

That the Dead May Speak:

Examining Gender, Identity, and Personhood in Minoan Mortuary Landscapes

In the summer of 2018, I studied the frescoes of the Late Bronze Age Minoans (1500-1300 BCE) to compare female and male represented activities; I found that men were depicted performing a wider range of activities than women (six compared to four), but women were represented more often performing their respective activities (i.e. dancing, sitting). Through this independent research, I recognized that gender identities and relationships are notoriously tricky patterns to discern in the archaeological record. A society's gender roles and behaviors largely depend on spatial and temporal context. The painted dancing women and feasting men on the frescoes represented gender identities and relationships in that particular environment and temporal condition. This year I became interested in analyzing how gender identities change in death on Crete from the Prepalatial to the Final Palatial periods (3000-1100 BCE) of the Minoans. Mortuary landscapes—spaces where living persons interact with the deceased through burial, funeral, visitation, and rituals at various tombs, cemeteries, or burial containers— may provide clues of a community's socio-political roles, gender systems, and identity markers. Mortuary environments are stages for the living to transfix social, political, and spiritual roles onto the deceased, and perform their own social roles through funerary actions such as redeposition of bones or feasting. In this paper I will explore how gender preserves in the mortuary record in order to determine the theoretical steps necessary for interpreting Minoan gender identity.

The goals of this paper are twofold. I will analyze data from publications to investigate how artifacts and spaces can evoke gender identities and discuss theoretical methodologies for exploring gender in instances of poor preservation. In archaeological

research, scholars typically examine skeletal remains and artifacts to distinguish a society's gendered codes. As opposed to one's biological sex, or anatomy, gender varies according to a community's enactment of masculinity, femininity, and nonbinary identities. Linking sex to gender has commonly been the definitive way of solidifying hypotheses about gender relations in the ancient world. However, the ways in which the Minoans grouped and treated bodies in burial and funerary practices (i.e. rituals, visitation, burning of bones) conveys information about Minoan identity and conceptualization of personhood, or the characteristics that define a person's being. In this paper I will use a feminist methodology to evaluate the gender relationships and behaviors in the holistic mortuary landscape, rather than focus primarily on the skeletal and grave good assemblages. Even in instances where gender may seem invisible (i.e. no skeletal data), inserting gender into the narrative creates a more thorough understanding of ancient culture and organization. Through my research, I will demonstrate that feminist methodologies contextualize gender identities in the Minoan mortuary landscapes and I will develop a systematic exercise to engender sites with poor preservation.

I will catalogue and compare over 50 sites diachronically across Crete by chronology, tomb type, artifact assemblage, skeletal remains, and landscape. Using an Excel chart and graphs, I will observe the patterns of the Prepalatial and Protopalatial, and the Neopalatial and Final Palatial phases of cemetery use. I will identify instances where gender is clearly visible in the archaeological record; for example at Moni Odigitria in the Mesara region, where male and female skulls were mixed in an ossuary. In the cases where the sex of the skeleton fails to preserve, I will analyze, for example, how the mixed nature of certain tombs may signify the importance of familial or occupational ties rather than gender hierarchies. I will compare diachronically how four regions of Crete (i.e. South, North, Central, and East) differ in

their mortuary practices, preservation, and gender identities to understand the contextual nature of Minoan gender construction.

In this paper, I additionally will construct theoretical exercises for evaluating gender in cases of poor preservation. For example, questioning who treated the body after death, participated in rituals, or revisited the funerary site. These activities do not often preserve in the archaeological record and thus lead archaeologist to adapt genderless approaches; however, without specifying the possible gendered activities, the default is androcentric. By constructing several scenarios using available archaeological evidence in which women may have overseen mortuary activities, or children performed special rites introduces a more diverse community to the narrative.

Studying gender hierarchy in the mortuary landscape of Minoan Crete contributes invaluable information to the study of Aegean archaeology and modern gender studies. Like the Minoans, we define our identities in relationship to gender, politics, economics, spirituality, and culture. Our funerary actions and landscapes reveal such information about ourselves, whether mimicking real individuality and relationships or staging idealized ones. Systematic evaluation of gender identities on Bronze Age Crete will empower discussions to break down androcentric scholarship and promote diverse methodologies in the field.