

SEASONAL FLUX—THREE FLOWERS FOR THREE SEASONS: SEASONAL RITUAL AT AKROTIRI, THERA

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Since prehistoric times, the natural world has been a focus of human artistic endeavour. From before people first settled and started practising agriculture, plants have been important sources of shelter, nourishment and clothing materials. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that plants feature in early artistic representations. The artistic record reflects our early and continuing inextricable link to the natural environment.

Identifying and interpreting images, symbols and icons is an important aspect of classical and prehistoric archaeology and our reliance on plant products makes botanic motifs an important subset of the iconographic record. Analysis of botanic motifs may be instrumental to understanding broader representational patterns and analysing the meaning of early images.

Botanical identification of plants is an important step towards motif interpretation. This paper uses context to make botanical identification, acknowledging possible dual or multiple interpretations and meaning of images.¹ A broad interpretation of the motifs using a contextual methodology goes beyond recognising the representational similarities and differences—it may provide insight into the lives of the people creating the motifs.

This paper focuses on three floral motifs of the Late Cycladic period (approx. 1700-1600 BCE) at the town of Akrotiri, Thera—the crocus, the lily and the papyrus/sea daffodil. The motifs appear most commonly on pottery and wall paintings and are portrayed in a variety of styles.² The frequent representations of these three floral motifs suggests, even to the casual observer, that they may have been intended to be more than just a decorative motif—did these motifs hold a particular meaning or significance to the prehistoric Akrotirians? This paper proposes that an Akrotirian ritual cycle associated with the seasons can be traced through the depictions of the three floral motifs.

Akrotiri, Thera

The site of Akrotiri is situated on the southern tip of the island of Santorini, also known as Thera (Figure One). The island is located in the Cyclades, a group of islands that lie between the Greek mainland and the island of Crete. Archaeological evidence suggests the site of Akrotiri was occupied from early Neolithic times (circa 5000 BCE)³ until a massive volcanic eruption destroyed the centre of the island and covered the site with up to 6 metres of ash.⁴ Recent evidence

1 See Hodder (1987, 1991) for discussion of contextual archaeology methods. Contextual archaeology is closely linked with social and post-processual archaeological methodologies.

2 See Angelopoulou (2000), Schiering (1992), Walberg (1992).

3 Sotirakopoulou (1989), Doumas (1992a), 12.

4 N. Marinatos (1984), 29.

SEASONAL FLUX—THREE FLOWERS FOR THREE SEASONS

derived from preserved remnants of an olive tree suggests this eruption occurred between 1627-1600 BCE.⁵

Figure One - Map of Thera



The volcanic ash that covered the site has preserved it remarkably well, with remains of architectural structures, wall paintings, pottery and organic materials contributing to our understanding of the site. Many of the buildings are well preserved, sometimes to the third storey. A number of wall paintings have been found, some still partially intact on walls. Pots of various shapes and sizes have been discovered—some for storage of staples, others for luxury items such as perfumed oil and some whose purpose remains unclear. Unusually high levels of organic remains have been found, including processed foods.⁶ Very few transportable items of value have been found, however, which is interpreted as evidence of the evacuation of the site before the eruption.⁷

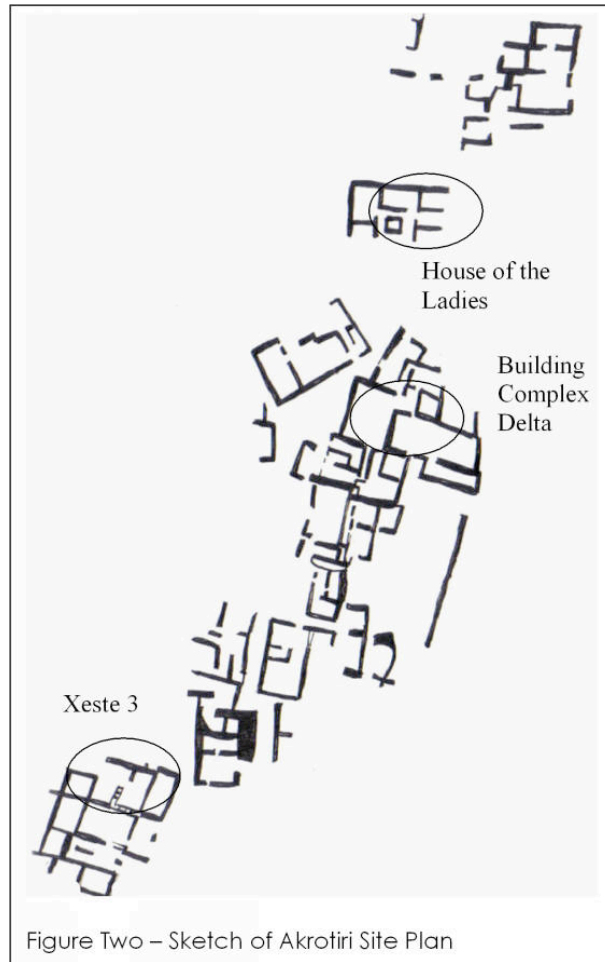
A number of private and public buildings and complexes have been unearthed.⁸ Artefacts bearing depictions of the three floral motifs discussed in this paper originate from rooms and buildings sometimes identified as public—particularly building Xeste 3 in the southern section of the excavated town, a room in the Delta Complex in the central-northern area of the site and the House of the Ladies to the north of the site (Figure Two).

5 Friedrich et al. (2006), 548.

6 Sarpaki (1992).

7 S. Marinatos (1967-1973). A small number of examples have been found of attempts to rebuild architectural ruins caused by pre-volcanic earthquake/s. The extent of these attempts suggests only a small number of inhabitants remained on the island after the earthquake/s. No bodies and only one small item of value have been recovered from the site, supporting the theory of widespread evacuation before the eruption. The growth of grass on some of the ruins suggests at least one wet season passed between ruins caused by earthquakes and the final destruction of the site.

8 Dumas (1992a).



Due to the unusually high level of preservation, this site has provided the highest number of floral and vegetal motifs of all of the Cycladic prehistoric settlements. The abundance of plant life represented in prehistory is an interesting contrast to the modern, post-eruption Thera landscape, which is now one of the most barren of the Cycladic Greek Islands. In addition to the three flowers that are being examined in this paper, iris, ivy, reed, palm, sedge, myrtle, barley, vetch and grape are represented at Akrotiri.

The Flowers

Crocus

The crocus is one of the most widely represented plants in Minoan painting.⁹ At Akrotiri the crocus motif is found on wall paintings, jugs, cups, and a number of other pottery vessels.

⁹ Morgan (1988), 29. Morgan discusses similarities and differences of saffron crocus representation across Minoan, Mycenaean and Cycladic art and decoration.

SEASONAL FLUX—THREE FLOWERS FOR THREE SEASONS

The crocus is a monocotyledon and part of the Iridaceae, or iris, family. There are 42 species of crocus.¹⁰ The flower depicted at Akrotiri is either the *Crocus cartwrightianus* or the *Crocus sativus*. *C. sativus* is considered a domesticated variety of *C. cartwrightianus*, a species found growing wild in the Mediterranean, particularly in the vicinity of the Cycladic Islands.¹¹ Figure Three¹² depicts the *C. sativus* variety. Both species flower in autumn.

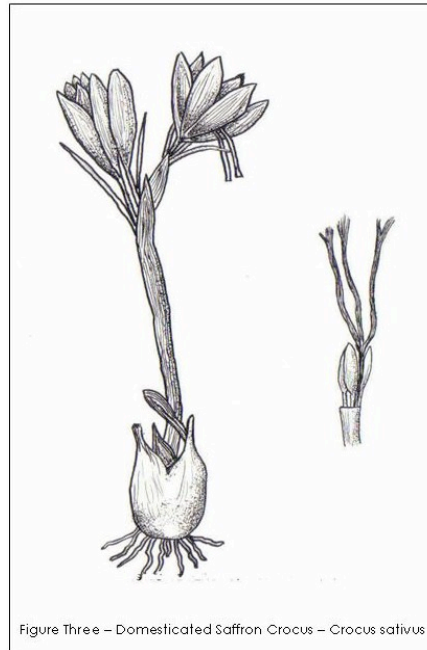


Figure Three – Domesticated Saffron Crocus – *Crocus sativus*

The plant has grass-like foliage that grows up to 40cm long. A star-shaped flower emerges from between the foliage, and is coloured from pale to dark purple. The flowers always bear three stigmas/styles and three stamens.¹³

The distinctive long orange stigmas of the *C. sativus* are hand collected and dried to produce the expensive spice saffron in modern day Spain, Iran, India, Greece and Italy.¹⁴ Up to 150,000 flowers are required to produce just one kilogram of saffron and the spice is more expensive than gold by weight.¹⁵ The collection of the flower and orange stigma is clearly depicted on wall paintings in Building Xeste 3 at Akrotiri.¹⁶

10 Huxley and Taylor (1977), 153.

11 Mathew (1982), 52. Sarpaki (2000), 661, argues the rocky landscape in the Xeste 3 paintings suggests a mountainous, wild landscape of wild crocus plants. Douskos (1980), 143, argues that, because only crocuses are growing in the landscape, the plants were cultivated particularly for economic purposes.

12 Figure Three is based on Maw (1886) Plate XXIX.

13 Sarpaki (2000), 671, notes that many scholars incorrectly refer to the saffron-producing part as a stigma, when it should be referred to as a 'style'. Bailey (2003), 221f., clarifies that a stigma is the 'receptive tip of the carpel...[which] may be elevated on a stalklike protrusion called a style'. Also see Morgan (1988), 29, for discussion about saffron crocus motifs in Minoan art.

14 Crop and Food Research (1993), Broadsheet 20; Kafi et al. (2006), 176-81.

15 Crop and Food Research (1993), Broadsheet 20.

16 Chrysikopoulou (2005), 77-80; Nugent (2008).

Lily

The lily is a monocotyledon and member of the Liliaceae family. The lily, or *Lilium*, has large, loosely clustered flowers with a long style with 3-lobed stigma and a bulb formed of ‘overlapping scales’.¹⁷ The lily depicted in the wall paintings and pottery of Akrotiri may have been a number of varieties.

Baumann identifies the Akrotirian lily as the *Lilium candidum*, a variety also known as the Madonna Lily (Figure Four).¹⁸ This pure white variety of lily is a spring flowering ornamental plant, growing up to one metre high with few flowers on individual stems.¹⁹ Like the crocus, there is some debate as to whether a domesticated or wild version of this variety may have been depicted in the Akrotiri wall paintings.²⁰ The Madonna Lily may have been used in the ancient Aegean to create scent for perfume. Its oil may have also been extracted to form a remedy for ailments and venomous snake bites.²¹

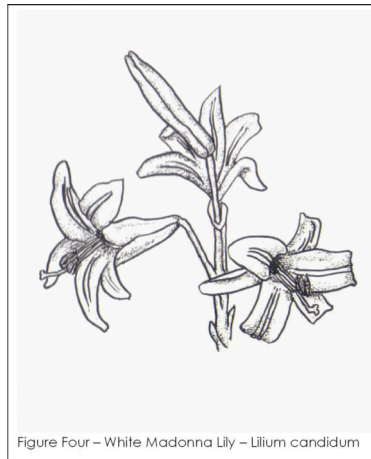


Figure Four – White Madonna Lily – *Lilium candidum*

It is difficult to identify just one variety of lily at Akrotiri as some representations depict red lilies. Sarpaki proposes that the red lily in the wall paintings is a combination of the *Lilium candidum* and the *Lilium chalcedonicum* (Figure Five).²² Baumann, a supporter of sole identification of the flower as *Lilium candidum*, proposes that the depicted colour of the lily is due to artistic licence and depends on the colour of the background.²³

To identify the motif variety, one might look to the specifics of each variety. In modern times the *Lilium candidum* grows on dry, stony slopes and thickets in Epirus, the Peloponnese and the eastern Aegean islands. The *Lilium chalcedonicum*, which flowers in late spring, grows up to one

17 Huxley and Taylor (1977), 143.

18 Baumann (1993), 176.

19 Huxley and Taylor (1977), 146.

20 Negbi and Negbi (2000), 600.

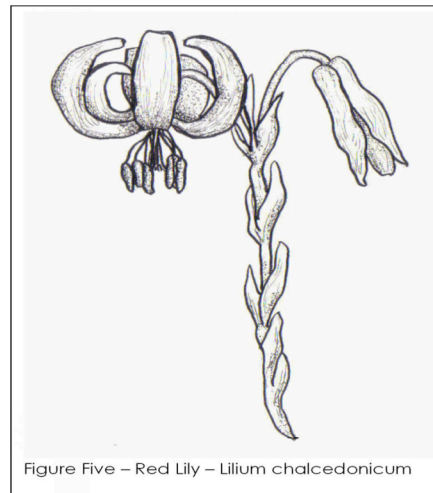
21 Negbi and Negbi (2000), 596-97.

22 Sarpaki (2000), 659.

23 Baumann (1993), 171.

SEASONAL FLUX—THREE FLOWERS FOR THREE SEASONS

metre tall and can be found in woodland clearings on mountains in modern Greece.²⁴ Both varieties share a number of characteristics.



The primary importance of identification of flower species and varieties in this paper is to position the flowering seasons of the floral motifs represented in Akrotirian art. In this case both the *Lilium candidum* and the *Lilium chalcedonicum* flower in spring, so an exact identification is not required.

In a different context, however, one might ascertain the value attributed to the flower or motif by the creators and their contemporary observers to identify the variety. That is, we should consider those things about the representation, or the object represented that are meaningful to the creator or observer.²⁵ If these attributes are shared between similar floral varieties, the variety itself may have been considered irrelevant to the observer. Therefore, if one is seeking to determine the original relevance of the motif, identifying whether the lily represented at Akrotiri is *Lilium candidum* and *Lilium chalcedonicum* may not be as important as identifying the similarities between them.

Papyrus/Sea Daffodil

The papyrus was a common plant motif in Egyptian Art. Highly stylised, the plant was portrayed as a rounded triangular head on a straight stem—a motif called ‘waz’.²⁶ The papyrus is a member of the sedge family, however, and in reality the head of the plant is a spray of needles, more closely resembling an exploding firework than the composed triangle of the stylised motif.²⁷

The papyrus plant is best known for the paper-like writing material made by softening the harsh fibres of its stalk in liquid and pressing flat.²⁸ The plant was economically important to the

24 Huxley and Taylor (1977), 146.

25 Renfrew (1985), 3.

26 For an example of the stylised papyrus of Egyptian Art see Bianchi (1996), 134, depicting a scene from the tomb of Ramose, Governor and Vizier under Pharaoh Akhenaten, from Western Thebes.

27 Lewis (1974), 3, describes the plant as having a ‘tall triangular stem and graceful feathery crown’.

28 For a full description of the process (as described by Pliny *NH* 12.74-82) see Lewis (1974), 34-69.

Egyptians for more than its paper products, however. It was used as food, to make baskets, rope, sails, wicks and upper class sandals, and the crown was used as decoration.²⁹

A number of Akrotirian wall paintings carry triangular botanic motifs that have been identified as papyrus, a position supported by a number of scholars.³¹ Papyrus is not native to Greece, but Warren argues that cultivation of the papyrus was indeed possible in Greece in the Bronze Age³² and therefore a known and relevant botanic motif.

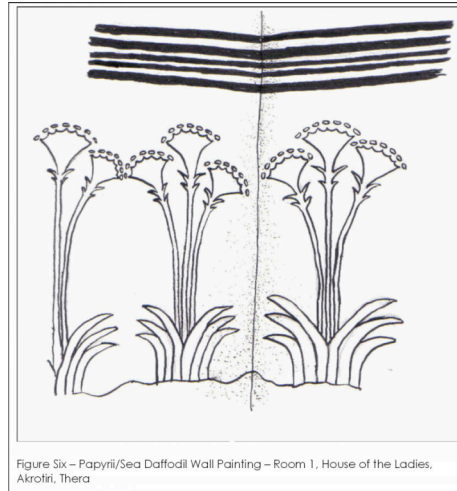


Figure Six – Papyri/Sea Daffodil Wall Painting – Room 1, House of the Ladies, Akrotiri, Thera

A wall painting that is often central to discussion about the identification of the motif at Akrotiri is from the House of the Ladies in the northern section of the excavation area (Figure Six).³³ The wall painting depicts clumps of three long-stemmed flowers emerging from symmetrical foliage. It is interesting to note the prominence of triads in the composition, which have religious associations in eastern traditions at this period.³⁴ The blue flower heads contrast against the protruding yellow anthers. The plants grow from a rocky mustard ground line.

While there are some similarities between the waz motif of the papyrus and these flowers, there is one feature of the motif that convincingly identifies it as the sea daffodil.³⁵ Figure Seven³⁶ shows pressed sea daffodils with the petals removed. Although there are only six anthers in nature and seven are visible in the wall painting, the resemblance of the protruding anthers of the plant to the motifs from the House of the Ladies is quite remarkable.

The sea daffodil, or *Pancratium maritimum*, is a night-blooming summer flower.³⁸ A monocotyledon of the Amaryllidaceae (or Daffodil) family, it is also known as ‘pancratium lily’.³⁹ It is a bulb plant, native to Greece, and grows on sand dunes and the shores of most islands and the

29 Lewis (1974), 21-32.

31 For example Walberg (1992), 242; Morgan (1988), 21; Sarpaki (2000), 664; N. Marinatos (1984), 94f.

32 Warren (1976).

33 Dumas (1992a), 36.

34 Dickinson (1995), 259; Renfrew (1985), 23.

35 A number of scholars support the identification of the motifs in the House of the Ladies as sea daffodils. See Porter (2000), 603-14; Diapoulis (1990), 129-40; Baumann (1993), 175f. and 180.

36 Figure Seven is based on Baumann (1993), fig. 348.

38 Porter (2000), 605.

39 Huxley and Taylor (1977) p. 153; Diapoulis (1990), 134.

SEASONAL FLUX—THREE FLOWERS FOR THREE SEASONS

mainland. The plant grows 40-60cm high with usually between two and 20 stems clumping together.⁴⁰ Dioscorides described the plant as having medicinal properties,⁴¹ the bulb is edible, and its fibres were used to produce clothing.⁴²



The flower emits a very strong scent, attracting night insects for pollination. Diapoulis notes that the scent of the flower is so strong that, at the height of flowering in late August, the smell keeps sheep away from the coasts.⁴³ Porter suggests that its strong scent was used in rituals—pleasing a deity, attracting ‘his or her attention and emotionally heightening the transcendental experience of religious ritual’.⁴⁴

The Motifs

The Crocus Gatherers (Figure Eight) is one of a number of wall paintings in Rooms 3a and b from Building Xeste 3, Akrotiri. It depicts women collecting flowers from crocus plants sprouting from a rocky groundscape.⁴⁵ The crocus plants and flowers are represented realistically, although the purple petals of the flowers are now faded. As mentioned above, the practice of harvesting crocus stigma by hand continues into modern saffron production.

Figure Nine⁴⁶ depicts the wall paintings of the upper and lower levels of the north and east walls of Room 3 at House Xeste 3. The upper wall paintings depict a full saffron production process.⁴⁷ The gatherers on the right (east wall) are moving left—the first on the right gathers flowers

40 Porter (2000), 607.

41 Quoted in Huxley and Taylor (1977), 153.

42 Huxley and Taylor (1977), 153.

43 Diapoulis (1990), 136.

44 Porter (2000), 605.

45 The women in this wall-painting are considered to be younger women of the community primarily due to their hair styles and breast development. N. Marinatos (1984), 62; Rehak (2000); Chapin (2002), 3f.

46 Figure Nine is based on N. Marinatos (1984), figs. 40, 44, 52 and 53.

47 Nugent (2008).

with her basket on the ground beside her, the second carries a basket in which to place the flowers she is picking, the third carries a presumably full basket on her shoulders.



Figure Eight – The Saffron Gatherers Wall Painting – Room 3a, Xeste 3, Akrotiri, Thera

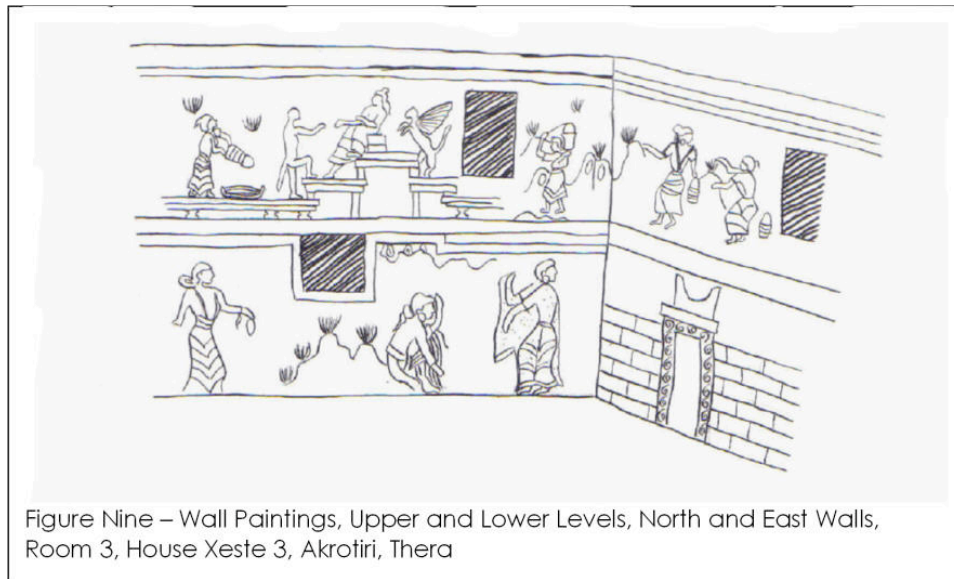


Figure Nine – Wall Paintings, Upper and Lower Levels, North and East Walls, Room 3, House Xeste 3, Akrotiri, Thera

The gatherer on the far left empties her stigmas into a low receptacle. Modern Greek and Iranian makers of saffron dry whole crocus flowers, while Spanish, Indian and Italian producers separate the style from the petals before drying. Saffron may be dried in the sun, in the shade, over a heat source, or in a warm enclosure—modern Greek practice sees fresh saffron placed in 3 or 4mm thickness on plates and covered with silken cloth. These plates are stacked and placed in a warm cupboard for 12 hours, after which the saffron is separated from the petals.⁴⁸ The act of tipping the stigma into a low pan is the final stage in the production process and we are observing the complete saffron production process in this scene.

48 Nugent (2008); Kafi et al (2006), 176-81; Crop and Food Research (1993).

SEASONAL FLUX—THREE FLOWERS FOR THREE SEASONS

The female figure in the centre of the composition is larger than the other women and is flanked by two creatures—a monkey on the left and a griffin on the right. In near eastern iconology, a larger figure flanked by two fanciful animals is often identified as a deity.⁵⁰ Her clothes are decorated with the crocus motif. If indeed this figure is a deity, we might interpret her presence as ‘sanctifying’ the message about the importance of the production of saffron.⁵¹ This ritual may be interpreted, therefore, as both secular and religious—the process may have such intrinsic economic and/or cultural importance that the line drawn between the secular and the religious is indistinguishable.

The room directly beneath the crocus gatherers wall painting holds some interesting architectural features and a continuing focus on the crocus flower. ‘Pier and door’ partitions, which are pillars with doors placed between them that can restrict or allow access and viewing of the room, are located on the south wall.⁵² In front of the wall paintings on the lower north wall there is an unusual architectural form, sometimes referred to as a ‘lustral basin’. Steps lead down into a lowered area, perhaps to enable a symbolic descent in order to perform ritual. This architectural form is found at a number of Minoan sites.⁵³ Although the purpose of this basin is debated, a number of scholars believe that the presence of the pier and door partitions and lustral basin indicate the rooms’ use was important to public ritual of some kind.⁵⁴



The wall painting on the lower level of the northern wall is situated directly above the lustral basin (Figure Nine). The wall painting depicts women and crocus plants in a rocky landscape. The three elaborately dressed women, or ‘adorants’, are set in a landscape of flowering crocus plants. Crocus motifs also decorate their clothes. This scene has been interpreted as an engender-

50 Dickinson (1995), 259; Renfrew (1985), 23.

51 Rappaport (1971) discusses the idea of ritual as communication of important social issues. The presence of a deity sanctifies the message as legitimate for the community.

52 See Hitchcock (2000) for discussion about examples of other pier and door partitions in the Minoan world.

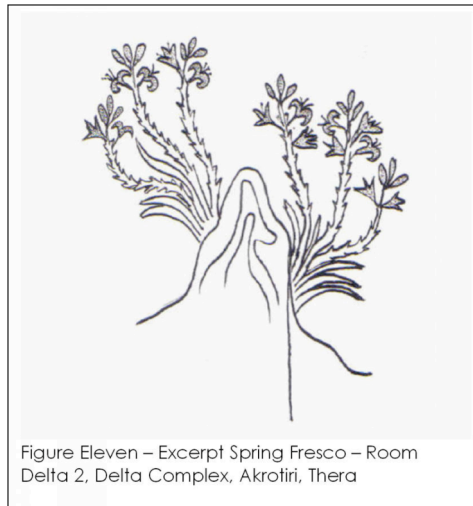
53 See Hitchcock (2000), 163-81, for discussion about lustral basins at Akrotiri and other Minoan sites.

54 N. Marinatos (1984); Doumas (1992a); Chapin (2000).

ing rite of passage.⁵⁵ The uses of the saffron product have informed the interpretation of the wall painting. Saffron was used in the ancient world as a medicinal potion, particularly associated with gynaecological conditions, a dye and a spice.⁵⁶ The painting's position and contents provide further clear association between the crocus and ritual.

Examples of the crocus motif can also be found on many pottery items from Akrotiri. Both of the examples presented in Figure Ten have been interpreted by N. Marinatos as ritual vessels due to their find context and their floral decoration. The tripod stool is decorated with three crocus flowers on each of the three legs. Each head of the flower has three petals and three stigmas. The triad theme mentioned above in relation to the sea daffodil wall painting is repeated in this piece, strengthening its identification as an item with religious ritual importance. Marinatos refers to this item as an offering table.⁵⁷

Marinatos also identifies the strainer as a ritual vase and suggests that the act of straining or seeping may have been involved in a ritual process undertaken at Xeste 3. A seeping process is required to 'activate' saffron colour and flavour. The vessel was found in Room 3 of Xeste 3.⁵⁸ The top section depicts swallows flying through flowering crocus and the bottom section portrays a row of stemless lily flowers. Two seasons appear to be depicted on this vessel—spring lilies on the base and autumn flowering crocus on the top. This mixing of seasons is problematic for literal interpretations, but may be proof of the symbolic importance of the motifs and importance in a seasonal ritual cycle.



Like the crocuses of the wall paintings in Building Xeste 3, the lilies represented on the so-called Spring Fresco from room Delta 2 of the Delta Complex are portrayed in a realistic manner (Figure Eleven). They emerge from rocky outcrops and, in most cases, have three flowering stems on each plant. The stems hold flowers in different stages of bloom, buds on the same stems as fully open flowers, which is a natural phenomenon (Figure Four). Due to the weight of the flow-

55 N. Marinatos (1984); Rehak (2002); Davis (1986).

56 Budge (1913); Riddle (1992); Theophrastus (1990), 6.6.10.

57 N. Marinatos (1984), 89.

58 N. Marinatos (1984), 65.

SEASONAL FLUX—THREE FLOWERS FOR THREE SEASONS

ers, the stems usually droop when in flower, rather than stand straight as portrayed here. Flying swallows swoop between the flowers.

The Spring Fresco wall painting continues around three walls of the ground floor room. A grinding stone, a number of storage pots and a bed were also found in the room.⁵⁹ This leads Marinatos to suggest that this wall painting was the backdrop to agricultural-related ritual.⁶⁰ Rather than the ritual being depicted on the wall, as in the public ritual of Room 3a and b of Building Xeste 3, this wall painting may provide the right environment for undertaking ritual.

The door and window in the lower level room indicate that it was not intended as plain living quarters—supporting the premise that it was a workshop or storeroom for foodstuffs.⁶¹ The window is an interior one, leading from one internal room to another. Marinatos suggests this enabled handing of items into the decorated room during ritual.⁶² Alternatively, the window may have provided a ‘frame’ for observers to watch and legitimise the ritual, like the goddess in the Room 3 Xeste 3 wall painting. From the wall painting’s subject matter and the presence of grinding and storage jars, one might speculate a lily-based product, such as oil or fragrance extract for medicinal or perfume products, was produced here.⁶³



Figure Twelve, 'Lilies in vase on window sill' Wall Painting, Room 4, West House, Akrotiri, Thera

Figure Twelve is a wall painting depicting a bunch of lilies emerging from a vase placed on a window sill. This painting appears between two windows of Room 4 in the West House. Like the lily depictions in the Spring Fresco, the flowers are red. This representation is fundamentally different to that of the Spring Fresco, however, as the lilies are no longer in a natural landscape, but confined to a vase on a windowsill. The wall painting has sometimes been identified as purely

59 S. Marinatos (1971); Doumas (1992a).

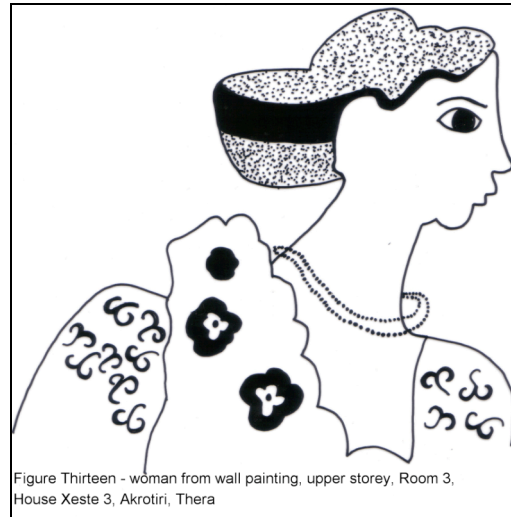
60 N. Marinatos (1984), 94. This may be problematic, however. The site continued to be occupied after the earthquake and therefore rooms buried by the volcanic ash may not have retained their intended purpose and may contain items not related to that purpose.

61 Doumas (1992a), 17.

62 N. Marinatos (1984), 94.

63 Acknowledging that the artefacts found in the room may not have been those that would have been there if the site of Akrotiri had been fully settled at the time of the volcanic eruption.

decorative.⁶⁴ However, the separation of the floral motif from the landscape may be symbolic of the occupier's power over nature, or alternatively, power over products associated with the lily motifs.



The woman in Figure Thirteen is one figure in what may be a procession on the upper level of the southern wall of Room 3, Xeste 3, opposite the saffron production ritual/sacrifice scene of Figure Nine. The woman's clothes are decorated with floral motifs—cistus on the central sash and lily heads on the sleeves. Clothing is important to communicate personal, social and even religious information.⁶⁵ The inclusion of a lily motif on the clothing of a participant within the larger iconographical context of Room 3 of the Building Xeste 3 is significant. The lily motif in this context indicates that this motif is part of the larger ritual iconology associated with this room. Although the mixing of flowering seasons between the motifs in one composition may be problematic to a literal interpretation, it may be proof of the symbolic importance of the motifs within a seasonal ritual cycle.

The reconstructed altar at the eastern lower level of Figure Nine looks to be the destination of the three adorants. The altar has been reconstructed by Marinatos with blood dripping from the top, identifying it is a sacrificial altar for blood libation.⁶⁶ The altar decoration is reconstructed with two lines of lilies running down the central panel. The association of the floral motif with religious ritual is obvious in this case.

Figure Fourteen places the sea daffodil wall painting within the House of the Ladies decorative schema. The sea daffodils appear on the three walls of Area 1 and elaborately dressed women appear on the walls at the other end of the room (Area 2). Like the Spring Fresco room, the room has an interior window that may have enabled observance of a ritual. Area 2 has been identified as a dining room due to the cooking pots and conical cups found within it.⁶⁷ Four repositories

64 Dumas (1992a); N. Marinatos (1984), 48.

65 Rehak (2000), 101. See Barber (1991) for detailed discussion about prehistoric textiles and clothes.

66 N. Marinatos (1984), fig. 53.

67 N. Marinatos (1984), 97.

SEASONAL FLUX—THREE FLOWERS FOR THREE SEASONS

were found beneath the floor strongly identifying this room as important to ritual.⁶⁸ The vessels found in the repositories are associated with eating and drinking. They were under heavy flagstones, however, and may therefore have been sealed off after a single ritual rather than re-used. Ritual feasting is indeed an important practice found in many cultures.⁶⁹ The clear association between ritual and the decoration and use of the room unmistakably link the sea daffodil motif and ritual.

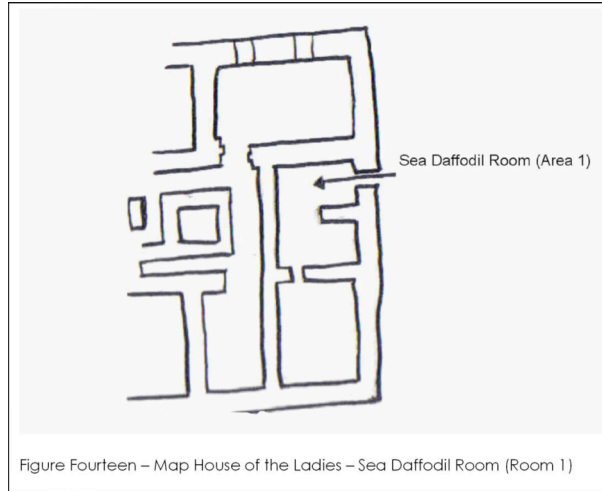


Figure Fourteen – Map House of the Ladies – Sea Daffodil Room (Room 1)

Ritual is often accompanied by stimulation of the senses—through music, food and scent. Heightening the senses may provide entry into an altered state of mind, transcending the everyday. The sea daffodil is a summer blooming flower and would have been the only bloom available at this time of the year. The strong scent of this night-blooming flower at its unique flowering time of the year, in association with the way in which the motif is used in the House of the Ladies wall painting, suggests it may be associated with the ritual cycle of the Akrotirians.

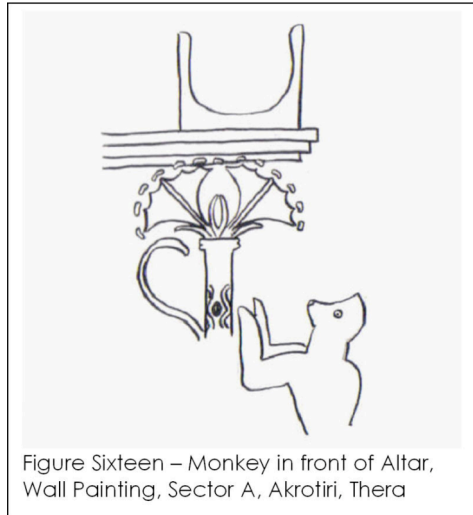


Figure Fifteen – Excerpt 'River Scene'
Miniature Wall Painting, East Wall, Room 5,
West House, Akrotiri, Thera

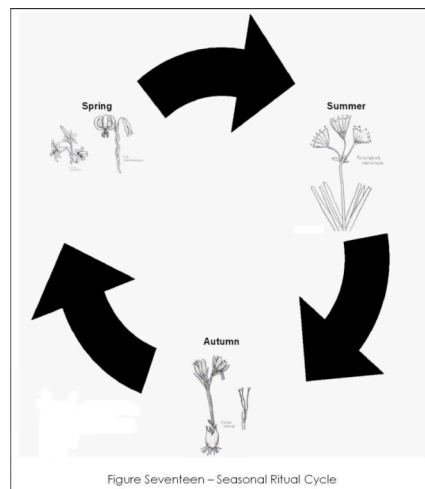
68 N. Marinatos (1984), 97; S Marinatos (1972). One of the vessels (stirrup jars) buried was decorated with vetch and another with polychrome birds.

69 Dickinson (1995), 259; Hitchcock et al. (2008).

Figure Fifteen is an excerpt of a river scene miniature wall painting from Room 5 of the West House, Akrotiri. A number of the plants in this wall painting have formerly been identified as papyrus. These identifications need to be reviewed in light of the proposed identification method for sea daffodil discussed above. This particular representation does not contain the most obvious sea daffodil identifier (the anthers at the top) and so is not identified as sea daffodil for the purposes of this paper.



The floral form in the reconstructed wall painting from Sector A (Figure Sixteen) is easier to identify as a sea daffodil. We see here two flower heads similar to those from the House of the Ladies. Seven anthers are visible on the right flower head—the same unnatural number as those from the House of the Ladies. On this basis, I identify these motifs as sea daffodils. Behind the blooms is a familiar Minoan icon—the ‘horns of consecration’ or altar, which is associated in Minoan iconology with religious ritual. The link between ritual and the sea daffodil is strengthened through this clear association.



In conclusion, I have attempted in this paper to link the use of three floral motifs—the crocus, the lily and the sea daffodil—with ritual, both secular and religious. These three flowers bloom at three different times of the year—autumn, spring and summer, respectively.

In this way, I propose that we are able to identify a ritual cycle at the site of Akrotiri, based on the flowers and the seasons—an autumn ritual associated with crocus and the production of saffron, a spring ritual associated with the lily and agriculture, and a summer ritual associated with the strong scented sea daffodil (Figure Seventeen).⁷⁰

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List of Figures

(Unless otherwise indicated in the footnotes, all illustrations are my own, based on a number of photographs and sightings.)

Figure One: Map of Thera

Figure Two: Sketch of Akrotiri Site Plan

Figure Three: Domesticated Saffron Crocus—*Crocus sativus*

Figure Four: White Madonna Lily—*Lilium candidum*

Figure Five: Red Lily—*Lilium chadeconicum*

Figure Six: Papyri/Sea Daffodil Wall Painting, House of the Ladies, Akrotiri, Thera

Figure Seven: Sea Daffodil—*Pancratium maritimum*

Figure Eight: ‘Saffron Gatherers’ Wall Painting, Room 3a, Building Xeste 3, Akrotiri, Thera

Figure Nine: Rooms 3a and 3b, North and East Walls, Building Xeste 3, Akrotiri, Thera

Figure Ten: Strainer (left), Tripod (right) from Building Xeste 3, Akrotiri, Thera

Figure Eleven: Extract from ‘The Spring Fresco’, Room Delta Two, Delta Complex

Figure Twelve: ‘Lilies in Vase on Window Sill’, Wall Painting, Room 4, The West House, Akrotiri, Thera

Figure Thirteen: Woman from Wall Painting on West Wall, Upper Storey, Room 3, Building Xeste 3, Akrotiri, Thera

Figure Fourteen: Plan of the House of the Ladies and Sea Daffodil Room

Figure Fifteen: Excerpt from ‘River Scene’ Miniature Wall Painting, East Wall, Room 5, West House, Akrotiri, Thera

Figure Sixteen: ‘Monkey in front of Altar’, Wall Painting, Sector A, Akrotiri, Thera

Figure Seventeen: Seasonal Ritual Cycle

⁷⁰ I would like to thank the anonymous referees for their helpful comments and to acknowledge the work of the organising committee of the 2006 Flux Conference, University of Melbourne, at which the original version of this paper was presented.

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MARCIA NUGENT

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