planter with a broad base and curved sides, with horizontal lines depicted on the bottom. Planted on the top level is an unknown leaf bush with six green stems blooming from the planter, each with individual leaves. The bottom level, instead, contains two red lily flower blooming on each side of the planter. Compared to the Lily Fresco depicting lily flowers growing in front of an architectural structure, these frescoes portray the cultivation of lilies in a planter outside in nature. The planter is placed in front of red organic shape, a rocky terrain or landscape congruent to the Spring Fresco landscape found in Akrotiri. The foreground in these scenes contains no architectural structure, only a white plaster foreground, which is used to emphasize the red lilies and rocky terrain further and creates the impression of an open sky or area—giving the viewer the appearance or illusion of walking outside in nature. With the addition of these floral frescoes, the Lily Fresco in the Villa Amnisos was designed similarly to the “Spring Fresco,” covering most of the walls to create an immersive and intimate setting.

It is important to note that the incavo technique previously used in the Lily Frescoes was not applied to these floral frescoes. The flowers are painted using the traditional fresco

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<sup>64</sup> For more information on the technique Immerwahr. *Aegean painting in the bronze age*. Pg.206

<sup>65</sup> Referenced from the description found in the Heraklion Archeological Museum Lily fresco - Heraklion Archeological Museum. Heraklion Archeological Museum - Heraklion Archeological Museum. (2022, May 10). Retrieved May 8, 2023, from <https://www.heraklionmuseum.gr/en/exhibit/lily-fresco/> and Poursat, Jean-Claude. “Aegean Wall Painting.” Chapter. In *The Art and Archaeology of the Aegean Bronze Age: A History*, translated by Carl Knappett, 169–94. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022.

technique, which gives the flowers a two-dimensional appearance but still creates depth by using a contrasting color in the foreground.<sup>66</sup> This suggests the lily planters were not seen as significant enough to use the rare technique, further suggesting that the Lily Fresco itself was designed to be the focal image within the room. Scholars such as Maria C. Shaw and Jörg Schäfer have proposed that this room was created to represent a sacred Minoan garden, with lilies representing a significant and sacred flower worthy of being grown within a garden.<sup>67</sup> Mark Cameron suggested this room was used as a private ceremonial hall within a wealthy merchant's home.<sup>68</sup> The Villa Amnisos is still heavily under-researched, and little information is known about the villa except for the discoveries of Spyridon Marinatos.<sup>69</sup> However, in investigating the iconography and context of the room as a whole, it becomes clear that lilies are portrayed as the focal point.

### **The Monkeys and Blue Birds Fresco**

In this chapter, the iconography of lilies has been investigated in two different landscape paintings and contexts. The first case study, the Spring Fresco, investigated the iconography of lilies within a pure nature landscape. The second case study, the Lily Fresco, examined the technique and depiction of lilies in a purposed ceremonial sacred garden within

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<sup>66</sup> To learn more about the techniques used in Aegean wall paintings, please refer to Jones, R. E., and E. Photos-Jones. "Technical Studies of Aegean Bronze Age Wall Painting: Methods, Results and Future Prospects." *British School at Athens Studies* 13 (2005): 199–228. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40960404>.

<sup>67</sup> Recent scholarship by Shaw comments on the possible inaccuracy of M. Cameron's reconstruction of the room: "I propose that it is the western side that did not have extensive murals, for even if this had been a closed room, rather than a loggia, that wall would have been the logical side to have windows. If the space upstairs were a loggia, the painting would have been limited to the long eastern wall, possibly with panels on the shorter walls at the north and south sides of the room, where doors need to be restored. Cameron's architectural setting for the frescoes should be reexamined in terms of such considerations." Shaw, "The Aegean Garden." Pg. 666

<sup>68</sup> Referenced from the description found in the Heraklion Archeological Museum - Heraklion Lily fresco - Heraklion Archeological Museum. Heraklion Archeological Museum - Heraklion Archeological Museum. (2022, May 10). Retrieved May 8, 2023, from <https://www.heraklionmuseum.gr/en/exhibit/lily-fresco/>

<sup>69</sup> To learn more about the Villa Amnisos please reference Matz, Friedrich. *The art of crete and early Greece: The Prelude to greek art*. London: Methuen, 1962. To learn more about Spyridon Marinatos please consult his 1999 series: *Excavations of Thera I-VII*. (2nd ed.). Athens: Archaeological Society of Athens

a private villa. The final case study, the Monkeys and Blue Birds Fresco (Fig. 34), discovered at the House of the Frescoes near the Palace of Knossos, will investigate the way that lilies were portrayed within a Minoan spring and the way that the inclusion of lilies was thus viewed with other floral iconography. Working alongside Arthur Evans in 1923, Emile Gilleron fils was the first to reconstruct the two panels from the large deposits found within this room.<sup>70</sup> The first panel contained imagery of blue monkeys in a rocky landscape among a field of various flowers such as crocuses, lilies, dwarf irises, ivy, and papyrus-reed hybrid plants.<sup>71</sup> The second panel contained features of bluebirds in a rocky landscape with similar floral imagery.<sup>72</sup> Finally, the third panel consisted of a monkey foraging through papyrus; there were many other individual fragments depicting flowering plants and a water fountain. During the years of 1967 to 1968, Mark Cameron published a five-and-a-half-meter reconstruction of the composition identifying the subject of the fresco.<sup>73</sup> Compared to the previous case studies of lilies within nature scenes, this fresco is proposed to use the iconography of lilies as a symbol to represent an idealized and eternal Minoan spring.

This wall painting was first discovered by Evans in 1923, who believed that the wall painting was only used as decoration and held no significance.<sup>74</sup> In recent years, scholars such as N. Marinatos and J. Schäfer have proposed that the ‘Blue Bird Fresco’ was not just a decorative wall-painting, but a ‘religious landscape’ that used the iconography of flowers to imply a deeper religious significance.<sup>75</sup> Supporting Sabine Beckmann’s theory in her article

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<sup>70</sup> Chapin, Anne P. “Power, Privilege, and Landscape in Minoan Art.” *Hesperia Supplements* 33 (2004): 47–64. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1354062>. pg.47

<sup>71</sup> To learn more about the different types of floral within the composition please refer to Tucker, Arthur O. “Identification of the Rose, Sage, Iris, and Lily in the ‘Blue Bird Fresco’ from Knossos, Crete (ca. 1450 B.C.E.).” *Economic Botany* 58, no. 4 (2004): 733–36. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4256886>.; Chapin (2004) pg. 47

<sup>72</sup> Chapin, “Power, Privilege, and Landscape in Minoan Art.” pg.48

<sup>73</sup> Chapin, “Power, Privilege, and Landscape in Minoan Art.” pg.48

<sup>74</sup> Beckmann, Sabine. “Beyond the Moon: Minoan ‘Calendar’-Symbolism in the ‘Blue Bird Fresco.’” In *Living the Lunar Calendar*, edited by Jonathan Ben-Dov, Wayne Horowitz, and John M. Steele, 63–78. Oxbow Books, 2012. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvh1dj98.7>.

<sup>75</sup> To learn more about the proposed religious landscape in the Blue Bird Fresco’ please refer to Beckmann, 2012, pg. 65 and Chapin, “Power, Privilege, and Landscape in Minoan Art.” pg.48

“Beyond the Moon: Minoan ‘Calendar’-Symbolism in the ‘Blue Bird Fresco,” this study proposes that the iconography of lilies (and that of the other floral iconography) was used as a symbol to represent the season in which lilies typically grow in nature, thus creating an eternal blooming spring. This is shown by the different seasons in which certain flowers traditionally bloom. The Madonna Lily traditionally blooms through the hot summer months of May and June.<sup>76</sup> Crocus flowers bloom any time from late winter to early spring. Iris flowers bloom during late spring to early summer months, while papyrus traditionally blooms during late summer.<sup>77</sup> Nanno Marinatos suggests that the deliberate compression of nature within this scene represents a religious renewal of nature and the symbolic ideal spring.<sup>78</sup>

Throughout the composition, lilies appear growing from the ground, as they are in the Spring fresco, but here, they are full lily flowers. Each lily stem depicts the various stages of blooming flowers, including fully bloomed, partially bloomed, and buds. It is important to mention that among the field of various flowers depicted in this wildlife scene, the lily continues to be the only flower that is shown in different stages of growth. After closely observing the different floral iconography depicted throughout the composition, it is clear the flowers do not depict a natural landscape or season, but instead depict a fantasy location where all flowers bloom in the same season. By including the iconography of lilies with the other proposed symbolic floral motifs such as the crocus flower, it is very likely that lilies held a ceremonial or religious significance and would have been viewed as such throughout the composition.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Brickell, Christopher. *American Horticultural Society Encyclopedia of Plants & Flowers*. London: DK Pub., 2011.

<sup>77</sup> Chapin, “Power, Privilege, and Landscape in Minoan Art.” pg.48

<sup>78</sup> Chapin, “Power, Privilege, and Landscape in Minoan Art.” pg.48

<sup>79</sup> To learn more about the House of Frescoes and the different types of plants and animals depicted throughout the narrative, please reference Chapin's article, Power, Privilege, and Landscape in Minoan Art or Chapin, Anne P., and Maria C. Shaw. “The Frescoes from the House of the Frescoes at Knossos: A Reconsideration of Their Architectural Context and a New Reconstruction of the Crocus Panel.” *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 101 (2006): 57–88. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30073256>.

The investigation of lily iconography within Aegean landscape wall paintings has shown that lilies were portrayed in both natural and cultivated contexts, a fact which may shed light on the cultural, religious, and even ceremonial importance of lilies in ancient Minoan society. The examples discussed in this chapter show that the original audience who would have viewed these depictions had a deep reverence for the natural world, and for the lily. A deliberate emphasis on the lily is also demonstrated by the meticulous attention to detail artists gave when depicting the flower, including its distinct stages of growth, as well as a unique fresco technique.

## **Chapter 4: Lily Adornment in Figural Wall Paintings**

While the previous chapter investigated the iconography of lilies in natural landscapes, this chapter will observe the way that lilies were portrayed along with or on figures. This study will investigate lilies in two contexts, specifically as the ornamentation on figures, and as offerings. In terms of the former, lilies, when worn as headdress or in gold jewelry, may have held a symbolic or hierarchical meaning. The fresco known as the “Priest-King” will be a focal case study in this chapter, as the central figure wears multiple lilies in the form of ornamentation, specifically as necklace and headdress. In terms of the latter, this chapter will study lily iconography as both offerings and ornamentation in processional scenes, using the “Lady of the Landscape” fresco and “Adorants Fresco” (both from Xeste 3 at Akrotiri), and the “Procession of Mycenaean Female Worshippers” fresco from Thebes, as case studies. The goal is to investigate the way that lilies are portrayed in scenes of procession, and what the depiction of lilies as offerings contributes to the scene, in each case.

### **The Priest-King Fresco**

One of the most significant depictions of lilies in this context was discovered at the Palace of Knossos, and is known as the “Priest-King.” (Fig. 35) The figure was known alternatively in early scholarship as the “The Prince of Lilies.” The fresco was first discovered in the south wing of the palace of Knossos by archeologist Arthur Evans in 1901, and is estimated

to have been created between 1600 and 1450 BCE.<sup>80</sup> Arthur Evans, the excavator of the Palace of Knossos, was the first to suggest that the figure represented a theoretical ruler of Knossos, claiming that the figure was once a king or influential person who contained religious and secular power over the Minoan people.<sup>81</sup> In his 1987 study, Hans Niemeier instead interpreted the figure as a Minoan god, suggesting that the scene contained multiple figures (not just one), and that the crown was originally worn by either a sphinx or a priestess, no longer visible.<sup>82</sup> In more recent years, Nanno Marinatos proposed that the figure did not represent a male Minoan god but instead depicted a female “priestess,” perhaps serving a Minoan god or goddess.<sup>83</sup> Following Arthur Evans's reconstruction (Fig. 36), the fresco depicts a life-size youth, rendered in high relief, against a monochromatic red background, walking through a field of lilies. Due to a lack of fragments discovered at Knossos, however, the “Priest-King” was comprised of three separate fragment sections. The only identifiable pieces portray an elaborate headpiece and corresponding jewelry featuring lilies that are reminiscent of the lilies discussed above at Amnisos and Akrotiri. Regarding the authenticity and accuracy of the “Priest-King” reconstruction, therefore, it is essential to note that many scholars use Evan’s reconstruction sparingly and do not consider his reconstructions accurate.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, the reconstruction offers a framework for further exploration of the figure.

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<sup>80</sup> Shaw, Maria C. “The ‘Priest-King’ Fresco from Knossos: Man, Woman, Priest, King, or Someone Else?” *Hesperia Supplements* 33 (2004): 65–84. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1354063>.

<sup>81</sup> Referenced from the description found on the Heraklion Archeological Museum <https://www.heraklionmuseum.gr/en/exhibit/the-prince-of-the-lilies-fresco/>

<sup>82</sup> Shaw, “The ‘Priest-King’ Fresco from Knossos: Man, Woman, Priest, King, or Someone Else?” pg. 70

<sup>83</sup> Marinatos, Nanno. “The Lily Crown and Sacred Kingship in Minoan Crete.” *Krinoi Kai Limenes: Studies in Honor of Joseph and Maria Shaw*, edited by Philip P. Betancourt et al., vol. 22, INSTAP Academic Press, 2007, pp. 271–76. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt3fgvnmk.41>. Accessed 20 Oct. 2023.

<sup>84</sup> To see more examples of possible other depictions of the figure, please read Maria C. Shaws’s “The *Priest-King* Fresco from Knossos: Man, Woman, Priest, King, or Someone Else?”



The first fragmented section of the Priest-King figure portrays a colorful red and blue loincloth connected to a belt around the waist; from there, the remaining portions illustrate the lower leg of the figure (Fig. 37). The second section depicts the torso of the figure with the left arm positioned across its chest in a seemingly authoritative gesture (Fig. 38). Along the figure's neck rests a stylized necklace of red waz-lilies (Fig. 39). The last section of the fresco depicts what is suggested to be a majestic crown or headdress, adorned with five small waz lilies encasing the headband, and a large waz lily ornament connected to three peacock feathers (Fig. 40). From the few fragments discovered during excavations, it becomes clear that the lily flower is one of the most influential components of the fresco, which raises the question as to how lilies may contribute to the figure's identity.

Headdresses with lilies or waz lilies, such as the one worn by the Priest-King, are rarely found in Aegean art. This makes it difficult to determine the identity of a figure within the society who may have worn such an ornament. The incredible size and majesty of the crown has led art historians to speculate that the figure may represent someone with power.<sup>85</sup> Although no figures known from other Minoan frescoes depict similar ornate lily headdresses, there are instances of figures wearing a simplified style of the headdress. These appear on larnax coffins, and include the female figures on the Hagia Triada Sarcophagus (Fig. 41). This terracotta larnax dates to the 14th century BCE, and was painted with complicated imagery on all four sides.<sup>86</sup> Discovered in 1903, the larnax has remained one of the most important sources for understanding Minoan religion, as the various scenes likely represent a ritual or ceremonial funerary event.<sup>87</sup> The front of the larnax is divided into two panels. The first panel depicts a

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<sup>85</sup> Shaw, "The 'Priest-King' Fresco from Knossos: Man, Woman, Priest, King, or Someone Else?" pg. 73

<sup>86</sup> In Minoan burial rites a larnax is a closed coffin, box, or "ash chest" used to contain human remains.

<sup>87</sup> NAUERT, JEAN PORTER. "THE HAGIA TRIADA SARCOPHAGUS AN ICONOGRAPHICAL STUDY." *Antike Kunst* 8, no. 2 (1965): 91–98. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41319153>. Pg. 93

female procession, a bull sacrifice, and musicians, while the second panel portrays a male figure giving offerings in front of an altar adorned with the horns of consecration.<sup>88</sup> The back of the sarcophagus holds a similar scene but contains different motifs (Fig. 42). The left panel shows a procession of men and women, while the right panel depicts a procession of male figures with offerings, near a boat that holds and displays the deceased. The female figures in both scenes wear a headdress similar to that of the Priest-King. Indeed, the general shape and design of the lily headdress on this larnax are almost identical to that depicted in the Priest-King fresco. While the restoration of the so-called Priest King fresco is so theoretical that scholars do not even know if the figure initially wearing the headdress was a male or female. Therefore, there is solid evidence of female figures wearing a similar headdress on the Hagia Triada Sarcophagus.<sup>89</sup> What is more, the females wearing the headdress were involved in a procession – a highly important religious and/or funerary event.<sup>90</sup> While it is difficult to determine how the lily headdress would look in a simplified form, the two curved petals creating a rim along the crown with three curved lines running down the back of the headpiece suggests this was a similar headdress to that worn by the Priest-King. Thus, this study proposes that the lily headdress seen on the Priest-King was meant to adorn someone of significance during a ceremonial and even potentially funerary event.

In addition to the elaborate waz-lily headdress, the Priest-King is also depicted wearing a red waz-lily necklace. Due to the poor preservation of the fresco fragments, the pigment quality around the figure's neck, and thus the lily necklace, have faded over time, making it hard to determine what the necklace looked like. From the current archeological fragments and Evans's reconstruction of the figure, the necklace would have consisted of stylized lily beads - similar to

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<sup>88</sup> Nauert, THE HAGIA TRIADA SARCOPHAGUS AN ICONOGRAPHICAL STUDY." pg. 93

<sup>89</sup> Shaw, "The 'Priest-King' Fresco from Knossos: Man, Woman, Priest, King, or Someone Else?" pg. 73

<sup>90</sup> Nauert, THE HAGIA TRIADA SARCOPHAGUS AN ICONOGRAPHICAL STUDY." pg. 93

the many actual examples of such necklaces found in Minoan funerary contexts.<sup>91</sup> Gold necklaces such as those found at Dendra Argolis and Kalkani are suggested to have been a symbol of power and wealth to the owners who wore them, as gold was a hard material to purchase.<sup>92</sup> An intricate gold waz-lily necklace with alternating ivy leaves was found in the funerary tomb of Dendra Argolis in Chamber 10 (Fig. 43). Inside the chamber tomb at the cemetery in Kalkani, another gold lily necklace was discovered though its design was simpler, with the shape of fully bloomed lilies and a single stud in the center of the chain (Fig. 44). The iconography of lily necklaces found in gold jewelry implies that the lily flower was an important enough symbol to be repeated in a long string of precious metals. The individuals decided to buy and wear the lily necklace in life, but they also thought it was valuable enough to bring with them into the afterlife. Thus, the necklace may hold the same significance for the figure wearing it in the fresco. The flower was an important symbol; the individual was powerful and wealthy.

The so-called Priest King wears an ornate lily headdress and necklace. What we can say with certainty is that such individuals within Minoan culture held a position of power, and may have been an important participant in ceremonial (and potentially religious) and funerary events.

Outside of Minoan Crete, lilies continue to appear as both adornments and ceremonial offerings within figural wall paintings, such as those found in Akrotiri.<sup>93</sup> Building Xeste 3 was a three-story free-standing public building containing extensive figural frescoes throughout the interior setting.<sup>94</sup> Beginning with the top floor of the building's three levels, the upper rooms are

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<sup>91</sup> Branigan, Keith. "Gold and Goldworking in Early Bronze Age Crete." In *Temple University Aegean Symposium: A Compendium*, edited by Philip P. Betancourt, 439–44. INSTAP Academic Press, 2015.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt18z4gjq.61>.

<sup>92</sup> Verduci, Josephine, and Brent Davis. "ADORNMENT, RITUAL AND IDENTITY: INSCRIBED MINOAN JEWELLERY." *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 110 (2015): 51–70.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/44082106>.

<sup>93</sup> Clairy Palyvou, *Akrotiri, Thera: An Architecture of Affluence 3,500 Years Old* (Philadelphia: INSTAP Academic Press, 2005), 54–62

<sup>94</sup> Thera VII = Spyridon Marinatos, *Excavations at Thera, I-VII* (Athens, 1968-1976)

decorated primarily with geometric compositions of spirals with a relief fresco depicting a rosette-embellished wall hanging (Fig. 45).<sup>95</sup> The walls of a narrow corridor leading to a secondary staircase into Room 3 feature the “Lady of the Landscape” fresco (Fig. 46).<sup>96</sup> The second floor depicts some of the most influential Minoan wall paintings, including the Saffron Gatherers fresco, the Mistress of the Animals fresco, and a fresco depicting a marshy landscape that is hypothesized to have symbols of the heavenly realm.<sup>97</sup> Finally, on the ground floor of the building, located near the lustral basins, is the Adorants Fresco (Fig. 47).<sup>98</sup> The Adorants Fresco and the Lady of the Landscape fresco are scenes that depict a relationship between the lily flower and its figures.

### **The Adorants Fresco**

The “Adorants Fresco” spans along the north wall of the ground floor with three figures resembling a processional march (Fig. 48). The women are depicted heading toward the room’s eastern wall, where a painted structure, perhaps a shrine or altar, awaits them. The three women are painted within a rocky landscape with saffron crocuses appearing throughout the scene.<sup>99</sup> The processional scene evenly distributes three women throughout the composition on the wall, creating a narrative for the viewer as they witness each woman’s processional journey. Paul

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<sup>95</sup>Vlachopoulos, A.G., 2008. The wall paintings from the Xeste 3 building at Akrotiri: towards an interpretation of the iconographic programme, in *Horizon: a Colloquium on the Prehistory of the Cyclades*, eds. N. Brodie, J. Doole, G. Gavalas & C. Renfrew. (McDonald Institute Monographs.) Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 451–65. pg. 52

<sup>96</sup> Vlachopoulos, “The Wall Paintings from the Xeste 3 Building at Akrotiri, Thera. Towards an Interpretation of Its Iconographic Programme”,pg. 52

<sup>97</sup> Vlachopoulos, “The Wall Paintings from the Xeste 3 Building at Akrotiri, Thera. Towards an Interpretation of Its Iconographic Programme”,pg. 52

<sup>98</sup> Vlachopoulos, “The Wall Paintings from the Xeste 3 Building at Akrotiri, Thera. Towards an Interpretation of Its Iconographic Programme”,pg. 52

<sup>99</sup> Simons, Emily. “Thinking About Thera : A Re-interpretation of the Wall Paintings in Xeste.” (2014). Pg.43

Rehak labels the first two figures to the left of the composition older women, calling them the 'Necklace Swinger' and the 'Wounded Woman.' The third figure closest to the east wall is described as a young woman who was given the name 'Veiled Girl.'<sup>100</sup>

The 'Necklace Swinger' (Fig. 49) stands against the far left of the composition and sets the narrative for the other two women. Described as one of the older women, the 'Necklace Swinger' is depicted moving towards the shrine, holding out a beaded necklace or a floral garland.<sup>101</sup> She is seen wearing ornate and traditional mature Minoan-style clothing and jewelry, such as her skirt, which depicts many stylized patterns and colors throughout the fabric, and a shawl-like cover that exposes her bare chest. The second older female, the so-called 'Wounded Woman,' (Fig. 50) is depicted as the central figure within the scene, and appears slightly larger in scale than her fellow companions, making her the most prominent figure of the two women. She sits on the rocky landscape, crouched over with her hand on her head as if in pain, caused by her bleeding foot. The 'Wounded Woman' wears mature clothing similar to the 'Necklace Swinger' and adorns nature-style jewelry, as seen by the lily hairpin and foliage in her hair. The last figure in the scene depicts the youngest woman of the group, who is presented in a peculiar position. The 'Veiled Girl's' body is structured as walking towards the other two women in the composition but her head is turned 180 degrees in the opposite direction, towards the eastern wall (Fig. 51). She is gazing upon the eastern shrine, seemingly unsure of her decision to turn around. The 'Veiled Girl' wears a stylized red and yellow veil almost covering her entire body, and a traditional juvenile skirt. Her head was painted blue, with sections of her hair growing to further accentuate her youthful age. Rehak theorizes that the three 'Adorants' are women in

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<sup>100</sup> Rehak, P. 2007. "Children's Work: Girls as Acolytes in Aegean Ritual and Cult." In *Constructions of Childhood in Ancient Greece and Italy. Hesperia Supplement 41*, edited by Ada Cohen and Jeremy B. Rutter, 205- 225. Athens: American School of Classical Studies.

<sup>101</sup> Simons, "Thinking About Thera: A Re-interpretation of the Wall Paintings in Xeste." Pg.43

service to a goddess, suggesting that the two older women are assisting the younger woman in her path to the shrine.<sup>102</sup>

The procession's scene continues along the room's eastern wall, where a shrine adorned at the top with horns of consecration (Fig. 52-53). The shrine contains a painted door with running spirals along the frame and red, fully bloomed-lilies on the main surface. Along the top of the shrine, the right horn is hypothesized to have droplets of blood, while a tree bending to the left covers the left horn with leaves. Horns of Consecration have become associated with Minoan ritual practices, the term being first used by Arthur Evans in 1901 which he described as a symbol of sacrificed bull horns, usually made from alabaster or stone.<sup>103</sup> The Eastern wall shrine is an interesting example of the Horns of Consecration depicted with the iconography of lilies, as current artworks discovered by archeologists have yet to see other examples depicted with the flower. Understanding that the Horns of Consecration are associated with Minoan religion, and considering the previous scene depicting three women in a procession, raises the question of how the viewers would have interpreted the lilies painted along the shrine. This study proposes that the inclusion of mature lilies on the eastern wall is a symbolic representation of this young woman growing into a mature female adult—the transition from a partially bloomed lily flower into a fully bloomed mature lily. The lily door thus symbolically represents the physical action of the young child entering the doorway and passing into maturity.

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<sup>102</sup> Rehak, "Children's Work: Girls as Acolytes in Aegean Ritual and Cult." Pg. 210-213

<sup>103</sup> Horns of consecration are believed to be one of the most important symbols of the Minoan cult and are likely related to the cult of the bull. To learn more about the horns of Consecration in Aegean art, please reference Milićević Bradač, Marina. (2005). The transfer of symbols and meanings: the case of the 'horns of consecration.' *Documenta Praehistorica*. 32. 10.4312/dp.32.14. and *The Macmillan dictionary of archaeology*, Ruth D. Whitehouse, 1983

## The Lady of the Landscape Fresco

After walking through the ground floor room containing the “Adorants fresco” and observing the narrative of the procession, the viewer might have walked along a narrow corridor to reach a secondary staircase leading to the first floor. “The Lady of the Landscape” fresco (Fig. 54-55), also known as the “Procession of Mature Women,” depicts two pairs of life-sized mature women adjacent to each wall along the corridor in a procession scene.<sup>104</sup> The first pair of figures depicted on the northern corridor of the wall are titled the Rose Bearer and the Basket Bearer. They are wearing traditional Minoan garments but with embroidered depictions of lilies and crocuses.<sup>105</sup> The Rose Bearer carries a bundle of roses close to her chest while another bundle is raised with her left arm, extended as if in an offering gesture. Her clothes are embroidered with a lily pattern of fully-bloomed red lilies. While some traditional Aegean clothing contained imagery of crocus flowers (as discussed in Paul Rehaks article “Crocus Costumes in Aegean Art”), a waz-lily pattern design in Minoan textile has been discovered in the villa at Epano Zakros, in Crete (Fig. 56). Thus, the cloth shown worn by the Rose Bearers did actually exist.<sup>106</sup> Discovered in the villa's basement, the textile fragments preserve a lively net pattern of diagonally crossing blue and black barred lines.<sup>107</sup> They are connected with intersections marked

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<sup>104</sup> To read more about the figural titles and interpretation of the Lady of the Landscape fresco please read Vlachopoulos, A.G., 2008. The wall paintings from the Xeste 3 building at Akrotiri: towards an interpretation of the iconographic programme, in *Horizon: a Colloquium on the Prehistory of the Cyclades*, eds. N. Brodie, J. Doole, G. Gavalas & C. Renfrew. (McDonald Institute Monographs.) Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 451–65. Brodie, N., & Vlachopoulos, A. pg. 493

<sup>105</sup> Vlachopoulos, “The Wall Paintings from the Xeste 3 Building at Akrotiri, Thera. Towards an Interpretation of Its Iconographic Programme”, pg. 52 pg. 493; To read more about traditional Minoan clothing please reference Chapin, Anne P., and M.K. Heyn. “The Lady of the Landscape: An Investigation of Aegean Costuming and the Xeste 3 Frescoes.” Edited by C.S. Colburn. *Reading a Dynamic Canvas: Adornment in the Ancient Mediterranean World*. C.S. Colburn and M.K. Heyn, eds. Newcastle 2008, 48-83 (2008): 48–83.

<sup>106</sup> Shaw, Maria C., Anne P. Chapin, Elizabeth J. W. Barber, Giuliana Bianco, Brendan Burke, Emily C. Egan, and Suzanne Peterson Murray. “Palace and Household Textiles in Aegean Bronze Age Art.” In *Woven Threads: Patterned Textiles of the Aegean Bronze Age*, 22:105–30. Oxbow Books, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvh1dh4d.7>.

<sup>107</sup> Shaw, “Palace and Household Textiles in Aegean Bronze Age Art.”Pg.107

by blue rosettes drawn in black, with red centers and a single red waz-lily painted inside each lozenge. The pattern is completed by a chain of red lilies framing the network. As this current fresco is pending formal publication, according to Maria C. Shaw and Anne P. Chapin, the interpretation of the composition remains tentative.<sup>108</sup> However, the net pattern has led Shaw and Chapin to suggest that this is a depiction of patterned textiles similar to the fabric that female figures such as the Rose Bearer, would have worn.<sup>109</sup> Similarly, the lily chain pattern may have been inspired by jewelry designs such as the necklaces and beads discovered in Aegean tombs, discussed above.<sup>110</sup>

After the observations of the lily iconography on the Rose Bearer, the Basket Bearer would be next in line in the procession. Resting on her arm is a basket that hangs near her hip, but because of the limited fragments, it is unclear what the basket is holding. She wears similar clothing seen on the Rose Bearer, but because of the lack of fragments currently discovered, it is hard to distinguish if she had any type of lily ornamentation. The second pair of women, the Lady of the Landscape and the Lily Bearer, enter the corridor from the south side, following the direction of the north figures.<sup>111</sup> The Lady of the Landscape can only be distinguished by her skirt due to poor preservation and findings.<sup>112</sup> The skirt is decorated with similar imagery found in the “Spring Fresco” from Complex Delta at Akrotiri. The colorful blue and red rocks flow against the skirt as the flying swallows decorate the fabric's surface. The Lily Bearer stands in front of a red monochrome background. She holds a large bundle of white lilies, wearing a white lily in her hair and embroidered clothing depicting a net-like pattern. Andreas Vlachopoulos

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<sup>108</sup> Shaw, “Palace and Household Textiles in Aegean Bronze Age Art.”Pg.107

<sup>109</sup> Shaw, “Palace and Household Textiles in Aegean Bronze Age Art.”Pg.107

<sup>110</sup> Shaw, “Palace and Household Textiles in Aegean Bronze Age Art.” Pg.107

<sup>111</sup> Vlachopoulos, “The Wall Paintings from the Xeste 3 Building at Akrotiri, Thera. Towards an Interpretation of Its Iconographic Programme”, Pg. 453

<sup>112</sup> Vlachopoulos, “The Wall Paintings from the Xeste 3 Building at Akrotiri, Thera. Towards an Interpretation of Its Iconographic Programme,” Pg. 453



proposes that the women depicted in the corridor are distinguished members of the local elite who are shown in a procession, holding offerings ready to give to the Great Goddess located on the upper levels.<sup>113</sup> Assuming that Vlachopoulos's theory is correct, and that these women are distinguished members of the local elite, raises the question of what makes or visually distinguishes them part of the local elite.<sup>114</sup> The true answer to that question may never be known, but close study of the scene shows that three out of the four women in the corridor portray imagery of lilies on their person. The Rose Bearer wears embroidered lily clothing, the Lady of the Landscape wears a skirt depicting the “Spring Fresco” that is associated with the lilies, and the Lily Bearer is carrying a bundle of lily flowers as an offering to the Goddess and even wears one in her hair. Unfortunately, due to the lack of fragments and preservation of the wall paintings, it is hard to say if the Basket Bearer contained imagery of lilies on her person. Yet it is proposed that since these women were depicted in pairs and three out of four all contained lily iconography in some aspect, the Basket Bearer would also have contained lily iconography. The iconography of lilies within this procession is prominent, appearing on jewelry, clothing, and as offerings. This study proposes that it is the lilies that distinguish these important female figures. What is more, it may thus be possible that this hallway would have been used by a young woman newly come-of-age (perhaps having gone through a maturity ceremony), who would pass through the eastern shrine doors and make their way in procession to the Greater Goddess figure depicted on the upper floor.<sup>115</sup> The staggering iconography of lilies in this hallway suggests lilies held a vital ceremonial or ritualistic significance within this context.

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<sup>113</sup> Vlachopoulos, “The Wall Paintings from the Xeste 3 Building at Akrotiri, Thera. Towards an Interpretation of Its Iconographic Programme”, Pg. 453

<sup>114</sup> Vlachopoulos, “The Wall Paintings from the Xeste 3 Building at Akrotiri, Thera. Towards an Interpretation of Its Iconographic Programme”, Pg. 453

<sup>115</sup> It is important to note that this is pure speculation and as there is currently no factual evidence to support this theory. However, with the iconographic evidence, it is highly suggested.

In analyzing the lily iconography in both the Adorants fresco and the Lady Landscape corridor, it becomes clear that the lily features prominently in processional scenes, either worn as ornament, or offered as religious gift. Thus, these images reinforce the idea that lily flowers held a significant place – indeed that the flower was worthy if not symbol of the most important ceremonial or religious events – in Minoan civilization.

### **The Procession of Mycenaean Female Worshippers Fresco**

The Procession of Mycenaean Female Worshippers fresco from Thebes (Fig. 57), painted in the 14<sup>th</sup> century BCE, is the final example considered here of lilies portrayed as offering in a ceremonial or religious context. This Theban fresco is believed to have originally been over 14 meters long with three floor to ceiling zones throughout the scene: the first zone depicted a decorative band, the second zone portrayed the main composition, and finally, the third zone was a marble band.<sup>116</sup> From the few fragments discovered by Antonios Keramopoulos, we may understand that the scene may depict a large procession of female worshippers striding in two opposite directions, towards a centrally-located deity.<sup>117</sup> Currently, the fragments only display five female worshippers with offerings, but it is suggested there would have been more female figures in the scene. The depicted women wear traditional Minoan dresses with colorful and embroidered pattern borders. Each woman wears fine jewelry, such as necklaces and bracelets, and holds individual offerings in their hands.

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<sup>116</sup> Immerwahr, *Aegean painting in the bronze age*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990. Pg.115

<sup>117</sup> Immerwahr, *Aegean painting in the bronze age*, pg.115

Of the five women, the only female worshiper facing left is posed holding wild roses in both hands in an outwards gesture, offering toward the center deity (Fig. 58). Two of the remaining right-facing women are depicted in profile. The first woman in the procession holds a large box that is believed to have been filled with jewelry (Fig. 59), while the third woman holds wild roses in her hands in a similar gesture as the woman facing left (Fig. 60). The remaining two female worshipers offer gifts to the central deity, though they are depicted showing their frontal chests. The fourth worshiper in the procession holds a luxurious painted vase in extended arms as if offering (Fig. 61), and it has been suggested by Sarah Immerwahr that the vase contained perfume or oil used for ceremonial purposes.<sup>118</sup> The final female figure offers a variety of red and white lilies in each hand in a gesture similar to the offering gestures from the Procession of Older Woman, discussed above in Xeste 3 (Fig. 62). She holds three red lilies close to her exposed chest and extends three white lilies toward the center deity. In this context, lilies are seen as significant and valuable enough to be given as religious offering with other luxurious items. While the question of who receives these offerings is still debated in scholarship, this study proposes that lilies were considered significant and valuable enough within the culture to be given as offerings to a higher deity in a processional scene.

The depiction of lilies in Bronze Age figural frescoes, whether they are portrayed as fully bloomed or in a hybrid style, serves as a lens to help scholars explore the cultural, religious, and social dynamics of the ancient Aegean cultures. Through the detailed analysis of key frescoes such as the "Priest-King" from Knossos, the "Adorants fresco" from Akrotiri, the "Procession of Older Woman" in Xeste 3, and the "Procession of Mycenaean Female Worshipers" from Thebes, the multifaceted but important roles of lilies in these artistic representations become

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<sup>118</sup> Immerwahr, *Aegean painting in the bronze age*, pg.115

increasingly apparent. When combined with figural frescoes, the lily flower is portrayed as both offerings or ornamentation, always symbolizing the nature the Minoans so greatly revered. What is more, these depictions suggest that the flower had an exalted position within the culture, thus elevating the figure wearing or holding the flower. Whether presented as floral tributes or worn as ornamental adornments, the painted lily appears (and is indeed highlighted) in scenes of religious and/or ceremonial significance.

## **Chapter 5: The Lily Motif in Decorative Wall Paintings**

When investigating lilies depicted in Bronze Age Aegean wall paintings, particularly those portrayed in landscape and figural wall paintings, a common element has come to the fore: the association of a flower with a higher power in a religious or political setting. The final classification of wall paintings to be studied in this thesis, decorative, will investigate the way that lilies are presented in a decorative function within the room or object they are depicted on, and what they may have symbolized to the owner in this context. The iconography of lilies in decorative wall paintings varies from those depicted in landscape and figural wall paintings, even suggesting that decorative wall paintings are the only classification that depicts lilies in all four of their maturation moments, as discussed at the beginning of this thesis. The depiction of lilies in decorative wall paintings will be investigated in frescoes from the West House in Akrotiri, the North House in Knossos, and two Minoan funerary larnakes, with the hope of ascertaining the reason that lilies were portrayed in each location, and what the symbol of the lily could thus symbolize as a decorative motif within the Aegean culture.

### **The Ikria Fresco**

The West House in Akrotiri, Thera, is well-known for its frescoes. The West House is one of five freestanding houses in Akrotiri and is currently the most extensively excavated house

within the settlement.<sup>119</sup> Allowing art historians to study what is currently one of the most completed sequences of wall paintings within an Aegean home.<sup>120</sup> When investigating the underlying theme of the West House, scholars such as Lyvia Morgan believe the wall paintings reflected throughout the interconnected rooms reflect an interest in maritime and ceremonial events.<sup>121</sup> Particularly, Room 4 of this house depicts a fresco that contains maritime and lily iconography and is proposed to represent or symbolize a captain of a ship, the so-called Ikria fresco (FIG. 63).<sup>122</sup> Ikria were unroofed, lightweight, portable structures made from wooden frames that would have been situated on large.<sup>123</sup> They would have been open at the front but partially covered with ox hide or textiles, protecting the ship's occupant (possibly the captain or someone of importance) from the wind and waves without obstructing the view.<sup>124</sup> With the understanding that these are portable and lightweight structures, and have been shown depicted with a male figure illustrated on the stern of a ship in the Flotilla Frieze located in Room 5 of the West House (Fig. 64), this led to scholars such as Christos Doumas to propose these Ikria were interpretations of cabins of palanquins meant for the captain of a ship.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> HITCHCOCK, L. A. (2016). Entangled Threads: Who Owned the West House at Akrotiri?. *Journal of Prehistoric Religion*, 25, pp.18-34 To learn more about the West House from a paleoethnobotanical study please refer to Sarpaki, Anaya. "A Palaeoethnobotanical Study of the West House, Akrotiri, Thera." *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 87 (November 1992): 219–30. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0068245400015136>.

<sup>120</sup> To learn more about miniature wall paintings around Thera please reference Morgan, Lyvia. *The miniature wall paintings of Thera: A study in aegean culture and Iconography*. Cambridge etc.: Cambridge university press, 1988. Pg. 155

<sup>121</sup> Morgan, *The miniature wall paintings of Thera: A study in aegean culture and Iconography*. pg.164

<sup>122</sup> Doumas, Christos G., Sōkrátīs Maurommátīs, and Alexandra Doumas. *Prehistoric thera*. Athens: John S. Latsis Public Benefit Foundation, 2016. pg. 258

<sup>123</sup> To read more about the Ikria in Mycenae please reference Shaw, Maria C. "Painted 'Ikria' at Mycenae?" *American Journal of Archaeology* 84, no. 2 (1980): 167–79. <https://doi.org/10.2307/504264>.

<sup>124</sup> Shaw, Maria C., Anne P. Chapin, Elizabeth J. W. Barber, Giuliana Bianco, Brendan Burke, Emily C. Egan, and Suzanne Peterson Murray. "Sailing the Shining Sea: Maritime Textiles of the Bronze Age Aegean." In *Woven Threads: Patterned Textiles of the Aegean Bronze Age*, 22:149–82. Oxbow Books, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvh1dh4d.9>. pg.155

<sup>125</sup> Doumas, *Prehistoric Thera*, pg. 258

Room 4 of the West House depicts eight large-scale Ikria arranged around the walls of the entire room. Each consists of three vertical posts to which a hide of some sort is attached. Each post terminates at the top in a stylized hybrid lily flower. A few of the finials are depicted with a waz-lily or hybrid lily papyrus flower (Fig. 65), and some include a more ornate and stylized version of the waz-lily (Fig. 66). Despite the various hybrid lily styles, however, the flower is always depicted in a yellow color. This study proposes that the lily finials may have been made with gold or gilded, suggesting that the Ikria belonging to someone of importance or wealth.

Lilies also appear in the floral garlands that hang along the middle of the three posts in the Ikria (Fig. 67). In modern times, floral garlands are traditionally worn or hung as ornaments, or to honor.<sup>126</sup> While no written records describe what floral garlands were used for in the ancient Aegean cultures, we may imagine that they were used for similar purposes. The floral garland hanging on the Ikria shows different flowers such as lilies, roses, or seashells; as such, it can be assumed that the garland was used to honor the person who would have used the Ikria.<sup>127</sup> The stylized, ornate waz-lily motif is seen again on the floral garlands, showing that the flower was symbolic enough to be woven repeatedly. Finally, the lower half of the Ikria would have been covered with a type of ox hide or textile.<sup>128</sup> Due to the preservation of the fragments, it is hard to determine precisely what the ox hide, or textiles would have looked like. However, what can be seen is that each Ikria had a different style of ox hide or textile (Fig. 68). Each of the eight floor-to-ceiling Ikria frescoes displayed throughout the room were adorned with lily motifs in

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<sup>126</sup> To learn more about the symbolism of floral garlands throughout history, please reference Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "garland." Encyclopedia Britannica, April 9, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/art/garland-floral-decoration>.

<sup>127</sup> Warren, Peter. "The Fresco of the Garlands from Knossos." *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique. Supplément* 11, no. 1 (1985): 187–208. <https://doi.org/10.3406/bch.1985.5279>.

<sup>128</sup> Doumas, *Prehistoric Thera*, pg. 258

some aspect. The owner of this rich home, so ornately decorated with exquisite paintings of maritime imagery, is thought to be an important individual, perhaps a ship's captain. The prominence of the lily imagery with the Ikria thus appears to highlight his elevated status, perhaps even signaling an association between status and wealth, and the flower.

But there is one more aspect of the room's frescoes that must be mentioned. As the viewer walked through the room, surrounded by imagery of lilies and maritime subjects, the viewer would have passed too the room's windows. Inside the thick walls of one window, painted on the walls of the jambs in life size, were a pair of vases, one on either side, which were full of lilies (Fig. 69).<sup>129</sup> Here, the lilies are portrayed as they are in the Lily Fresco at the Villa Amnisos, in a natural form and in various stages of bloom, ranging from fully bloomed to budding. The red lilies have long stems, and were held in oval veined marble vases. The vases stand on a white foreground with a red border. Interestingly, the decoration of the jambs of the small west window creates a rare optical illusion for the viewer. It was designed so that when the viewer looked at the space, they would see the illusion of a veined marble flower vase with red lilies sitting on a windowsill overlooking the outside world.<sup>130</sup> It is important to note at this point that evidence suggests a relationship between rare decorative techniques and lily flowers in Bronze Age Aegean contexts. As seen in Chapter Three, the Villa Amnisos example was created with a rare technique that resulted in a 3-D effect for the lily petals on the Lily Fresco. Here, in the West House, a special technique was used to create an illusion of real flowerpots being placed on the windowsill during proposed times of festive or ceremonial occasions, as claimed

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<sup>129</sup> Doulas, *Prehistoric Thera*, pg. 258

<sup>130</sup> Doulas, *Prehistoric Thera*, pg. 264



by Christos Doumas in his book “Prehistoric Thera.”<sup>131</sup> The iconographic abundance of lilies in Rooms 4 along with the inclusion of the windowsill frescoes, suggests that the lily flower was significant enough to the owner of the house to be featured as one of the prominent images of the room. It has already been shown that the lily flower, in particular, had a highlighted place in the adornment of this very special room.

### **Fresco of the Garlands**

When depicted in decorative landscapes, lilies appear to be connected to social status and associated with themes of power and class. We will now explore this idea further with frescoes from Knossos, such as the Fresco of the Garlands in the North House. The North House is a recent discovery, and the Garland fresco (Fig. 70) has fast become one of the most notable finds.<sup>132</sup> While the original location of the fresco remains unknown, the fragments were discovered in the north wall of the Room of the Frescoes, about 0.85 m above the floor. Scholars such as Warren Peter believe the Garland Fresco may have decorated the ground floor or the upper story.<sup>133</sup> The Garland Fresco is a rectangular yellow- or gold-colored fresco that portrays five variations of garlands. The composition contains only six colors, and red is the most prominent color in all five garlands.<sup>134</sup> Of the five garlands in the fresco, three contain depictions

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<sup>131</sup> To learn more about the style of painting and lily flower pot please reference Marinatos, Nanno, and Lilly Papageorgiou. *Art and religion in Thera: Reconstructing a bronze age society*. Fira: Editions Souanis Bros Co. 2016.; and Doumas, *Prehistoric Thera*, pg. 258

<sup>132</sup> To read more about the excavation and history of the site and the remaining two floral garlands not discussed in this thesis, please refer to Warren, Peter. “The Fresco of the Garlands from Knossos.” *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique. Supplément* 11, no. 1 (1985): 187–208. <https://doi.org/10.3406/bch.1985.5279>.

<sup>133</sup> Warren “The Fresco of the Garlands from Knossos.” pg. 189

<sup>134</sup> Warren “The Fresco of the Garlands from Knossos.” pg. 190

of lilies -- either in a hybrid formation or fully-bloomed. Specifically, these are garlands 2, 3, and 5.

Garlands Two and Three are the best preserved of the set. Garland Two consists of two prominent red waz-lily pendants hanging upside down in the middle of the garland, as blue-grey ivy leaves create the circular wreath that is finished with a dotted bow (Fig. 71). Garland Three is made of a circular hoop, but the circle is made of vertically-split deep red half lilies instead of full lily flowers (Fig. 72).<sup>135</sup> Compared to Garland Two, which depicts the waz-lily flower, it is unclear what the two pendants hanging from the bow of this garland should represent. From the context of the composition, the pendant may be a simple version of lily flowers, as traditionally, lilies are depicted with three stamens. The petals, however, raise the question of whether they are lilies, as the petals do not curve as seen in traditional depictions. This is why scholars such as Peter Warren have described the pendants as papyrus stems with red and black dots intended to replicate flowers.<sup>136</sup> The final garland containing lily imagery is Garland Five (Fig. 73). Garland Five consists entirely of red, fully bloomed lilies in a circle. This creates a chain of red lilies finished with a blue-grey bow with hanging papyrus pendants in the front of the garland.

When viewed together, the Garland Fresco is proposed to highlight the spirit of Minoan nature, representing the popular theme of flora and nature. Peter Warren suggests that due to the significance of garlands in classical Greece, these circular garlands may have held importance as they ranged in symbolism from victory to a new status, including marriage and death.<sup>137</sup> With the

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<sup>135</sup> It is interesting to note that Peter Warren considers the third garland the most abstract when investigating the iconography of the five floral garlands. Unfortunately, only five floral garlands are depicted from the archeological fragments discovered at this site, but there could have been more abstract floral garlands that have yet to be found.

<sup>136</sup> Warren "The Fresco of the Garlands from Knossos."pg. 205

<sup>137</sup> Warren "The Fresco of the Garlands from Knossos."pg. 205

current lack of scholarly research regarding the North House in Knossos, the purpose of this particular fresco appearing within the home is waiting to be answered.

Notably, however, the iconography of lily garlands has appeared in numerous ceremonial objects that we do have and that are well-studied. The Ritual Jug (Fig. 74) discovered in the Unexplored Mansion at Knossos contains imagery of lily garlands, the horns of consecration, and the figure-of-eight shields.<sup>138</sup> Peter Warren further suggests that garlands such as the ones portrayed in the North House were used or worn in ritual dances and ceremonies for fertility and life and carried during ceremonies of death.<sup>139</sup> From the various lily depictions discovered within this context, this study suggests that the very deliberate action of transforming lilies into garlands was a hallmark of a significant event. As discussed in earlier chapters, the lily flower continued to appear within ceremonial or religious contexts throughout the centuries, in the Bronze Age Aegean cultures, emphasizing its value within the culture. In this context, furthermore, the lily may be linked to moments of celebration or significance.

So far, the decorative iconography of lilies in wall paintings has been associated with celebration, honor, fertility, and even death. While Mycenaean funerary larnakes are not technically considered frescoed wall paintings, they are painted with similar pigments and styles. Many of these, too, contain decorative motifs portraying lilies as they appear in Aegean wall paintings.<sup>140</sup> Funerary boxes, clay, or terracotta larnakes ranged in decorative motifs. L. Vance Watrous categorizes the imagery appearing on larnakes into four groups.<sup>141</sup> The first represent

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<sup>138</sup> To learn more about the other archeological discoveries at the Unexplored Mansion at Knossos, please reference Popham, M. R., and L. H. Sackett. "The Unexplored Mansion at Knossos: A Preliminary Report on the Excavations from 1967 to 1972." *Archaeological Reports*, no. 19 (1972): 50–71. <https://doi.org/10.2307/581091>.

<sup>139</sup> Warren "The Fresco of the Garlands from Knossos." pg. 206

<sup>140</sup> To read more about Mycenaean larnakes and their depictions and motifs, please reference Vermeule, E. D. T. "Painted Mycenaean Larnakes." *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 85 (1965): 123–48. <https://doi.org/10.2307/628814>.

<sup>141</sup> Watrous, L. Vance. "The Origin and Iconography of the Late Minoan Painted Larnax." *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens* 60, no. 3 (1991): 285–307. <https://doi.org/10.2307/148065>.

abstract designs, the second group contain ritual figures (human or animal) and objects, the third group portray images of animals and plants that would have been sacred to a divinity, and the final group represents the hereafter.<sup>142</sup> In investigating the iconography of lilies on larnakes, the third group of motifs will be the leading group of consideration for this thesis. The Chest Larnax from Palaikastro dated 1370-1300 BCE, and the Clay Chest larnax with painted decoration discovered in the North Cemetery at Knossos dated 1350 BCE- 1300 BCE, are interesting cases. Here, in each case, we see lilies used as decoration on a funerary larnax from both the Minoan and Mycenaean cultures, with symbolic significance. Scholars such as N. Merousis have been investigating the various iconographical symbolism of decorations on larnakes, and have determined that lilies appear on these objects as sacred symbols – that lilies were associated with a divine being in the form of offerings or ornamentation.<sup>143</sup>

### **The Chest Larnax from Palaikastro**

The Chest Larnax from Palaikastro contains many dense decorative and symbolic themes (Fig. 75). It contains symbolic imagery such as fully bloomed waz-lilies, the double ax, and the horns of consecration, all of which are now known to be important symbols in Minoan iconography. The decoration of the larnax itself, however, is designed to emphasize structural divisions.<sup>144</sup> The frame of the larnax is covered with traditional Minoan spiral bands, serpentine lines, or triangles in light and dark shades of red. Decorating the width of the larnax are

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<sup>142</sup> Watrous “The Origin and Iconography of the Late Minoan Painted Larnax.” pg. 289

<sup>143</sup> Sarah Georgel-Debedde. Building a Minoan Larnax -Techniques and Gestures. Preliminary Analysis. *Symposium Egejskie: Papers in Aegean Archaeology*, Brepols Publishers, pp.69-84, 2022, 10.1484/M.WSA-EB.5.128953 . hal-03853779

<sup>144</sup> Bosanquet, R. C. “Excavations at Palaikastro. I.” *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 8 (1901): 286–316. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30097027>.

quatrefoils, which divide the side panels of the larnax.<sup>145</sup> The four panels each contain only one figure, and are framed by wavy lines. On the back of the larnax, panels C and D portray images of land (a turkey-like bird) and marine animals (a dolphin or a fish) (Fig. 76).<sup>146</sup> Notably, the front of the larnax contains the most symbolic Minoan imagery, similarly represented in Aegean wall paintings. Once again, waz lilies are depicted as the central motif in panel A. Two large waz lilies bloom from the base of the panel and stem away from each other. Compared to the previous description of waz lilies seen in Chapter Two, these lilies portray detailed elements of the papyrus flower, while the focal form of the flower is the two curved lily petals. Growing from the two waz lilies is a stem of ‘sacred horns’ holding a plain double axe. Panel A is the only scene that emphasizes the theme of floral motifs, while panels B, C, and D hold the symbolic image of animals. Through their depiction on panel A, waz lilies are portrayed as a symbolic floral motif, which is seen again on panel B as they bloom in front of a griffin. A fascinating element in panel B is that the griffin, which has become associated with the Aegean Great Goddess, is standing in front of the waz lily. The griffin motif on this larnax alludes to the idea that the Great Goddess is present; the Great Goddess is the personification of nature, the living world, and the world of the dead.<sup>147</sup> The griffin, the horns of consecration, the double ax, are all important symbols, and they may all have a relationship with the Great Goddess in this context.<sup>148</sup> But the waz lily, already shown to be associated with religious or ceremonial events in Aegean culture also features greatly here, as a symbol, and could be then be similarly understood as being tied to the goddess.

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<sup>145</sup> Bosanquet, “Excavations at Palaikastro. I.” pg. 299

<sup>146</sup> Bosanquet, “Excavations at Palaikastro. I.” pg. 299

<sup>147</sup> To learn more about the Nature Goddess in Minoan art, please reference Taiz, Lincoln, and Lee Taiz, 'Mystic Plants and Aegean Nature Goddesses', *Flora Unveiled: The Discovery and Denial of Sex in Plants* (New York, 2017; online edn, Oxford Academic, 19 July 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190490263.003.0006>, accessed 29 Apr. 2024.

<sup>148</sup> Bosanquet, “Excavations at Palaikastro. I.” pg. 299

## The Clay Chest Larnax with painted decoration

Another larnax discovered in a cemetery north of Knossos, the Clay Chest larnax with painted decoration, is another example. Its rich decoration consists of geometric motifs and figurative scenes with religious significance.<sup>149</sup> While the Chest Larnax from Palaikastro had multiple panels, each with a different symbolic motif, this larnax uses the painted motifs and figures to portray a story emphasizing the lily motif (Fig. 77). The painted decoration of the larnax is divided into two panels, and the side is separated by a vertical pattern of retorted spirals.<sup>150</sup> Along the narrow sides of the larnax, the panels show a repeated design consisting of three vertical zones. The panel's border consists of geometric spirals, as a stylized 'tree' is depicted in the center, with repeating simplified, fully bloomed lilies (Fig. 78). As described by Lyvia Morgan, the tree motif is universally employed as a symbol of life and regeneration in the ancient World.<sup>151</sup> The clustering of lilies, mirroring this motif, imbues the lily flower with symbolic significance and is now seen as such throughout the composition. The main symbolic scene of the larnax contains of two panels, each with depictions of female figures holding lilies or being accompanied by the lily motif. The same geometric spirals designed on the narrow sides of the larnax are carried through the frontal border of the two frontal panels. Following the spiral border, wavy bands complete the border design, framing the two mature women as they hold or are accompanied by lily motifs.

Due to the preservation and passage of time, the fully painted image on the larnax has faded. What remains of the left panel portrays a mature woman raising her hands to her forehead,

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<sup>149</sup> Morgan, Lyvia. "A Minoan Larnax from Knossos." *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 82 (1987): 171–200. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30103088>. Please refer to Chapter 4 to provide more information about the Ayia Triada sarcophagus.

<sup>150</sup> Morgan, "A Minoan Larnax from Knossos." pg.175

<sup>151</sup> Morgan, "A Minoan Larnax from Knossos." pg. 186

in a gesture of prayer (Fig. 79).<sup>152</sup> The details of her dress have faded over time, but it can be assumed that she wore traditional Minoan clothing similar to those depicted in the “Adorants Fresco” or the “Procession of Older Women” in Akrotiri. Finally, a single hybrid lily flower is blooming downwards from the upper left corner of the scene. Following her gaze, the left female looks toward the slightly larger-in-scale female figure on the right. The right female figure is shown wearing a Minoan dress similar to that of her companion, but it is hard to distinguish because of the fading of the paint (Fig. 80). Whereas the previous female figure raises her arms toward her forehead in prayer, the right female figure raises both arms upward in adoration. Her gaze looked upward toward the sky. In her adoration form, she holds in her left hand a lily flower like the one blooming from the upper corner of the left panel. Her right hand touches what is hypothesized to be the trunk of a palm tree, in Lyvia Morgan's opinion.<sup>153</sup> It is important to note that while the paint on the larnax has faded, the only well-preserved and thus noticeable symbol in the panel is the female figures and the lily motif present in both scenes. Lyvia Morgan hypothesizes that this scene depicts a religious ceremony, further symbolizing nature's blossoming and rebirth and, by extension, a reminder of rebirth after death.<sup>154</sup> With the reoccurring motif of lilies throughout the larnax decoration in both examples, it is clear that the flower is important within this funerary context. The lily flower is used as an offering within the religious scene, as both females present it to the deity above them.

As seen throughout this chapter, lily iconography appears in many ceremonial, religious, and funerary contexts, and it furthermore suggests power and prestige. As such, it was certainly a recognized symbol, recognized and purposely employed, in the arts of the ancient Aegean world.

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<sup>152</sup> Morgan, “A Minoan Larnax from Knossos.” pg. 177

<sup>153</sup> Morgan, “A Minoan Larnax from Knossos.” pg. 183

<sup>154</sup> Morgan, “A Minoan Larnax from Knossos.” pg.180

## Conclusions

The purpose of this study aimed to correct the need for more research conducted on the prominent lily motif seen across Aegean media and provide a starting corpus for study. It sought to delve into the enigmatic and intricate nature of the Minoan lily through an analysis of its diverse representations and cultural significances with Aegean wall paintings, by investigating the various contexts in which the lily flower appears. This research aimed to offer new insights into the significance of this prominent motif, specifically investigating lily iconography in three distinct types of wall paintings, in Bronze Age contexts: landscape, figurative, and decorative.

Through each type of wall painting, the lily flower was investigated using three case studies for each type. The investigation of lily iconography within Aegean landscape wall paintings has shown that lilies were portrayed in both natural and cultivated contexts, a fact which may shed light on the cultural, religious, and even ceremonial importance of lilies in ancient Minoan society. The examples discussed in Chapter Three showed that the original audience who would have viewed these depictions had a deep reverence for the natural world, and for the lily. When combined with figural frescoes as seen in Chapter Four, the lily flower was portrayed as both offerings or ornamentation, always symbolizing the nature the Minoans so greatly revered. What is more, these depictions (seen primarily in religious and ceremonial contexts) suggested that the flower had an exalted position within the culture, thus elevating the figure wearing or holding the flower. Finally, when portrayed in a decorative manner as shown in Chapter Five, lily iconography appeared in many ceremonial, prestigious, religious, and funerary contexts. Furthermore, it is proposed that if seen by its



original audience, the lily flower would have been a recognizable symbol, recognized and purposely employed, in the arts of the ancient Aegean world.

The various depictions of lilies in Aegean wall paintings, as seen throughout this study, are proposed to hold significance in both social and religious contexts. The iconography of lilies requires further research to better understand the significance and position the lily flower held within Aegean culture. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this study will mark the initial stride towards a more profound exploration of lilies in Aegean art and their significant role within the Aegean culture.

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## Appendix and Illustrations

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