Tentacular thinking in Bronze Age Crete

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‘Of the special cult aspect presented by the Snake Goddess and her votaries no other hint has as yet been supplied by the Palace remains. It is possible that we have here to deal with a specially chthonic aspect of the cult of the same Mother Goddess whose worship is otherwise so well illustrated here’. (Evans 1903: 85)

‘The chthonic powers of Terra infuse its tissues everywhere, despite the civilizing efforts of the agents of sky gods to astralize them and set up chief Singletons and their tame committees of multiples or subgods, the One and the Many’. (Haraway 2016: 31)

Among the most famous discoveries made during the excavations of Sir Arthur Evans at Knossos were the faience female figures from a sealed deposit known as the Temple Repositories. His identification of the figure handling snakes as relating to the underworld, or chthonic, form of the Mother Goddess has remained largely unchallenged since its discovery and publication. Another figure, found less well preserved, is now usually regarded as a Snake Goddess too rather than a votary. Despite their extensive reconstruction shortly after excavation, they have become icons of the Minoan civilisation of Bronze Age Crete. The contents of the Temple Repositories are usually explained with reference to these figures, as symbolic of their domain. This paper aims to decentre the Snake Goddesses by examining the rich set of relations between the different entities in this deposit. Many of the deposited things appear to relate, directly or indirectly, to palatial textile production but tracing their connections requires an ontological shift. This shift starts with the term ‘chthonic’, which becomes a metaphor for interrelatedness rather than a symbol of depth.

Greek Religion in the Chthulucene

The Greek adjective *chthonios*, as Donna Haraway reminds the reader of her paper ‘Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene’, means “of, in, or under the earth and seas” (Haraway 2016: 53). For Haraway the chthonic deities and monsters of Greek mythology, rather than the Olympian ‘sky gods’ provide a way to rethink the relations between humans and the world. She points out the irony that the term Anthropocene, derived from the Greek word for ‘human’, *anthropos*, refers to a period when the earth’s climate is spiralling beyond human control. Haraway prefers to start instead with James Lovelock’s characterisation of the earth as Gaia, a reminder that humans are just one part of a complex planetary organism. In Greek mythology Gaia is the earth herself, and the entities associated with her are chthonic. Haraway’s excursus into Greek mythology is

an attempt to rethink the Anthropocene. As she says, ‘It matters which stories tell stories, which concepts think concepts’ (Haraway 2016: 101). For Haraway, the chthonic is a way to reconnect with the earth.

Haraway recruits another creature of Greek mythology, the Gorgon Medusa as an ‘icon of the Chthulucene’, particularly as she appears on a plate from the British Museum (**fig. 1**). There she holds two waterbirds in either hand in a characteristic pose known as Potnia Theron, the ‘Mistress of the Animals’. This pose usually regarded as symbolic of human domination over nature. Haraway’s term ‘Chthulucene’ is an alternative conceptualisation of the Anthropocene, replacing the idea of human domination of nature with the interconnectedness of things. It was inspired by a chthonic creature, a Californian spider called *Pimoa cthulu*, its name a combination of an indigenous name and the tentacled monster Cthulu invented by H.P. Lovecraft. Haraway’s changing of the spelling indicates that the idea of the chthonic is richer in possibilities than Lovecraft’s monster. As an icon of the Chthulucene, Medusa offers the potential for telling different stories. ‘We need another figure, a thousand names of something else, to erupt out of the Anthropocene into another, big-enough story. Bitten in a California redwood forest by spidery *Pimoa chthulhu*, I want to propose snaky Medusa and the many unfinished worldings of her antecedents, affiliates, and descendants’. (Haraway 2016: 52). Among her antecedents, in the Potnia Theron pose, are the Snake Goddesses of Knossos.

Another scholar to consider snaky Medusa was the classicist Jane Ellen Harrison. Like Haraway, she too illustrated the Rhodian plate in the British Museum, showing the Gorgon as Potnia Theron, noting that ‘she is a potent goddess, not as in later days a monster to be slain by heroes’ (Harrison 1903: 194). In her exploration of the chthonic aspect of Greek religion, Harrison argued that the Greek ritual of animal sacrifice had two distinct aims, depending on context. The first was to enlist the support of the Olympian deities, while the second was apotropaic, to avert harm from the more primitive, chthonic deities. Drawing on textual and archaeological evidence she suggested that in one Athenian festival, Zeus was worshipped in the form of a snake. ‘It is not that Zeus the Olympian has ‘an underworld aspect’; it is the cruder fact that he of the upper air, of the thunder and lightning, extrudes an ancient serpent-demon of the lower world, Meilichios’ (Harrison 1903: 19-20). Zeus Meilichios, then, was a syncretism between the Olympian god and a much older underworld deity. As a creature of the earth, the snake was a characteristic chthonic form. It showed that beneath the Olympian veneer, a much older set of practices was lurking.

Although earlier scholars had recognised the importance of these rituals, Harrison was the first to see them in explicitly anthropological terms. Drawing in the work of Edward Tylor, she saw these apotropaic sacrifices as a ‘survival’ of an earlier stratum of Greek religion. Medusa she saw as part of a wider group of spirits, the Keres, which ‘denote a wider animism’ (Harrison 1903: 215). In her discussion of the Gorgoneion, the terrifying head of Medusa, she drew parallels with the masks to be

found in anthropological museums which had an apotropaic function (Harrison 1903: 187-194). In a subsequent work, she went on to suggest that totemism, and identification of human groups with particular animals or plants, was at the root of this early apotropaic type of sacrifice (Harrison 1912: 118-157). Although she showed little sympathy with the 'primitive' people whose practices she used to inform her theories, Harrison was showing an awareness that anthropological observations might help to explain features of Greek religion.

For both Harrison and Haraway, the term chthonic points not simply earthwards, but towards a different way of understanding the world. Haraway's chthonic beings are what she calls 'tentacular', reaching out to connect with other entities. Harrison's chthonic deities belong to a much older, animate world and if not treated with respect they can bring harm. These definitions echo the alternatives to Western ontologies outlined by anthropologists including Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Philippe Descola. Both question the applicability of the terms 'nature' and 'culture' in non-western ontologies. In order to understand the significance of this critique for the Snake Goddesses it is necessary to look at the Temple Repositories deposit as a whole.

Nature and culture in the Temple Repositories

By 1903 the plan of the Palace of Knossos had been fully revealed but its excavators continued to go deeper. In a room in what Arthur Evans called the Central Palace Sanctuary, in the West Wing of the Palace, he noticed a depression in the floor which he asked his excavators to explore. This turned out to be the Temple Repositories, two large stone-lined cists containing an extraordinary deposit of ceramic vessels, organic material and numerous faience objects (Evans 1903: 38-94; Evans 1921: 463-472). The excavators noted the fatty consistency of the deposit suggesting that at least some of the jars had contained perfumed oil. The cists were filled and sealed under the floor of the room in around the 16th century BCE, when the palace was thriving, although almost certainly during a period of rebuilding after an earthquake caused damage to the palace. This was likely related to the seismic events around the time of the eruption of the Thera volcano, whose implications will be considered below.

The faience objects were concentrated in the Eastern Temple Repository (Evans 1921: 495-523). Faience is a glassy material which started to be made in Crete around this time, the technology for which was imported from Egypt. As well as the Snake Goddesses, the faience objects included model dresses painted with a design of crocuses, cups and depictions of various animals. These included several copies of two similar plaques, one showing a goat and kid and the other a cow suckling a calf. Another group of animals was marine, with flying fish and the 'shells' of argonauts, a type of octopus also known as a paper nautilus. This could have been from a piece of furniture, with the sea creatures framed by coralline rocks. There were also a number of faience bivalve shells, found with around 5000 actual seashells of various types, some of them painted.

In the original unpublished photo of the deposit the Snake Goddess and two votaries stand either side of a marble cross (f**ig. 2**). Evans (1903: 59) described this as 'the most important ritual object in the Repository', interpreting it as a symbol of the deity, and even the forerunner of the Christian Cross, still visible in Greek Orthodox churches. The original photo includes a weasel skull and some shark vertebrae arranged to suggest the skeleton of a snake, although these were erased in the photo published in the Annual Report and covered over in the photo published in the *Palace of Minos* (Evans 1903: fig. 63; 1921: fig. 377), presumably once the error had been pointed out. On the background above are three deer antlers which were also cropped out in the published photo. The caption of the published photo is 'group above altar-ledge of shrine of Snake Goddess as tentatively arranged'. This shows how the finds were organised to create a narrative about the original arrangement of the shrine, and therefore the relative significance of the objects, despite there being no evidence for the original layout of the shrine. Even the idea that these were objects from a shrine is conjectural, although there is comparative evidence of shrines with platforms from Late Bronze Age Crete to support this.

The original photo also shows the votary without a head or left forearm. These too were added to the photograph published in the *Palace of Minos*, and also reconstructed on the figure itself. These restorations were made by the Danish artist Halvor Bagge, who was employed by Evans at the time. The restorations were not well documented: drawings by Bagge in the Ashmolean's Sir Arthur Evans Archive do provide an indication of which parts of the figures are original (**fig. 3**). These show that by the time the photograph was taken, the skirt of the Goddess and parts of the votary had already been restored. One of the most problematic restorations was the addition of a snake's head to the striped object held by the votary. Although the Goddess clearly holds snakes, these are spotted, and these can be associated with snakes found on Crete such as the rat snake. There are no diagonally striped snakes in the Aegean, however and this aspect of the restoration has been the subject of some doubt. It has been suggested that the votary instead holds a striped cord (MacGillivray 2000: 223; Bonney 2011: 178). Even Evans was non-committal about snakes in his descriptions of the votary, although she is now widely identified as a 'Snake Goddess'.

Evans's original publication of the deposit has been supplemented by a much fuller, item by item catalogue of the objects by Marina Panagiotaki (1999). Although she publishes the objects to modern standards, she continues to tell much the same story as Evans about the centrality of the goddesses in understanding this deposit: 'Two broad thematic groupings can be isolated in this material. One focuses on the flora and fauna of the natural world; the other concerns the figurines and associated articles of clothing. The figurines seem to represent the goddess or priestess(es) in whose honour a shrine had been established. The flora and fauna can be seen as symbolizing the sphere(s) of influence of the divinities concerned.' (Panagiotaki 1999: 103). It is this story that I want to unpick and retell, starting not with the question of whether the figurines represent divinities, which is almost impossible

to answer. Instead it is the ontological implications of this statement that can be questioned, with the objects representing the natural world acting as subsidiary symbols of the figures of humans/deities. Instead I will suggest that all these objects are part of a collective based on craft production, particularly weaving.

Towards a collective

The incorporation of the Temple Repositories assemblage into a modernist ontology started with the rapid restoration of the Snake Goddess figures and their placement at the centre of staged photos. They remain at the centre of deposit in their current display in Heraklion Archaeological Museum, reopened following refurbishment in 2014. The two complete figures stand at the centre of the vitrine, some of the painted seashells scattered around the edge of the plinth. Above them is not the cross but an arrangement of the rock crystal pieces in the form of a sun. The cross has been displaced to the display on their left hand, where it hangs over a selection of faience and stone objects. These include the faience models of clothing decorated with crocuses, the third unrestored Snake Goddess and a selection of vessels. By contrast, on the right-hand side of the central figures is a display of the remainder of the faience, including the plaques of mothering animals and the marine forms, along with more of the painted shells. The effect is to divide the deposit into 'cultural', the vessels and clothing, and 'natural', the land and marine animals, with the Snake Goddesses somewhere in between.

The Temple Repositories deposit has also been fragmented. Some of the ceramic vessels found in the layer above are on display in the same gallery, with a selection of the clay sealings. Others were regarded as duplicates and allocated to the excavator, Sir Arthur Evans. A law passed by the Cretan government in 1903 allowed him to export objects from Knossos (Panagiotaki 2004). As a result the deposit is split between different collections, with a large selection on display in Heraklion. Some of the objects Sir Arthur Evans was not allowed to remove from Crete were copied in plaster, and these replicas also entered the collection of the Ashmolean Museum. These replicas were made by the Danish artist Halvor Bagge, who also restored the original figurines. Other replicas were made by different artists and exported to different collections, so that simulacra of the Temple Repositories objects now exist in museums across Europe and America. The Snake Goddesses themselves have become icons of the Minoan civilisation of Crete, and are imitated in a bewildering variety of tourist souvenirs, from life-size terracotta imitations to pendants and earrings in precious metals. As a result of all of these processes the Temple Repositories assemblage has become distributed around the world.

One of the objects in the Ashmolean collection from the Temple Repositories is a faience model argonaut shell. It was of particular interest to Evans who described it and similar objects as follows:

‘The marine aspect of the cult also comes out among the contents of the Temple Repositories in a series of very beautiful faience objects in relief or in the round, representing flying fish, rocks and shells, and other sea creatures. The most exquisite of these relics are the argonaut shells of various sizes, modelled in the round, and lustrous with a pearl-like sheen’ (Evans 1921: 521). The pearl-like sheen is a quality of faience, a glassy material which started to be made in Crete around this time, the technology for which was imported from Egypt. This material connects the argonaut with a variety of other objects in the deposit, including the Snake Goddesses. Once it arrived in the Ashmolean it was given an accession number, AE1201.2 and it is now visible on the online collection database. The record photograph shows how it has been understood within a modern ontology – a cultural object, with its unique museum identifier, measured, taken out of its original Bronze Age assemblage (**fig. 4**).

A similar act of displacement has resulted from the biological classification of animals. Argonauts, also known as paper nautili, are now classified as *Argonauta argo*, in the octopus family and the cephalopod genus. This is bound up with modern technologies of depiction which allow us to see argonauts underwater, whereas in the Mediterranean they are rare deep sea animals, mostly known from the case of the female washed up on the shore. Both nature documentaries and aquaria provide a particularly modern perspective on deep sea creatures, with technology allowing them to be seen as they never could be in the Bronze Age. Although there are no argonauts in the largest aquarium in Crete, CretAquarium, it exemplifies another way in which we can experience the sea in the modern world – separated from fish and other marine animals by a thick pane of glass.

Publications of the Temple Repositories material also establish them as belonging to a modernist ontology. In his 1903 report Evans described them as ‘a wholly unique collection of objets d' art, executed with extraordinary skill in this indigenous kind of porcelain’ (Evans 1903: 40). He specifically mentions the ‘beauty and naturalism’ of the plaque with the goat suckling her kid (Evans 1903: 73). The impressions of seals on the clay sealings are described in similar terms: ‘After what has been said as to the high degree of naturalistic perfection attained already by the Cretan engravers at the close of the preceding Middle Minoan period, the beauty and freedom of many of the seal-types of the present deposit cannot excite surprise. Such designs as the wolves’ or dogs’ heads, the small owls, and the Triton shells show a great fidelity to nature, in spite of the necessarily imperfect character of the clay impressions’. (Evans 1903: 56-57). Evans often used the term ‘naturalism’ to describe Minoan depictions. It referred to both realism and also subject matter, since animals were frequently shown. It is predicated on the idea that there is a distinct natural world against which human-made depictions can be judged in terms of accuracy.

These stylistic judgments, like the methods of display of the Temple Repositories material in Heraklion Archaeological Museum, trap these objects in a modern way of thinking in which nature and culture are separated. This split is characterised by authors including Donna Haraway (1991,

2003), Bruno Latour (1993) and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1998) as defining a western or modern ontology, which is contrasted with what can be called a non-western ontology in which this fundamental division is not recognised. For both Haraway and Latour, the present-day climate crisis is acting to undermine the division on which the western ontology is based since catastrophic natural events such as droughts or flooding are now widely recognised to be caused by human action (Haraway 2016; Latour 2017). The human-environment relations of the Anthropocene have resulted in a challenge to this ontology. For Haraway this presents an opportunity to go back to less dualistic, older ways of thinking.

Philippe Descola (2005, 2013) instead suggests four basic ontologies based on whether nonhuman and human others are understood as sharing the self's interiority and/or exteriority, mind and body in a Western ontology. These are the 'modes of identification' with which entities in the world are understood along an axis of similarity and difference. These define ontologies, which he defines as the 'systems of distribution of properties among existing objects in the world' (Descola 2006:141). Ontologies are activated through 'modes of relation'. Animism and totemism are largely found among hunter-gatherer collectives, defined by reciprocal modes of relation – hence hunters treat animals with respect because they could be the hunted next. Descola uses the term collective instead of society because it includes both human and nonhuman. Naturalism is the ontology of the modern West, essentially a scientific outlook which everything is made of the same sort of matter, but humans are seen as uniquely self-conscious. Analogism is the ontology which applies to a large number of premodern and non-Western internally differentiated collectives which are composed of lots of different types of bodies and things. The modes of relation for naturalism and analogism, production, protection and transmission (inheritance) are asymmetric. Analogism is the ontology which seems most appropriate for Bronze Age Crete as a pre-modern agricultural society in which hierarchies are apparent.

As Descola stresses, his scheme is a heuristic device rather than a societal classification, but he argues that only one type of ontology will be dominant among a given collective. What matters is how the basic inferences guide the way in which the properties of other bodies and things are actualised as these entities interact. Analogism, he suggests involves 'uses analogy to cement together a world rendered fragile by the multiplicity of its parts' (Descola 2013: 227). Astrology can be seen as a strand of analogism in our own society – trying to make sense of the world by reference to what the stars are doing. More recently Descola (2010, 2021) has applied this scheme to the depictions of different types of collectives, what he terms the mode of figuration. For instance, here, the material culture of an animist collective is typified by an animal mask which opens to reveal a human face – epitomising the shared interiority underlying different exteriorities. The totemist image is simultaneously a depiction of an animal and the human group identified with that animal. Naturalism is linked with the invention of perspective drawing, defining the world according to universal

scientific laws but also establishing the painting as a window to the world differentiated from the viewer. As he suggests: ‘linear perspective established in the domain of representation the possibility of the kind of confrontation between the individual and nature that was to become characteristic of modern ideology and of which landscape painting would become the artistic expression’ (Descola 2013: 60). And although there is no true linear perspective in Minoan Crete, Evans uses the term to describe Minoan sealstones, implicitly comparing Minoan depictions with western painting Another term borrowed from Western art is ‘animal study’, used to describe the close observation of animals (Betts & Younger 1982: 104-105).

Analogism is characterised by art which brings together different entities to show the links between them, establishing order out of a mass of differentiated forms. In the Temple Repositories, the use of faience helps to create a set of analogies between the various depictions of humans, animals and things. In the case of the marine animals in particular, another process is at work, termed skeuomorphy. Skeumorphy is a common practice in Bronze Age Crete in which one material is used to imitate another (Knappett 2002: 108-112, 2020: 108-129). In the Temple Repositories the skeuomorphy of marine animals undermines the distinction between natural and cultural forms. Instead the animals of the sea are recreated artificially using faience. The smooth surface of faience, its pearl-like sheen, is particularly appropriate for depicting marine forms such as shells because it imitates their shiny surface. By establishing connections, between forms within the deposit and with the sea beyond, faience gives the Temple Repositories a coherence which cross-cuts any division between natural and artificial. This points the way to a different way of understanding this deposit.

Making connections

The Temple Repositories contained a sealed deposit and it is likely that everything within them was placed in the two cists deliberately at around the same time. Evans’s idea that these were the contents of a single shrine is plausible but it draws significance away from the act of deposition and towards an imagined religious context whose location is unknown. Increasingly scholars have focussed on the significance of depositing an assemblage of objects together in the Temple Repositories, using the term ‘structured deposition’ (Herva 2005: 216; Hatzaki 2009). This draws the focus back towards the connections between objects created by the act of deposition itself. Herva (2005) has argued that this act has an ontological significance since they can be seen as a means of maintaining relations with the building. As he points out, similar ‘foundation deposits’ were made in Bronze Age Crete at times of crisis, and this deposit too could be a response to the earthquake which resulted in a period of rebuilding at Knossos at the time the Temple Repositories were sealed. He also questions the idea that these objects were made to be displayed, arguing that this results from a modern privileging of their appearance, their iconicity, whereas they could have been made to be deposited.

Whether or not the Snake Goddesses were ever displayed, they were brought together with a variety of other objects as a result of this structured deposition. This can be referred to as their indexicality, their interrelatedness with the other objects as a result of being part of a deliberate assemblage of objects. In some ways the idea that the objects were related to different aspects of the Goddess performs a similar function but downplays the deliberate act of bringing them together. From this point of view they had already been brought together elsewhere and the Temple Repositories are the product of secondary deposition, preserving some of the symbolism of the notional shrine. Rather than the faience objects reflecting a pre-existing reality – the domain of the goddess over the natural world as in a naturalist ontology – they are establishing connections between different entities through being deposited together.

One way to help understand these connections is, as Donna Haraway suggests, to tell a story about how these objects might have come together. Since the writing system of this period, Linear A, has not been deciphered, Minoan archaeologists are left to speculate about the possible significance of deposits like the Temple Repositories. The shrine to the Mother Goddess provides one such story but it excludes certain features at the expense of others, centring the Snake Goddesses and the marble cross and downplaying other objects which don't quite fit the narrative. The remainder of the paper seeks to provide a different story, big enough to incorporate more of the deposited objects.

The narrative thread which ties together the Temple Repositories assemblage is textiles. From the start of the palatial period of Crete, around 1900 BCE, there is evidence for the dyeing and weaving of textiles, which would have been exchanged with traders from the Eastern Mediterranean in return for metals and other commodities (Barber 1991: 311-357; Burke 2010: 17-63). It is likely that the palaces mark a scaling up of an existing household textile industry which was almost certainly under the control of women. In the Prepalatial period there are a number of clay figures decorated with linear patterns show an exiting association between women and textiles. Some have been seen as possible precursors to the Snake Goddesses. One is the so-called 'Goddess of Myrtos', a clay female figure is decorated with painted textile designs (Warren 1972: 208-210). Another figure found at Koumasa perhaps has a snake around her neck (Evans 1935: 163; Gesell 2010).

Women continued to be depicted in colourful textiles in frescoes on the walls of the palace at Knossos. Their prominence, and the lack of an obvious single leader, suggests that a group of women was in control of the palace. The palaces, with their central courts and industrial areas, as well as being places for gatherings, were likely to have been places for the manufacture and centralised exchange of textiles. The adjoining room to the Temple Repositories, the so-called Vat Room, contains a number of stone basins which could have been used for washing and dyeing woollen textiles (Panagiotaki 1999: 230). On the other side of the Central Court the so-called Loom-Weight

Basement contained loomweights for the manufacture of textiles which dated back to the Protopalatial period (Evans 1921: 248).

The importance of textiles in the Temple Repositories is clear. The Snake Goddesses wear elaborate dyed flounced dresses. The faience model dresses and girdles are decorated with crocuses, perhaps imitating embroidery, but clearly pointing to one of the most important vegetable dyes used in Crete in this period, saffron yellow. Among the objects in the deposit are a number of clay sealings, some of them bearing impressions of seals marked with designs which resemble textile patterns (Evans 1903, fig. 28; Gill *et al.* 2002: cat. nos. 25, 115). These designs are found on 'packet sealings' which were used to seal a small piece of parchment, probably bearing a written text. Such sealings are usually found in destruction deposits, since they were fired accidentally, so it appears that their retention in the Temple Repositories was deliberate. They provide a connection beyond the deposit, with a seal user who identified themselves using a textile pattern and a message which was perhaps fired before it could be sent.

The most significant dye for textiles in Bronze Age Crete, purple, came from underwater. It is obtained from sea snails of several species which live around Crete. There is increasing evidence that Crete was the first place in the Mediterranean where this dye was produced on a large scale, with dyeing installations dating back to the time the palaces emerged (Apostolakou *et al.* 2016, 2020). It is clear that Cretan woollen textiles were extremely valuable in the trade networks of the Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean. There are no purple shells in the Temple Repositories assemblage, but there are thousands of other sea shells, some coloured. It is not known which colours were used, but it is possible that they are the same as fabric dyes. In addition there are imitations of bivalve seashells in faience, painted with black bands. Most of them are separate but there is one faience vessels with relief shells on the rim (Panagiotaki 1999: cat. no. 200). Other marine animals are depicted in faience, including flying fish and argonaut shells (**fig. 5**). Some of the sealings too were impressed with designs marine creatures, including crabs and triton shells (Evans 1903, fig. 34; Gill *et al.* 2002: cat. nos. 150-151, 154-157). The marine-related objects in the Temple Repositories assemblage can be associated by analogy with the textile industry because they are connected with purple dyeing. The use of faience to create both human figurines and marine forms is another form of analogy, linking these entities materially.

Other faience plaques show land animals, one a cow suckling a calf and the other a wild goat with elaborate horns suckling one of its two kids (**fig. 6**). Fragments of several of each plaques were found, and others of a similar design (Panagiotaki 1999: cat. nos. 168-179). These two animals nursing their young have been linked by analogy to the bare breasts of the Snake Goddess figures as kourotrophoi (Panagiotaki 1999: 273). While this symbolic connection appears plausible there are other ways to connect these various faience objects, and bring others in too. In this period there is evidence that

these animals were important for their products: cowhides, which were used among other things to make shields, which are depicted on a later fresco from Knossos. In the Temple Repositories there are faience depictions of figure-of-eight shields, both separate and on the rim of a faience vessel (Panagiotaki 1999: cat. nos. 193, 197, 198). Among the sealings from the Temple Repositories are both cattle and goats. One of the sealings shows a scene of bull-leaping, and another a parallel scene of a human wrestling a goat. There are other sealings showing cattle and goats in various poses without human involvement, and another fragmentary sealing showing a suckling goat (Gill *et al.* 2002: cat. nos. 33, 221, 235, 377-379, 479, 492, 508, 530).

The wild goats of Crete, known as agrimia or kri-kri, are distinguished by their impressive horns. Although they are now recognised as a feral form of domesticated goats, introduced to Crete in the Neolithic period, there is evidence that they were widely hunted in the Bronze Age. Linear B tablets from Knossos show that their horns were valuable commodities, received as taxation by the palace (Killen 2008). These horns would have been turned into composite bows, some of which were exported to Egypt (Murock Hussein 2015). In this way horn bows were analogous to dyed textiles, since they were both trade goods made from animal products for export. There are clear depictions of these bows in Cretan Bronze Age iconography, although, despite recognising them as such, Evans labelled them as 'snake-frames' (Evans 1935: 169-176). The term snake-frame seems to have come about because of a particular scene in seal iconography showing women holding these bows above their heads, in the same pose as the female votary from the Temple Repositories. A gold ring from Dendra on the mainland shows these objects as bows particularly clearly (**fig. 7)**.

As noted above, the striped object held by the votary in her right hand was reconstructed as a snake (and duplicated on the left) even though there are no striped snakes found in Greece. The later depictions of female figures holding 'snake frames' suggest an alternative identification for the striped object. The stripes could represent the twisted pattern on a goat's horn and the object could be part of a bow. The depictions on seals show these female figures with bared breasts, usually accompanied by griffins or lions. In some depictions these animals appear to be suckling, which would tie in with the suckling animal imagery in the goat and cow plaques. Imposing one of these seal impressions on a drawing of the votary helps to give an impression of this alternative reconstruction (**fig. 8**). The votary's head was reconstructed using a faience headdress which had a dowel hole in the top. This hole showed that something was attached to the headdress, and so Bagge placed a faience cat from the deposit on top. There is no iconography showing female figures with cats on their heads and so, if the headdress does belong to this figure, the hole could have instead been an attachment for the bows, or perhaps even a double axe since this is sometimes shown too. In any case, it is better to reconstruct the faience votary using the seal depictions rather than interpret the seal depictions using the reconstructed votary.

The faience cat figure does show that cats were part of the Temple Repositories assemblage. Cats first appear in Cretan iconography in the preceding Protopalatial period and appear to have been imported to Crete from Egypt in this period (Shapland 2022: 192-194). Before they became widespread on Crete, the animals which humans could have relied on to control vermin would have been either weasels or snakes. There is evidence for both being kept as pest controllers in the Classical Greek period (Lazenby 1949a,b). In his discussion of the Snake Goddesses Arthur Evans (1921:508-509; 1935: 143-151) also highlighted the existence of house snakes in Greece and associated other objects with a snake cult. These household snakes would probably have been ratsnakes (*Zamenis* genus): the leopard snake (*Zamenis situla*) is found on Crete, where it is known as spitofido, 'house snake'. These spotted snakes resemble those held by the other Snake Goddess. Weasels are not depicted in the Temple Repositories assemblage but a weasel skull was found there (and incorrectly associated with shark vertebrae to form the snaky form in the original photograph) (Panagiotaki 1999: cat. no. 284). Snakes, weasels and cats can all be associated with the household and the control of vermin.

Broadening the story

It has long been recognised that Egyptian tomb paintings preserve important evidence for trade with Crete, with textiles as a major element. Several tombs depict male 'Keftiu' figures bearing typical Cretan goods and wearing patterned kilts. The clearest evidence for a trade in textiles comes from painted patterns on the ceiling of the tomb of Amenemhet which closely resemble the patterns preserved on Cretan frescoes (Barber 1991: 330-357). Linen, the main Egyptian textile, was more difficult to dye and so these patterns must be from imported woollen textiles. A number of Egyptian objects were found in the excavations at Knossos, further showing trade between the palace, Egypt and the wider Eastern Mediterranean.

A number of frescoes from the Aegean show people, particularly women, wearing dyed patterned textiles. Saffron crocuses also feature prominently. The well-preserved Theran frescoes include a scene of an elaborately dressed woman sitting on a platform, a griffin behind her and a monkey presenting her with saffron. Behind the monkey a woman pours saffron into a heap, with crocuses growing all around. Another fresco in the same building shows two women in dyed clothing dressed picking crocuses (Doumas 1992: 158-159, fig. 122). These frescoes owe their exceptional preservation to the Thera eruption which covered the site of Akrotiri in ash and are roughly contemporary with the Temple Repositories assemblage. Two other frescoes from around the same time help to fill in the picture. The Ayia Triada Park Fresco also shows a landscape filled with crocuses, with wild goats and cats stalking birds. Two female figures in colourful dresses occupy the scene (Militello 1998: 99-115, figs. 29-30). This was partly preserved by a fire at the end of the Neopalatial period but though the composition is less certain than the Theran frescoes, the association

between women, crocus, cats and goats is clear and echoes the Temple Repositories. Since the Knossos palace was not destroyed at this time there are few frescoes datable to this period from there although there is a saffron gatherer in the form of a monkey which probably predates the Temple Repositories (Hood 2005: cat. no. 5). This helps to reinforce the association between monkeys and crocuses.

These frescoes help illustrate some of the stories which were spun around the textile industry. They help to show how women in elaborate dresses and saffron crocuses were often closely associated, and how other bodies such as griffins, cats, goats and monkeys could be drawn in. In this context one notable absence from the Temple Repositories assemblage is the monkey and also the griffin which appears in the later 'snake frame' seal depictions. Perhaps these two entities which came from over the sea were analogies for trade, whereas the Temple Repositories assemblage revolves instead around the production of trade goods.

It is also possible to spin different stories around this deposit. For Bonney (2011) the Snake Goddesses are Cretan versions of a Syrian goddess who travelled along with the technology of faience production. Her short-lived cult at Knossos was brought to an end by the deposition of these objects. A more capacious story is told by Zimmermann Kuoni (2021) who connects some of the constituents of the deposit, such as the weasel skull, the deer antlers, the snakes, shells and the crocuses, with ancient midwifery practices. Here the figures become healing deities rather than fertility goddesses. She draws on a wide variety of evidence in order to show how the deposit could relate to traditional medicine. Like this paper, it is a story which incorporates some but not all of the constituents of this multifaceted deposit and there is no reason why these objects could not relate to both birthing and textile production. Both are bodies of knowledge associated in the ancient world with women and the household. As Zimmermann Kuoni (2021) argues, a focus on fertility has obscured the complexity of traditions around midwifery and the specific medical compounds employed. The Temple Repositories are a very particular instance of these household practices, formed at a particular time in the Palace at Knossos. How does this story unravel over time?

Collectives

The Temple Repositories assemblage is the material trace of a palatial collective (Shapland 2022: 59-62). The term collective is used by Philippe Descola, who suggests that each ontology is defined by a particular type of collective. The analogist collective deals with the outside world as 'muddled collections of unfamiliar existing beings whose sporadic growth has to be contained and whose chaotic nature must be reduced by absorbing them into the sociocosmic order in which a place has already been prepared for them' (Descola 2013: 400). In the Temple Repositories undersea creatures, for instance, are brought into the middle of the palace by turning them into faience. The term palatial collective describes all of the different humans, animals and things brought together through their

relations with the palaces, and the Temple Repositories as a microcosm of that, bringing together, through analogy, some of the different entities associated with cloth production. Its roots are in the household – the domestic collectives of the Prepalatial period were brought together by the need, among other things, to gather goods for export, and so the Temple Repositories shows how the domestic cloth-producing collectives were extended by incorporating new forms such as argonauts shells, bodies such as cats, or technologies such as faience production. And it is clear that women were at the centre of these collectives.

Various seismic events disrupted the palatial collectives, with a major earthquake at the end of the Protopalatial period and then the eruption of the Theran volcano causing further disruption at Knossos. But how did the volcanic activity at Thera affect this analogist, palatial collective centred on Knossos? Most immediately, it is likely that the earthquake which preceded the eruption caused the deposit to be formed in the first place, if this part of the building was damaged causing these objects to be deposited in two nearby floor cists and sealed. It is certainly possible that they were part of a shrine but the act of deposition, as Herva (2005) argues, served to incorporate all of these different forms into the fabric of the building – they were not thrown away but continued to be part of the palatial collective. There is also some evidence for a tsunami caused by the eruption itself, which would not have come as far inland at Knossos, but would have caused damage along the coast.

Rather than snakes, it is these earthquakes and volcanic eruptions which deserve the term chthonic. They were underground, and in the case of the tsunami, undersea, phenomena which would have been traumatic events to experience. They could also have resulted in changes to the organisation of the palatial collective. Following the Thera eruption there is a shift towards depictions of marine entities on pottery, rather than faience and stone (Driessen & Macdonald 1997: 62). Marine Style pottery is the clearest example of this, with its stylised octopuses and also argonauts, notably on the spectacular Poros Ewer (Dimopoulou 1999). The relief shells on the shoulder and handle recall the Temple Repositories faience shells, and bring the marine imagery out of the surface of the vessel (**fig. 9)**. Marine Style pottery also takes over some of the forms of stone vessels, such as the pear rhyton, but not the complete variety of scenes. Depictions of land animals and humans are not transferred to pottery whereas marine animals multiply. Meanwhile crocuses gradually disappear from pottery after their peak in the Neopalatial period (Day 2011: 373)

It is clear that textile production continued to be central to the palatial collective until the final destruction of Knossos in around 1350 BCE. At this time there were about 100,000 sheep in the palatial collective, co-ordinated using the Linear B tablets which were preserved in the fire which destroyed the palace (Halstead 2002: 170-171). Despite the importance of sheep, they were very rarely depicted in the Bronze Age. Intriguingly the symbol for wool in Linear B is derived from an earlier sign in Cretan Hieroglyphic and Linear A showing a cat's head. It was combined with another

sign between the cat's ears to spell ma-re or ma-ru. As John Younger (2005: 409) has pointed out, this closely resembles the later Greek word for wool, *mallos*, which could itself be a survival from the language spoken on Bronze Age Crete. Perhaps the first appearance of the sign for wool is on a seal in the Ashmolean Museum which shows a full frontal cat with the same sign between its ears (**fig. 10**). This indicates that the association between cats and woollen textiles seen in the Temple Repositories is not accidental.

With the destruction of the palace, the palatial collective centred on Knossos disintegrated, but new collectives formed which gathered together some of its constituents. The palace itself continued to be a focus of ritual, with the Shrine of the Double Axes maintained in the ruined building (Evans 1902: 95-102). Its name is a misnomer because only one small double axe was found on the platform alongside horns of consecration and clay figurines (**fig. 11**). One of these figurines holds her hands in the air and is often regarded as a goddess (**fig. 12)**. Like the Snake Goddesses her clothing is depicted. A male figure holds out a bird and is often seen as a votary. Since this shrine was found the year before the Temple Repositories, in 1902, it influenced the way it was interpreted. Nevertheless, the multiple vessels found in front of the platform, where they had been placed as offerings, could explain the presence of vessels in the Temple Repositories. The arrangement of the shrine, with a platform and offerings could also go back to the Neopalatial period, and provide a model for the way the objects in the Temple Repositories were encountered. Certainly the figurines in the Shrine of the Double Axes were a particular focus because of their position on the platform.

The clay figurine in the Shrine of the Double Axes is an early example of a type known as the 'Goddess with Upraised Arms'. These are found across central Crete in the Postpalatial period, sometime installed in similar platform shrines (Gesell 1985, 2004). As with the Shrine of the Double Axes 'goddess', it is unclear whether these are depictions of deities, and there is a strong argument that they are depictions of prominent human members of the collective instead (Gaignerot-Driessen 2014). Nevertheless there appears to be a line of continuity between these figures and the Snake Goddesses, particularly since some of the later figures handle snakes (Gesell 2004, 2010). The reappearance of such female figures after a long hiatus could show that there was a return to collectives centred on the household. At the same time these collectives appear to have reincorporated elements of the palatial collective. This is particularly apparent on Postpalatial larnakes, burial chests, which frequently show octopuses, argonauts and other marine creatures. In one particular tomb at Knossos, number 107 in the North Cemetery, there is even reuse of a fragment of a Bronze Age burial chest with a depiction of a female figure, this time holding birds, copied on to an Iron Age pot in the same tomb (Coldstream and Catling 1996: 148-162, figs.109, 114) (**fig. 13**). This design, known as the Mistress of the Animals was increasingly depicted in the Iron Age, and one slightly later example is the Medusa figure on the plate in the British Museum. It shows how her antecedents could indeed have been the Snake Goddesses of Knossos.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to take Haraway's account of the Chthulucene and tell a similar story about Bronze Age Crete, focusing on one deposit, the Temple Repositories and then working out from it tentacularly. As Haraway notes, 'it matters which stories tell stories, which concepts think concepts', and the concept used here is Philippe Descola's analogism as an alternative to the naturalistic ontology usually applied to these objects. Descola applies analogism to a wide array of collectives, but the palatial collectives of Crete seem to fit his description because as their connections with the Eastern Mediterranean increased, analogy provided a means to bring these entities into the collective. The relations of textile production seem to be at the heart of this collective, but a wide variety of entities get caught up in this set of relations. Material culture plays a key role in establishing these analogies, both through displaying connections but also, in the case of skeuomorphy, remaking certain entities in a different material in order to incorporate them into the collective.

And while marine forms were already an important part of the palatial collective at the time of the Thera eruption, as their deposition in the Temple Repositories shows, there is evidence that they became increasingly prominent as the Knossos palatial collective responded to this disaster. Ultimately this collective disintegrated but new collectives were reconfigured, perhaps returning to the sort of domestic collectives apparent in the Temple Repositories. In this way the Snake Goddesses and their descendants could be icons for the Chthulucene too but either way it is a different story to tell about this famous group of objects.

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