



## WHY IS NO ONE EATING? THE ICONOGRAPHY OF FEASTING IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

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### ABSTRACT

*Feasts were a vital part of life in the Ancient World. Those worthy of expression in images and texts were ideological and symbolic, celebrating royal power, marking the ritual calendar, creating alliances, and maintaining the status quo of society. Strikingly, in all representations relating to feasting, no one is actually depicted eating. The paper investigates this phenomenon both within the framework of the social impetus for feasting, and in terms of how iconography works. Using select examples from the art of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Aegean of the 3rd and 2nd millennium, the paper demonstrates how preparations and ceremonial actions convey the culminating social action of the feast. Processions, gift bringing, and holding the cup, in particular, allude to the wider significance of feasting by focusing on moments of ceremonial resonance. It is these – rather than consumption – that encapsulate the symbolic importance of feasting for elite social relations.*

It was in 1978, at a conference held on a ship moored in the spectacular caldera of Santorini (Thera), that I first met Nanno Marinatos. Our friendship over the years has straddled the continents and in each place I remember with enormous warmth the pleasure of sitting together talking over a meal. Whether in the garden of her house in Saronisi, kittens resting in the shade of the trees, on Santorini with the sounds of cicadas and the waves, at Tell el Dab'a refreshed from our work by an evening walk through the fields, or in the cosmopolitan settings of Cairo, Athens, Vienna, Chicago, each occasion was a feast of friendship. At the ends of our phone conversations, in which we would often discuss aspects of iconography, she would ask “what are you cooking tonight?” and I would list the menu. Sharing food is one of the many pleasures of friendship.

Nanno's prodigious body of work, which moves with ease between the cultures of the ancient Mediterranean and beyond, offers brilliant insights into Aegean iconography and religion, throwing penetrating light on a range of difficult issues that empowers the reader to see them afresh. In this small offering to a dear friend, I'd like to pose a question that I hope she might appreciate. Why, in the art of the Ancient Near East, Egypt, and the Aegean, despite many images connected with feasting, is no one eating?

The question came to me while working on the Miniature Frieze from Ayia Irini, Kea (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> Here, men stir the contents

of giant cauldrons on the coast (Figure 1e right); others in long robes greet one another with ceremonial gestures (Figure 1a) or meet across a river, bringing produce in containers (Figure 1b). Nearby was a chariot (Figure 1c), and beneath the cauldron scene are ships with decorated hulls (Figure 1e). A hunter carries his slaughtered prey on a pole (Figure 1d), walking in the direction of the cauldrons, and behind him from the adjacent wall dogs chase fallow deer. Together, the scenes tell a story of preparations for a feast, associated with pageantry on land and sea indicative of a festival. In the adjacent room were large panels of plants, predominantly blackberry and myrtle, widely associated with food and drink in the ancient world.<sup>2</sup> The paintings come from two upper storey rooms within the Northeast Bastion, strategically overlooking the approach to the town from the harbor. Below, linked by stairs, were service rooms with storage pithoi, and above, in the corner of the room with the Miniature Frieze, no doubt partitioned off, was a drain. The pottery in the painted rooms speaks of a range of vessels for drinking, pouring, eating, preparation and serving of food. Here was no doubt a meeting place for elites, serving as a banqueting hall. Yet with all this circumstantial evidence in the rooms, and the explicit referencing to hunting, bringing produce, cooking, and pageantry in the wall paintings, no one is actually shown drinking or eating.

This phenomenon can be considered on two levels, firstly within the framework of the social impetus for feasting, secondly in terms of how iconography works.

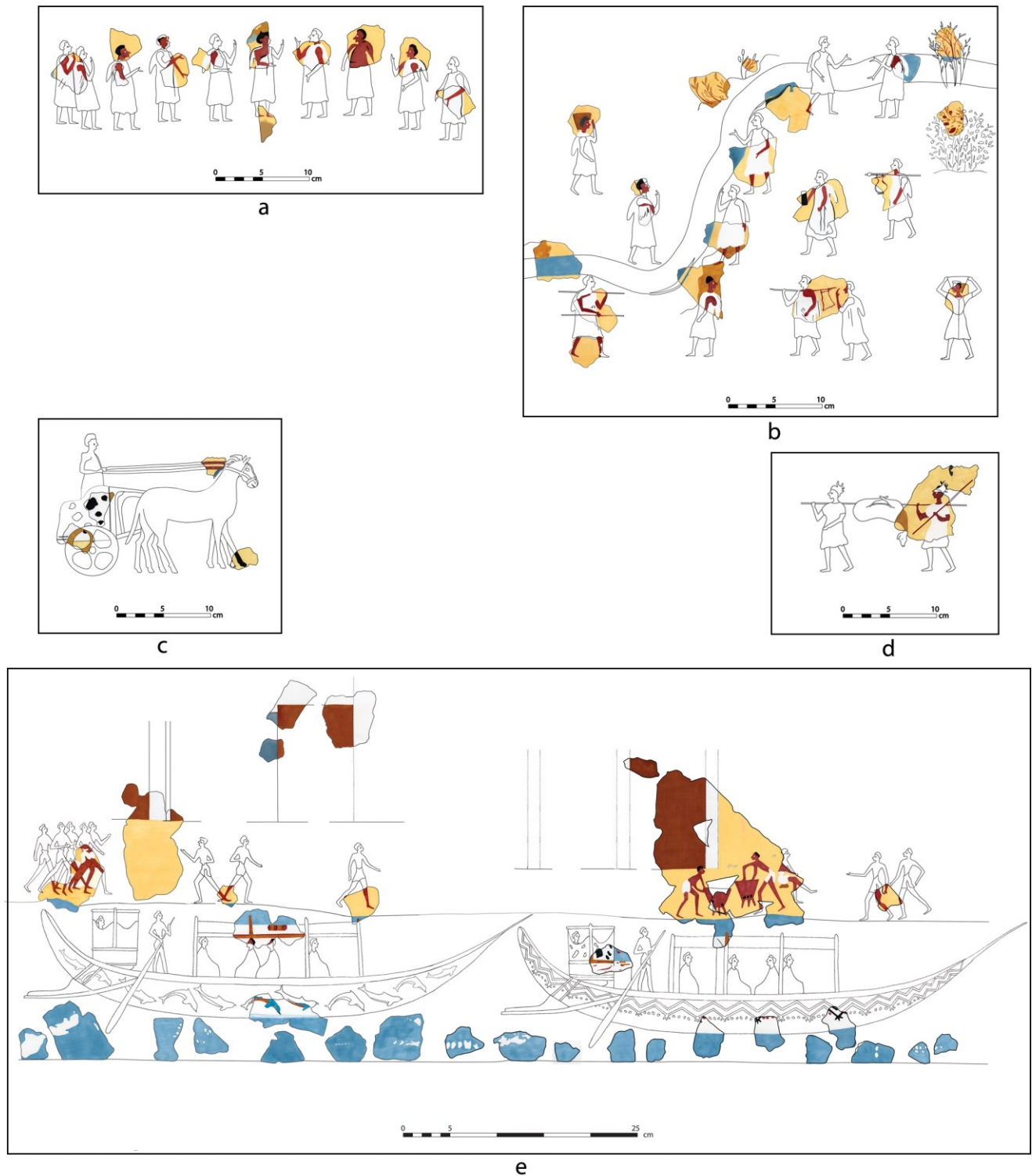


Figure 1: Reconstructions of parts of the Miniature Frieze, Ayia Irini, Kea (Late Cycladic I, 16<sup>th</sup> c BCE): (a) procession of men; (b) men by a river bringing containers; (c) chariot; (d) hunter; (e) cauldrons and ships scene. © Lyvia Morgan

## FEASTING IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

Feasting is a fundamental human activity. It is integrative, bringing together groups, communities and networks; at the same time, it is often manipulative, creating and maintaining power relationships through social identities and socio-political alliances. Feasting is seen as instrumental in the construction of identity and status, an active process in the formation of social and political relations.<sup>3</sup>

At festivals, people communally experience heightened awareness of their senses and enhanced conviviality through the stimulation of the theatricality of pageantry, ceremonial processions, recitations, music and dance, garlands, incense, perfumed oils, the odors of cooking meat, and the mind-altering effects of abundant alcohol. Meat and alcohol are crucial consumables at feasts throughout the world. Their importance for such social events lies not only in their relative rarity and cost, but in their symbolic power and the psychological and physiological effects they exert on mind and body. Meat embodies social ideals of manhood, especially when the animal was hunted, while sacrificial slaughter leads to ritualized consumption, in which the 'vitality' of the animal is embodied in the meat.<sup>4</sup> Alcohol is transformative, encouraging social bonding through the effects of the process of fermentation on the conscious mind.<sup>5</sup>

Feasting is fundamentally about reciprocity, and gift exchange is essential to the social, political and economic interests of the feast. When guests bring gifts to host, ruler or gods, they are instrumental in bringing a ceremonial dimension to the occasion, as witnessed by the many images of processions of offering bearers in ancient art. The giving of gifts is a conspicuous, non-challenging form of bonding in the social arena and is at the core of diplomacy, exchange and intercultural relations in the ancient world.<sup>6</sup> Gift exchange and hierarchy of seating are the social markers of both inclusion and the boundaries of exclusion, while conspicuous consumption and ostentatious display signal wealth, prestige, and power.

Feasts and festivals in the Ancient World were a vital part of life, highlighting special events - calendrical, religious, political - and marking rites of passage. Most, if not all, had a cultic context. In Egypt, there were literally hundreds of different festivals, small and large scale, local and widespread.<sup>7</sup> Remarkably, in the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty, temple records indicate that 54 days a year were dedicated to festivals, an average of at least once every ten days, some lasting for several days.<sup>8</sup>

In Mesopotamia, as in Egypt, many feasts were held at festivals marking events celebrating royal power: investiture of the king, inauguration of temples and palaces, diplomatic visits and alliances, celebration of hunting and warfare.<sup>9</sup> Feasts were predicated on divine protection, involving priestly intercession, as in the well-documented Babylonian New Year festival in which the gods determined the fates for the coming year.<sup>10</sup> Feasts of male

assemblies were occasions for the airing of debates and settling of disputes, dinner conversation aimed at maintaining social control.<sup>11</sup> Divine and royal power were celebrated and invoked through feasting, the primary function of which was ideological and symbolic, creating and maintaining affiliations and alliances within the status quo of the ordered society.<sup>12</sup>

In the Aegean, a range of evidence (faunal and organic residue analysis, kitchen wares and installations, architecture, iconography and texts) has resulted in the recognition of feasting practices from the Early Minoan onwards, with a notable increase in the Neopalatial period.<sup>13</sup> On Crete, the evidence points to a diversity of locations and a range of contexts, implying variation in social dynamics, from relatively egalitarian, cohesive festivities, to elite gatherings centered on power.<sup>14</sup> Elisabetta Borgna contrasts this diversity with the elite impetus for the rise of feasting practices on the mainland. Mycenaean Linear B tablets reveal that the organization of major feasts was one of the main concerns of palace authorities.<sup>15</sup> Lists of provisions are readable as contributions for feasts, mostly by elite members of society, but also some of lower status, at calendrical religious festivals and specific occasions such as the 'inauguration of the *wanax*' (ruler).<sup>16</sup> Given the range of status of the offering-bringers, the concept of reciprocity associated with gift giving has broad implications suggestive of different levels of participation. This may be paralleled to the distinct spatial levels of hierarchy in feasting areas in the archaeological record at Pylos, which are clear indicators of diacritical aspects of feasting.<sup>17</sup>

It should be kept in mind that both texts and wall paintings concentrate on those aspects of society deemed significant enough to be recorded. The feasting discernible in textual and iconographic sources therefore relates to specific levels of experience, not to the full range. Nor are the same levels of experience expressed in the different contexts of palatial or temple iconography and texts on the one hand, and urban, non-palatial iconography on the other. But whether we are looking at small-scale feasts of, say, Kea, or large-scale state-run feasts centered on divine kingship as in Egypt and Mesopotamia, the deeper structures of feasting resonate between different contexts of public commensal gatherings. In particular, distinctions between self and other - host / guest, community / network, inside / outside - are recurrent themes of major feasts, no matter what the societal context or apparent function. State sponsorship of feasting leaves a more definable permanent record than smaller-scale organizations, but the principles of inclusion / exclusion and of gift-exchange in the formation of a cohesive community or network are common to all levels of sponsorship and participation.

With all the wealth of archaeological, textual, and iconographic evidence available on feasting in the Ancient World, it is striking that in images the focus is exclusively on preparation, pageantry, and the pouring of liquids, not on the consumption of food. No one is shown eating.

NARRATIVES OF DRINKING CEREMONIES AND FEASTING

Since eating is not depicted, artists find other ways of visually conveying the feast. They do this by drawing together elements that tell a story, however broad, of preparations and ceremonial actions that imply the culminating social gathering at the feast. Such elements are not necessarily linear in structure, but work through juxtaposition. Some examples from Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Aegean of the third and second millennia BCE will serve to demonstrate this principle.

Banqueting scenes appear in Egyptian tomb paintings and reliefs from the late Old Kingdom to the New Kingdom, being particularly prevalent in the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty. The context of the tomb and the level of their specificity distinguish these from such scenes elsewhere in the Ancient World. They are multivalent, funerary and quotidian overlapping, with the emphasis on one or the other appropriate to the position in the tomb. Occasionally such scenes have referents which, while not unambiguous, point to the meaning of the occasion and consequently to a dimension of time. The mortuary context ties in with literary accounts of the annual Feast of the Valley, in which the people venerated their recent ancestors by feasting at the entrances to their tombs,<sup>18</sup> though this is not the only implication of the scenes. An excellent example of a banqueting scene, covering several registers, appears on the right wall of the inner passage of the Tomb of Rekhmire, TT 100.<sup>19</sup> Davies commented on this “family feast” that “such scenes hover between memories of the home and provision for eternity”.<sup>20</sup> However, the banquet lies immediately next to a scene of ships returning from celebrations on the occasion of the inauguration of the king, implying that the feast may also relate to state-sponsored feasting.

Some scenes show preparations of food for the banquet (notably sacrificial meat), while in others the actual banquet is shown, food piled up on small tables in readiness.<sup>21</sup> Yet no one is eating, and though there are occasional images of the effects of drunkenness, in the large gatherings of banquets, no one is actually shown drinking. Focus instead is on the interaction between servants and guests, provisions, and musical entertainment. The context of rejuvenation and sensual stimulation distinguishes these images of banqueting from those of Mesopotamia discussed below, or indeed from the wall paintings of the Aegean. Yet they share with them the principle of abbreviation of the sequence of events of festival and feast into images encapsulating the symbolic essence of the ritualized action.

Banquets were a popular theme of Mesopotamian art, particularly in the Early Dynastic period.<sup>22</sup> Processions of men bring produce, seated figures hold cups, and musicians provide entertainment. Though food may occasionally be visible on tables in scenes of large-scale feasts, actual eating is never shown and in most cases the primary reference is to drinking. While early depictions on cylinder seals show men drinking (beer) through large straws, the prestige cup in drinking ceremonies soon became a standard symbol for the ideology of power and rulership.<sup>23</sup> Even then, lifting the cup to the lips is not depicted. Rather, the seated

participants hold out their cup in front of the body, as though toasting or waiting for it to be filled. There are practical reasons for abbreviation, particularly when such scenes occur on the tiny surface of cylinder seals, but that does not preclude the representation of, say, receiving food rather than a goblet of wine. There were symbolic reasons for condensing the scene in this particular way, focusing on the resonant image of holding the cup. In combining significant actions – processions, bringing produce, ceremonial drinking – an iconographic cluster ‘stands for’ the larger connotations of festivals and feasting.

The most remarkable as a contextually situated image is that represented on the well known Standard of Ur, found in fragments in the Royal Cemetery, next to the shoulder of a buried man.<sup>24</sup> Its purpose is unknown, but the excavator, Leonard Woolley, thought it may have been mounted on a pole, hence the appellation of ‘standard’. If that were the case, it would have been carried in procession during a festival. On one side is a war scene with chariots, on the other a banquet, implying a victory celebration presided over by the ruler. The registers are read from the bottom up. On the banquet side (Figure 2), in the lowest row, reading from left to right, men in short garments carry produce on their shoulders or backs and lead onagers (equids); at the front of the row and interspersed between the produce-bringers are men wearing a longer fringed garment and holding their arms in a ceremonial gesture with hands clasped across the chest. This clasped hands gesture is held by dedicatory temple statues and statuettes of worshippers, who in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium most often wear the same fringed skirt as on the ‘standard’.<sup>25</sup> Gesture and clothing on the ‘standard’ therefore draw attention to the cultic associations of the scenes. Some of the statues hold a goblet in their folded hands, referencing ceremonial drinking or the bringing of precious liquids.<sup>26</sup> In the middle row of the ‘standard’, the procession continues, now only with live animals (prestige protein), led by men in the fringed garments with ceremonial pose, who continue to accompany the procession. The top row is the culmination of the scenes. On the left, two men greet one another with a gesture. Six men in the fringed garments are seated facing left, each holding out a cup with their right hand, with attendants alongside and a musician. Before them is a single seated figure facing right on a larger scale and differently attired, presumably the ruler.

The Standard of Ur dates to almost a thousand years earlier than the Kea Miniature Frieze, and the organization in registers around an object differs from that of a continuous painted frieze within a room. Yet some general principles are common to both, and if we think of the different sides as equivalent to different walls only inside out, we shall see some structural correspondences. The two short ends (which are reconstructed from fragments) have scenes of animals, referencing an animal hunt and animal sacrifice.<sup>27</sup> Like the animal hunt in the painting, separated from the scenes referencing preparations for a feast, this signals the importance of meat. Garments and gestures reflect status and role and hold the narrative together. The fringed garment is worn by the warriors on the war side (beneath cloaks) as well as by those





Figure 2: The Standard of Ur, banqueting side (drawing), shell, lapis lazuli, and red limestone (originally set in wood), Early Dynastic IIIA (c. 2550-2400 BC). Schmandt-Besserat 2001, p. 393, fig. 14.1.

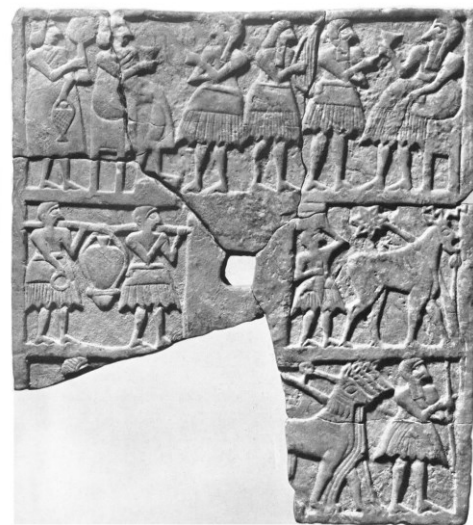


Figure 3: Votive wall plaques, Khafaje, limestone. (a) Sin Temple, Level IX, Early Dynastic IIIA (c. 2550-2400 BC), Schmandt-Besserat 2001, p. 395, fig. 14.2 (below); (b) Nintu Temple V and VII, Early Dynastic II (c. 2600 BC), Strommenger and Hirmer 1964, pl. 45

holding ceremonial gestures and those taking part in the banquet on the other side; the short divided 'kilt' is worn by men bringing prisoners as well as those bringing produce on the other side. Their garment and hair suggest that they may be from another region.<sup>28</sup> This repetition of the simultaneously elite yet egalitarian long fringed garment is instructive, suggesting in this case that the warrior class is also the ceremonial and the banqueting elite. Similarly, in the Kea Miniature (where there is no 'ruler') the men in procession and the men bringing gifts wear the same long robe, implying a link in intention between the two. It is possible that

tunics in the painting reflect a Mainland presence, in much the same way that the alternative garments on the 'standard' reflect neighboring people. A specific gesture of raised right hand with fingers separated from thumb appears both on the 'standard' (top left) and in the painting, as it does in the Knossos Camp Stool painting (Figure. 7). While there are no men with cups in the Kea frieze, the theme is central to the Camp Stool and recurs at Pylos, as discussed below. All these – robes, gesture, cups – are indicators of meaning, which in the context of banquet scenes aid the viewer in interpreting the abbreviated action.

Two votive wall plaques from Khafaje follow a similar pattern of abbreviation of festivals and feasting as that of the 'standard'. Display (entertainment / chariot) appears at the bottom, produce brought in containers in the middle, and banqueting at the top (Figure 3a-b).<sup>29</sup> Again there is no eating visible and the seated banqueters are formalized through the gesture of outstretched hand with cup (or bowl). The offerings include produce held in containers balanced on the head, an animal (meat on the hoof), and a large jar suspended on a pole. This part of the scene recalls the gift bearers of the Kea painting, as does the chariot for ceremonial display. The gesture of raised hand with fingers and thumb separated recurs on one of the plaques. It is a gesture of intercultural effectiveness intimating greeting, which is also applicable to drinking ceremonies.

In Mesopotamian banquet scenes, there is no visible sign of public religious rituals,<sup>30</sup> yet an association between libations to the gods or ancestors, as referenced in texts, and drinking is apparent, since the same liquids – water, wine, beer – were used for both. Drinking therefore had special symbolic significance in a wide range of ceremonies.<sup>31</sup>

In Aegean iconography, depictions of feasting or of holding vessels from which to drink are relatively rare. Feasting is implied rather than explicit. No one is eating or even (as far as we can tell) raising the cup to their lips to drink. Yet the cup, with its allusion to ceremonial drinking, is clearly a marker of prestige and occasion.

The earliest evidence for an iconography of feasting in the Aegean may be distant in time from the Early Dynastic images from Mesopotamia, yet they have in common the socio-political context of a recently formed elite exercising power through local rulership. The earliest indication of an iconography of feasting comes in Cretan 3-sided sealstones of the Protopalatial period (Middle Minoan II). Most are from northeast Crete and not all are from palatial contexts, but, significantly, they coincide with the rise of the first 'palaces', when elite members of society would be looking for ways to express their new-found status and role in society. Large-scale feasting, which was to have its heyday in the Neopalatial era, was the perfect solution.<sup>32</sup>

Usually, such groups of images from a multi-surfaced seal are presented to the reader in seemingly random order (usually privileging human figures) in lines, read left to right or top to bottom. In the illustrations in Figure 4, to facilitate the discussion, I have organized the images on the three sides as a story reading, like the registers of Mesopotamia and Egypt, from the bottom up.

Typically, the three sides juxtapose images of animals or animal heads, containers (jugs, pithoi and other vessels), and human figures.<sup>33</sup> In the three examples illustrated in Figure 4, I have positioned the animals at the bottom, the men with containers in the middle, and what I interpret as a banqueting scene at the top. The animals are hard to identify but presumably

reference hunting and meat. On two of the seals, a man carries vessels (leather bags?) hung from a pole, implying that, like the men with containers in the Kea Miniature Frieze (as well as the one from Tylissos), they are bringing produce.<sup>34</sup> In each, the three sides build a picture of events centering around animals (hunting and meat), vessels (the bringing of produce), and one or two seated figures in association with pots or table (the banquet). Together the images combine to form a simple yet effective iconography of feasting that works through abbreviation.

As a part of the story of preparations for a feast, the 'return from the hunt' is a scene that rarely appears in Aegean glyptic art.<sup>35</sup> It is clearly depicted in the Kea Miniature Frieze, in which a hunter carries a pole with trussed animal (Figure 1d), just as it is implied in the horned animal on the Khafaje plaque in Figure 3b. In both cases, the scene is juxtaposed with other moments of the story but not with the actual hunt by men or the subsequent eating.

Even more rare as a part of the story, is the cooking of meat, as implied in the cauldron scene of the Kea Miniature Frieze (Figure 1e). A single surviving sealstone from Knossos shows this theme (Figure 5). The leg of the cloven-hooved animal projects from the cauldron, over which two figures bend, one dressed in a loincloth (like the Kea men with cauldrons), the other in a robe (like those with containers in the Kea painting). Time and space are compressed into a single image. On the other hand, as we have seen, the multiple sides of prism seals can evoke a larger part of the story through the action of rotating the image, just as the Standard of Ur does by walking around the images, or wall paintings do through shifting the gaze as one moves around or across the room, each form of image combination being predicated on cumulative viewing.

Besides the prism seals discussed above, the few Aegean images that reference feasting all relate to drinking or the proffering of drink rather than eating. In each, the participants hold up the cup for toasting, pouring or offering, focusing on the moment *before* rather than the actual imbibing. It is this that is the most resonant moment for social relations. The artist (or patron) takes this crucial, ceremonial part of the action to stand for the whole.

In a clay model from the tholos tomb at Kamilari in southern Crete, four figures seated before small tables are served by two standing figures each proffering a bowl.<sup>36</sup> Feasting here has a funerary context. Within the tomb's precinct were cups and jars as well as an altar. A wall with 'windows' behind the figures and columns that once supported a roof indicate interior space. The larger seated figures have been interpreted as deities or the dead and the scene as one of votive offerings. Alongside, were two other models, one of bread making, the other, with figures in a circle, usually described as dancers but interpreted by Nanno Marinatos as the treading of grapes.<sup>37</sup> Cumulatively, the models express

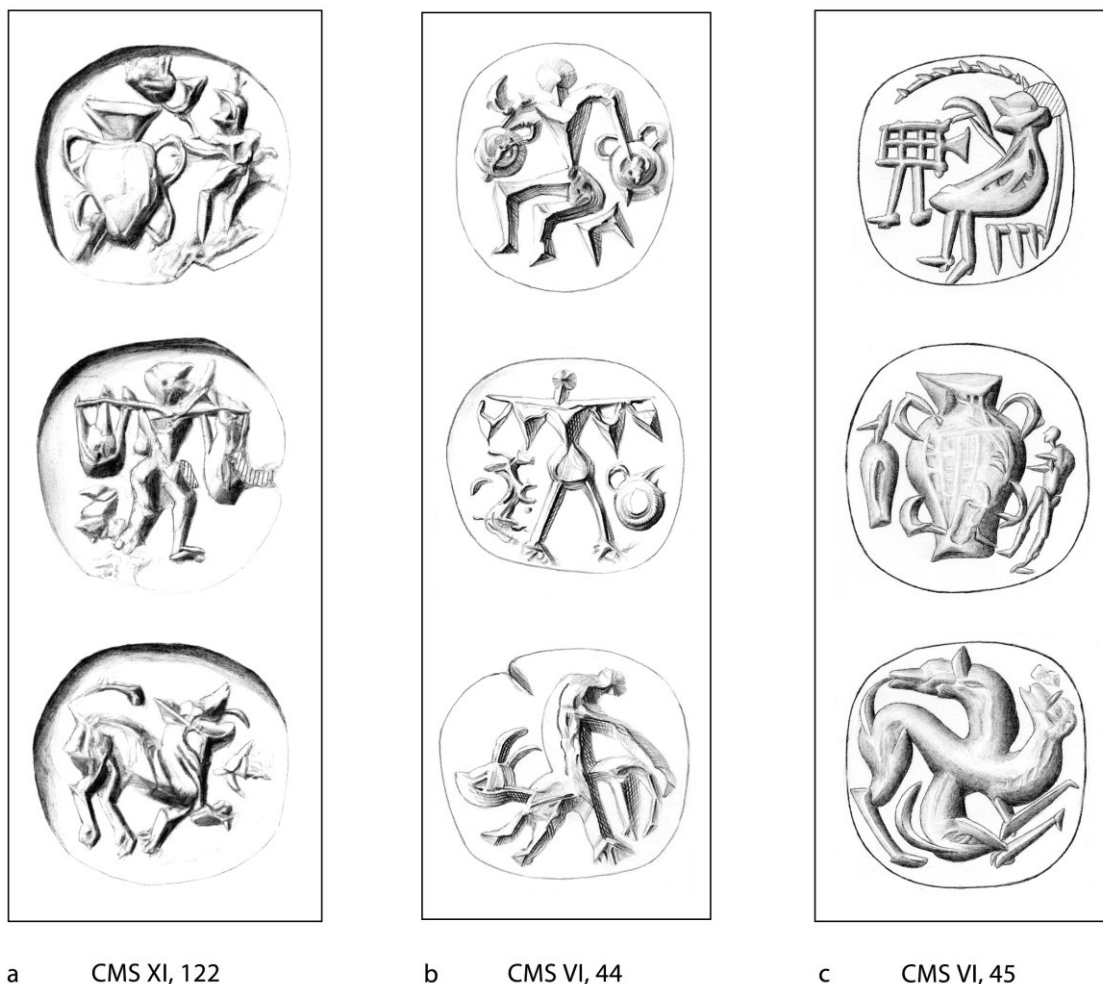


Figure 4: Three-sided steatite prism seals from Crete (drawings), Protopalatial (Middle Minoan II): (a) CMS XI, 122; (b) CMS VI, 44; (c) CMS VI, 45 (Images courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg)



Figure 5: Sealstone from Knossos (drawing), CMS II.8, 275 (Image courtesy of the CMS Heidelberg)

feasting, with preparations and a culminating offering scene. The standing figures proffer a cup or bowl and on two of the tables is a container. Yet the seated figures neither drink nor eat.

On a pictorial vase from the town of Akrotiri, Thera, two men face one another, one holding a jug for pouring, the other a cup to receive the proffered drink (Figure 6). The scene is usually interpreted as a libation scene, privileging the jug, but the presence of the cup signals drinking. The other side has a huge bird with its talons clasped around a small bird, no doubt its prey.<sup>38</sup> Story telling, perhaps mythic, here signals the importance of male drinking, most likely correlated with the notion of libation. It is the social dynamics of the scene that is most relevant here. Appropriately, the vessel on which these scenes appear is itself a jug, associating the vessel with the pourer in the scene.

A later wall painting from Knossos known as the Camp Stool Fresco has been variously reconstructed with seated and standing figures. Though fragmentary, it is clear that only drinking vessels are held.<sup>39</sup> In one fragment the stem of a vessel is clasped and held



up in front of the body; in another, better preserved, fragment, a hand proffers a vessel, while another hand stretches out to receive (Figure 7). These have been identified as chalice and goblet, drinking vessels that are thought of as Minoan and Mycenaean respectively. The two types of cup imply drinking ceremonies between different social groups. As though an extract of such a scene, a sealing from Knossos shows a robed figure seated on a stool in the open air (indicated by a plant, as on the Thera vase), holding, in this case, a 2-handled amphora.<sup>40</sup>

Long robes mark the significance of these scenes in terms of social relations centered on drinking ceremonies (Knossos) and preparations for feasting (Kea), and are worn by the participants in the only other surviving instance of probable commensal drinking in wall paintings, in Hall 6, the 'Megaron' or 'Throne Room', at the Mycenaean palace of Pylos. Two fragments show the lower parts of pairs of figures seated on stools at small tables. No food or container lies on the one surviving table, and the arms are not visible in the fragment so must have been raised. It has therefore been reconstructed with the men raising their cups in a drinking ceremony (Figure 8).<sup>41</sup> Recent re-examination of one of the fragments has revealed a small human head beneath the scene,<sup>42</sup> suggesting a larger grouping of paired banqueters.

Above the men at tables was the Lyre Player seated on a rock, with a bird flying towards the throne to the left, which is flanked by a leopard and griffin, and to the right what was interpreted as a large bull, though recent study has thrown doubt on this identification.<sup>43</sup> Low down on the wall next to the throne was a picture of a jug veined like stone, and beneath that on the ground was a channel connecting two hollows in the plaster floor for libations.<sup>44</sup> In front of the throne lay the massive hearth. From nearby came fragments of deer,<sup>45</sup> a reference to the hunt. Leading towards the Megaron, in the Vestibule, was a procession of figures bringing containers, and a large, no doubt sacrificial, bull— gifts, one assumes, for the royal host as symbolic and material contributions to the implied feast.<sup>46</sup>

From Hall 46 nearby, also with a central hearth, came a procession of men wearing greaves, some leading dogs, others carrying tripod cauldrons.<sup>47</sup> As in the earlier Miniature Frieze of Kea, they draw attention to the symbolic significance of the hunt and the social significance of consuming hunted meat in ceremonial contexts.

Pylos is unique in the Aegean for the study of feasting, as the iconography of the wall paintings is associated not only with architecture and pottery but also with texts and faunal remains. Amongst the finds in the Archives Complex at the western entrance, were quantities of burned animal bones, miniature (symbolic) cups, a storage pithos, and numerous Linear B tablets, many of which appear to refer to provisioning for sacrifices and feasts.<sup>48</sup> The tablets refer to 22 seats and 11 tables, correlating with the number of miniature kylikes. Two seats to one table perfectly

relates to the scene of elite banqueting in the painting, while the large number of bones implies a hierarchy of feasting, with privileged individuals inside the Megaron and the larger population of Pylos outside.<sup>49</sup> All of this provides contextual reinforcement for the significance of the small scene of pairs of banqueters at tables in what appears to be a drinking ceremony.

The architectural layout, finds, texts and wall paintings of the Megaron complex were resonant of processions, produce, feasting, libations, and ceremonial drinking in the context of rulership. Yet once again, no one is depicted eating. The painted scenes anticipate rather than reveal the ultimate act of consumption.

#### PROCESSIONS AND GIFTS

Feasting and drinking are the culmination of a cluster of social actions. Processions and the bringing of gifts were an essential part of small or grand scale, local or state festivals, as was the theatricality of display evident in the wearing of special robes, and the use of chariots and decorated ships. All these appear in the Kea Miniature Frieze, which takes the action further by showing the hunt, return from the hunt, and cooking in cauldrons.

In both Egypt and Mesopotamia, the New Year festival was the most notable annual event in terms of theatrical display and potency of meaning. Offerings were brought to the king or his representatives on the occasion, which sometimes coincided with public ceremonies of accession, as in the king's inauguration or jubilee, or appointment of a high-ranking official to royal office.<sup>50</sup> Several Theban tomb paintings reference gift giving in association with the New Year,<sup>51</sup> while in the Tomb of Amenemhet (TT 82), gift offerings are brought in association with a banquet on the occasion (as we read from the text of the accompanying song) of the New Year festival.<sup>52</sup>

In Near Eastern texts and art, the bringing of gifts was as essential a part of banqueting as drinking and eating. The ruler sometimes distributed rewards,<sup>53</sup> while the people brought gifts to the palace or temple. Cuneiform texts detail types of gifts (meat, beer, bread and other food) and the category of people (priests, officials, farmers etc) who brought them.<sup>54</sup> Such scenes are represented in Early Dynastic art in registers associated with a banquet (Figures 2-3).<sup>55</sup> These gift offerings constituted a public show of social, political and religious solidarity, as did the chariots and boats that were part of the processional pageantry.

In Aegean art, small-scale scenes of processions and the bringing of produce, such as we see in the Kea Miniature Frieze, are rare, and their combination with cooking is unique in Aegean iconography to this painting. In the Meeting on the Hill in the Thera Miniature Frieze (in which, on another wall, there is a procession of decorated ships), men wear ceremonial robes in procession, but no containers are carried. In the fragmentary Tylissos Miniature Frieze, the men, wearing loincloths, carry pots on poles.<sup>56</sup> Loincloths, not robes, are also worn by men carrying vessels on Minoan stone vases, which, as Nanno Marinatos points





Figure 6: The 'Libation Jug' from Akrotiri, Thera, with a drawing of one of the scenes (after Andreas Kontonis) (Late Cycladic I). Papagiannopoulou 2008, figs. 40.14-14.20. Courtesy of the Archaeological Society at Athens, Excavations at Thera



Figure 7: Reconstruction of part of the Camp Stool Fresco, Knossos (Late Minoan II-III A). Evans 1935, PM IV.2, fig. 323-5

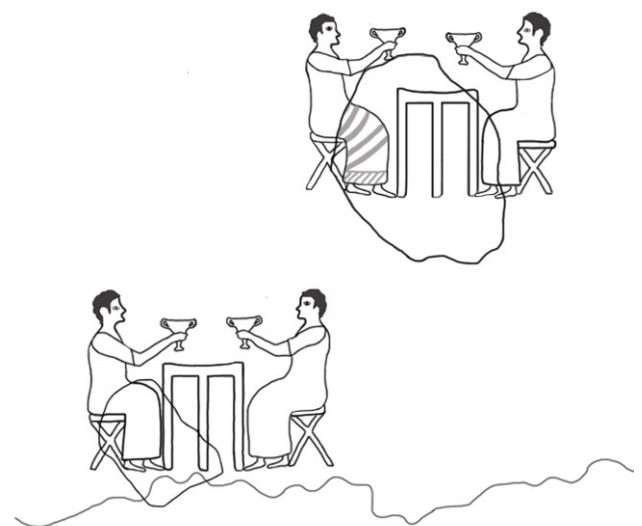


Figure 8: Reconstruction drawing of a probable drinking scene from Hall 6, Pylos (Late Helladic IIIB). Adapted by the author from McCallum 1987, pl. X and Lang 1969, pls. 28, 125-126, A (44 H 6)

out, may have been used at feasts exclusively attended by men at festivals associated with specific social events, even perhaps, as Robert Koehl suggests, with rites of passage.<sup>57</sup>

Processions in which people carry objects, including containers, are frequent in large-scale Aegean painting, especially, though not exclusively, in Mycenaean palaces, as we have seen in the case of Pylos.<sup>58</sup> No doubt ceremonial gift-bringing, as represented in these paintings and implied in a Linear B text from the palace of Pylos, coincided with preparations for a feast at major festivals in the Aegean, just as it did elsewhere in the Ancient World.<sup>59</sup> Yet the goal of the procession is rarely seen; once again, it is the preparatory action, in this case the bringing of offerings that is presented as an intimation of the unseen culminating feast.

#### EATING IS NOT FOR THE OBSERVER

Images are allusions; combinations of images provide the syntax to those allusions. Throughout the Ancient World, in images and in words, feasting is alluded to through visual metonymy. A part stands for the whole.

In Egypt, the Near East, and the Aegean, iconography focuses on significant moments of social integration through festivals and feasting, but never eating. So too in Greek, Etruscan and Roman images of banqueting, in all of which drinking presides, eating is invisible.<sup>60</sup> It is not simply that the artists have emphasized the drinking element of feasting; rather it is a means of encapsulating through a single image the symbolic conviviality of social relations. Eating under the public gaze would not be an appropriately dignified image of nobility or royalty. Social eating between elites is a private affair between consenting participants. Eating is not for the observer.

'Inconspicuous consumption' is a principle that applies to the art and literature of many cultures. An example is offered in pre-Islamic Arab literature, in which banquets are frequently though briefly mentioned. Their importance as social events is emphasized both from the point of view of the host (the poet) and of his guests. The host, prominent in his tribe, generously distributes meat that he has killed, but while the cooking pot on the fire is a frequent motif, the banquet itself is never described in detail. "The poet may depict himself as indulging in drinking wine, but never in stuffing himself with food."<sup>61</sup> Hunting, public cooking of meat, and drinking are the leitmotifs. Just as in the iconography of the Ancient World, those moments that symbolically evoke cohesive social relations are used to encapsulate the wider process of generous hosting through the feast.

In the Ancient World, festivals were a time of high visibility and occasions for a number of public religious rituals, incorporating pageantry, processions, and ceremonial gift-exchange, as well as hunting, sacrificial slaughter, and the preparation of food and wine, and ultimately eating and drinking within the social nexus. Yet a relatively narrow range of visual images is picked as the salient moments of social interaction able to stand for the event as a whole. The wearing of special robes, the pageantry of ceremonial vessels, processions of offering bearers, the

pouring of liquids, each highlights the prominence of ceremonial preparation. The festival is seen in terms of theatrical performance, the images defining the anticipatory moments before consumption, while for the feast itself, the theme of holding out the cup encompassed multivalent meanings condensed into a single image.

Broadening the thought, with rare exceptions (mostly in European art) it is hard to think of images in *any* culture in the world in which people are shown in the act of eating. On those rare occasions where someone is shown putting food in their mouth, they are usually alone, of relatively low status, or a child. Banquet tables may groan with food, but no one eats. Liquid is poured, cups are raised, but few drink. This is all the more curious when one considers that feasting is a quintessentially *social* event. Understandably, the most private moments of life – when digested food and drink leave the body – are virtually never depicted. On the other hand, private or privately shared moments of bodily touch – washing, oiling, and above all sex – are all well represented in art. The sexualized body can be viewed voyeuristically (European art), as an ideal (Greek art), or in terms of eroticized spirituality (Indian art), depending on the context of reception. But the viewing of bodily *consumption* – putting food *into* the body and expelling it *from* the body – appears on certain levels to be taboo.

In some cultures, men and women eat separately, wives serving husbands then retreating. Some rulers eat apart from their subjects, even at feasts. In both cases, the 'inferior' is prevented from viewing at close proximity the action of food entering the mouth of the one considered 'superior'. The ancient images that we have been considering are all images of elites. To show them eating would not have been appropriate to the message of superiority. When Bruegel paints people eating, the people are peasants.<sup>62</sup> In symbolic images of Virtues and Vices, 'Prudence' prepares food, 'Gluttony' eats. Eating is not depicted in ancient art because the people for whom the feasts are designed are rarefied, not equals of the viewer, but superior.

As public ritualizations of consumption, feasts provide "an arena for the highly condensed symbolic representation of social relations."<sup>63</sup> Representations of feasting, like feasting itself, are instrumental in the construction of identity and status in the social and political arena. But actual consumption – filling the mouth with food, swallowing the drink – is not the defining moment of symbolic social relations. Eating is a bodily act, a personal experience of sensation, and elite social eating is all about what happens when the food is *not* in the mouth – talking, toasting, sharing sensory sensations, atmosphere and entertainment. Satiation and intoxication are the effects of commensal relations, not the cause. It is the moments leading up to consumption – display, gift exchange, conspicuous cooking of special (especially hunted) food, filling the glass and toasting – that encapsulate the symbolic importance of elite social relations.

Στην υγεία σου, Ναννώ μου!

SPECIAL ABBREVIATION

CMS *Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel*. Berlin, 1964-2000; Mainz 2002-

NOTES

- 1 Morgan forthcoming a. Feasts and festivals are discussed in the penultimate chapter of the book. This paper expands on a particular aspect of the topic.
- 2 See for example Alcock 2006, 59; Joannes 1999, 36; Manniche 1989, 124-125; Pollock 2003, 24.
- 3 Feasting has been extensively theorized by anthropologists and the bibliography is enormous. See in particular Goody 1982; Dietler and Hayden eds. 2001; and most recently Hayden 2014, O'Connor 2015, with further references. Goody demonstrated that the ritualization of shared food consumption is not simply an *expression* of social relations or symbolic of social structure but instrumental in the *construction* of identity and status (1982, 30). Building on this theoretical stance, while drawing from the notion of *habitus* (as defined by Marcel Mauss and Pierre Bourdieu), Dietler and Hayden focused on agency, process and the active role of feasting in forming social and political relations within and between communities. Feasting in these terms is seen as playing a crucial role in cultural development. Michael Dietler's classifications of commensal feasts and their aims include 'empowering' (aimed at prestige and leadership), 'patron' (legitimization of inequalities through social debt), and 'diacritical' (symbolic naturalization of hierarchy through differentiated consumption). Brian Hayden's main categories are 'solidarity', 'competitive', 'celebratory', 'commensal'. Clearly all these overlap, and both scholars stress that 'pure' forms are rare and most commensal feasting has a diverse range of social aims and effects (cf. Hamilakis 2008, 16-17).
- 4 Cf. Fiddes 1991 on the symbolic potency of meat. On animal sacrifice in the Aegean, see Marinatos 1986. The correlation between hunting and masculinity has been discussed by a number of anthropologists (e.g. Morris 2000, 69-74).
- 5 Dietler 1990; 2001, 70; cf.; Joffe 1998 and the papers in Milano ed. 1994. On the social role of wine in the Aegean Bronze Age: Wright 1995; Hamilakis 1999.
- 6 Zaccagnine 1987; Liverani 1990. Focus on the centrality of gift exchange owes its inspiration to Marcel Mauss (2002, first published 1950).
- 7 On Egyptian festivals see Bleeker 1967; Altenmüller 1975; Sadek 1987, 167-198; El-Sabban 2000; Spalinger 2001; Teeter 2011, 56-75.
- 8 Teeter 2011, 56. The records are from Karnak at the time of Thutmose III.
- 9 Joannes 1999, 36; Schmandt-Besserat 2001, 397; Ziegler 2003.
- 10 Vanstiphout 1992, 10-12; Dalley 2000, 47; cf. Bottéro 2001 (1992), 74-75. On the Babylonian New Year Festival see Kuhrt 1987, 31-40.

- 11 Vanstiphout 1992; cf. Charpin 2013; and for ethnographic parallels, Dietler 2001, 69.
- 12 Pollock 2003, 17-18, 26, 33.
- 13 See Borgna 2004 for a survey of the evidence for Minoan feasting; also Girella 2007, 2008; and the papers in Halstead & Barrett ed. 2004; Wright ed. 2004; Hitchcock, Laffineur & Crowley ed. 2008.
- 14 Borgna 2004, 136-141; cf. Blake 2005; Hamilakis 2008, 7.
- 15 See Bendall 2007, 25-65, with further references. While the texts do not specifically refer to 'feasts' they imply them (Wright 2004a, 4). A survey of the evidence for Mycenaean feasting is provided by Wright 2004b. On the multifaceted evidence from Pylos see especially Stocker & Davis 2004; Bendall 2008.
- 16 Bendall 2008, 80; Weilhartner 2008, 412. The provisions have been interpreted as demonstrating "commitment to the social structure", rather than as taxes (Bendall 2004, 110), and have been seen in terms of a 'redistributive' function, "binding the community with a sense of indebtedness to their *Wanax* and ultimately to their gods" (Jones 2007, 190). Another suggestion is that the hosting of such large-scale feasts in a palatial context may have been connected with mobilization of troops, i.e. a 'work-feast' (Fox & Harrell 2008).
- 17 Bendall 2004.
- 18 Bleeker 1967, 124-140 (Festivals of the Dead); Ikram 2001, 163; Teeter 2011, 66-73. Teeter points out that in Egypt today both Muslims and Christians still visit their ancestral tombs "to eat and distribute ceremonial foods" (p.67).
- 19 Davies 1943 (1973), pp. 59-63, pls. LXIV-LXVII; Davies, Davies & Wilkinson 1935, pl. xxvi.
- 20 Davies 1943, p. 59
- 21 Vandier 1964, 232-256, figs. 96-115. Some Old Kingdom scenes of raising a bowl to the lips involve the tomb owner with a servant, or an intimate family scene (Vandier 1964, figs. 87-89), rather than a banquet.
- 22 Collon 1992; Pinnock 1994; Joannes 1999; Dalley 2000; Pollock 2003.
- 23 Winter 1986; Michalowski 1994.
- 24 Aruz 2003, Cat. No. 52, pp. 97-100 with color illustrations, catalogue entry D.P. Hansom; Schmandt-Besserat 2001, 394; Pollock 2003, 24. The Standard of Ur is now in the British Museum (BM 121201).
- 25 Eg. Strommenger & Hirmer 1964, pls. 50, 56, 60, 91, 96-97, 102-103, cf. the seated figures in pl. 86-89; Aruz 2003, Catalogue nos. 24-26, 88-89
- 26 Strommenger & Hirmer 1964, pls. 51 (left) / 53-54, 55.
- 27 Hansom in Aruz 2003, p.97, col. plates on p.100.
- 28 Hansom in Aruz 2003, 100, suggests an area north of Sumer.
- 29 The plaque in Fig. 3a is in the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (A 12417): K.L. Wilson, Catalogue No. 32, p. 73, in Aruz 2003. The lower right fragment (missing in the photograph) is in the Iraq Museum in Baghdad (Wilson p. 73; Strommenger and Hirmer 1964, pl. 46 (lower); it depicts wrestling games. The other plaque, Figure 3b, was in the Iraq Museum in



- Baghdad (No. IM14661, current status following the looting in 2003 unknown: <http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/IRAQ/dbfiles/objects/26.htm>); Strommenger and Hirmer 1964, pl. 45.
- <sup>30</sup> Schmandt-Besserat 2001, 396-7.
- <sup>31</sup> Pollock 2003, 25.
- <sup>32</sup> Cf. Day and Wilson (2002, 160), who point to the role of feasting in establishing political authority in the construction of the First Palace at Knossos.
- <sup>33</sup> E.g. CMS II.2-2; II.2-245; VIII-100; VSIA-43.
- <sup>34</sup> Cf. CMS VS3,16a (with man); CMS II.2,107, CMS VI,50 (without). Tylissos Miniature Frieze: Shaw 1972.
- <sup>35</sup> The theme, in which a man holds a pole with trussed animal, occurs on one of the four sides of a Middle Minoan prism seal (CMS VI, 25), along with, on the other sides, a horned and trussed animal (hunt or sacrifice), a fish or dolphin (protein or overseas travel?) and a standing man. Much later, the theme appears alone on the single surface of a Late Minoan IIIA.1 sealstone from Knossos (CMS II.8, 238).
- <sup>36</sup> Levi 1961-1962; color: Sakellarakis 1981, p.54 (HM Nos. 15074 and 15073). Proposed dating of the model has ranged from MM III – LM IIIA, with LM I as the median (see Ferrence 2008, 273).
- <sup>37</sup> Marinatos 1993, 22 (18-22).
- <sup>38</sup> Papagiannopoulou 2008, 441-444 figs. 40.14-20. See also Morgan forthcoming b.
- <sup>39</sup> Evans 1935 (PM IV.2), 379-396, figs. 318-319, 323-325. col. pl. XXXI; Cameron & Hood 1967, pl. C, fig. 5, pl. F, fig. 1, pl. V, figs 3-5, pl. VI, pls. 1-7, pl. VII, fig. 3; Platon 1959 (reconstruction: pl. H); Cameron 1964, 1987 (reconstruction: fig. 2); Immerwahr 1990, 95, 176 (Kn No. 26); Wright 1995, 292-293 (on the cups).
- <sup>40</sup> CMS II.8, 243.
- <sup>41</sup> Lang 1969 (44a H 6, 44b H 6), pls. 28, 126, A (fragments), pl. 125 (reconstruction); McCallum 1987, pl. X. Figure 8 has been re-drawn by the author for this publication.
- <sup>42</sup> [http://www.classics.uc.edu/prap/reports/HARP2004#body.1\\_div0.2\\_div1.5](http://www.classics.uc.edu/prap/reports/HARP2004#body.1_div0.2_div1.5), fragment 44a H 6.
- <sup>43</sup> Lang 1969 (19 C 6), pls. 53, 125; McCallum 1987, 94-96, 132-133, pl. X. Piet de Jong's drawing in Lang (pl. 125) reconstructs a bull standing to the left of the bard and banquet scene; McCallum's has it trussed on an altar (an additional fragment) to the right of the bard. Doubt as to the identification has been voiced by the team working on a re-analysis of the Pylos wall paintings (Stocker & Davis 2004, 70, n. 47, citing H. Brecoulaki, C. Zeitoun and A. Karydas).
- <sup>44</sup> Lang 1969 (2 M 6), pls. 108, 141 (jug); Blegen & Rawson 1966, 88.
- <sup>45</sup> Lang 1969 (36 C 17), pls. 136, G, large-scale rump; cf. (4 C 19), pls. 45, E, head with well preserved antlers, on a much smaller scale. McCallum considers it unlikely that the large deer came from the Megaron itself, but rather that it fell from a room above (1987, 104-105).
- <sup>46</sup> Lang 1969 (5 H 5-15 ), pls. 3-11, 119-120, N; Cf. Blakolmer 2008, 259, on the implication of a feast.
- <sup>47</sup> Lang 1969 (21 H 48), pls. 15, 116, 122
- <sup>48</sup> Stocker and Davis 2004; Killen 1998.
- <sup>49</sup> Stocker and Davis 2004, 71-73; Bendall 2008; Palaima 2000, 237 (on the tablets).
- <sup>50</sup> Aldred 1970. Cf. Joannes 1999, 35.
- <sup>51</sup> E.g. 12<sup>th</sup> dynasty: Tomb of Antefoker, TT 60, (Porter & Moss 1960, 122 (11); Davies 1920, pp. 16-17, pls. x, xiii, xiv). 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty: Tomb of Amenhotep, TT 345 (Porter & Moss 1960, p.413-4, (1, 5); Tomb of Amenhotep, TT 73 (Porter & Moss 1960, p.143 (2-3); Säve-Söderbergh 1957, pp. 2-8, pls. i-vi, ix (A); Tomb of Sennufer, TT 99 (Porter & Moss 1960, 205 (A)); Tomb of Mentiywy, TT 172 (Porter & Moss 1960, p. 280 (9); TT 348 (Porter & Moss 1960, p.415 (1). In the tomb of Menkheperra'sonb (TT 86) foreigners, including *Kefiu* (Aegeans) bring 'tribute', i.e. gifts, on the occasion of the New Year Festival (Menkheperra'sonb: Davies & Davies 1933, pp.2-9 (esp. 3-4), pls. I (frontispiece), III-VII, XX, pp. 2-9; Porter & Moss 1960, p.177 (8)). A similar association, though not as direct, occurs in the tomb of Puimre (TT 39), where there is also a banquet scene associated with recording produce: Porter & Moss 1960, pp.71-74, plan p.64: (12) foreigners, (14-15) New Year gifts, (5) banquet; Davies 1922-1923, 'tribute': vol. I, p. 79-92, pls. frontispiece, XXXI-XXXIV; banquet: pls. XLI-XLII; New Year gifts: vol. II, pp. 39-40, pls. LXIII-LXIV). Both Puimre and Menkheperra'sonb were priests of Amun in the time of Tuthmosis III, equivalent to LM IB in the Aegean.
- <sup>52</sup> Davies & Gardiner 1915, pp. 37-41 (esp. 41), pls. iv-vi (A); Porter & Moss 1960, p. 164 (5).
- <sup>53</sup> Bottéro 2001 (1992), 69.
- <sup>54</sup> Schmandt-Besserat 2001, 398-399.
- <sup>55</sup> Pinnock 1994, 19.
- <sup>56</sup> Thera: Doumas 1992, pls. 26-27; also Morgan 1988; Televantou 1994. Tylissos: Shaw 1972.
- <sup>57</sup> Koehl 1986, 1997, 145-147, 2006, 336; Marinatos 2005, 149, 154.
- <sup>58</sup> On processions and the carrying of containers in Aegean wall paintings, see especially: Peterson 1981; Boulotis 1987; Blakolmer 2007, 2008; and at Akrotiri, Thera: Doumas 1992, pls. 109-115, 131-134.
- <sup>59</sup> Cf. Warren 2006, 260; Blakolmer 2008, 259. On Linear B tablet PY Tn 316 see: Sacconi 1999, 361-362; Palaima 1999, 451-454.
- <sup>60</sup> Cf. Alcock 2006, 186, on banqueting scenes at Pompeii.
- <sup>61</sup> Gelder 1992, 86.
- <sup>62</sup> *The Wedding Banquet*, c. 1568, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; *The Harvesters*, 1565, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Notably, in *The Wedding Banquet*, some of the guests put food into their mouths, while the bride sits serenely with her hands firmly folded in front of her.
- <sup>63</sup> Dietler 1996, 89.

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