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# FAIENCE GODDESSES AND IVORY BULL-LEAPERS: THE AESTHETICS OF SEXUAL DIFFERENCE AT LATE BRONZE AGE KNOSSOS

Benjamin Alberti

## **Abstract**

In the figurative art of Late Bronze Age Knossos one recognises a singular form to the human body which crosscuts all other distinctions. Contrary to popular and academic interpretations, sexed differences are not marked in a clearly binary fashion. Drawing on this observation, the current paper analyses the relationship between two sets of figurines from the Bronze Age Palace site of Knossos: the faience figurines from the ‘Temple Repositories’ and the ivory bull-leaper figurines from the ‘Domestic Quarter’. The interpretation of these figurines elucidates: a) how the appearance of sexual characteristics are context specific and not general features of the imagery; and b) the differing aesthetic responses motivated by and surrounding these two sets of artefacts and hence the social contexts in which representations of sexed differences were mobilised.

## **Keywords**

Knossos; Bronze Age Aegean; figurines; aesthetics; gender; art; agency

## **Introduction**

The art works from Knossos, Crete, are traditionally interpreted as integral to a cultural visual aesthetic which embraced the greater part of the Aegean and endured for at least two millennia. Sophisticated studies include the search for schools of painters (Cameron 1975), individual styles and portraiture (Preziosi and Hitchcock 1999: 143), or the classification of iconographic groups (e.g. Younger 1993). The norms of the societies in question are understood to be produced in the imagery, among which the clear-cut distinction between men and women's roles and male and female symbolism occupies a central position. Such studies are essential for any study of the art of the Aegean, but, as Coote and Shelton (1992a: 6) have remarked for the case of anthropology, stylistic analyses are a means to an end, not the end itself. There is an almost complete lack of critical discussions of art, aesthetics and sexed differences within this literature. There is a need, therefore, to move beyond the classificatory or descriptive tendency in Bronze Aegean art studies to a consideration of recent developments in theory on art and aesthetics and, simultaneously, to begin a detailed engagement with the particularities of specific 'aesthetics' of sexual difference.

In this paper I argue both against art as passively reflective of society's norms and against a binary organisation to sex as a natural fact of the body which is a priori and central to representations of bodies. I present a general theoretical argument about the nature of human-object relations, especially in the context of human imagery, as well as a specific argument about the representation of sexual difference at Knossos. The latter serves to illustrate how a particular regime of sexual difference is both

expressed by and generated through figurative imagery and, crucially, how that imagery articulates with particular instances of practice. Aesthetic and formal qualities of the imagery are understood to act as the channels for such connections. Rather than considering meaning as symbolically overlain or applied to static and arbitrary material (artefactual or corporeal), I take a relational view of ‘art objects’ (Gell 1998) and a processual view of the constitution of gendered identity. As such, there is no a-temporal, fixed ‘core’ to a person’s identity – such as the peg of a natural, biological sex upon which culturally constituted gender is hung – outside of the acts and gestures that constitute it (Butler 1990). Further, art objects are the objectification of, and the conduit for, agency and social relationships. The aesthetic and formal qualities of the objects in question constitute the crucial link between concepts of the body, their representation and social practice.

Aesthetics is frequently treated as the response to visual stimuli and/or the appreciation of beauty. In its broader meaning, however, it encompasses sense perceptions in general (Firth 1992). The anthropology of aesthetics, as distinct from the anthropology of art, has emerged relatively recently (see Coote and Shelton 1992b) – a trend yet to be reflected in archaeology – and has generally concentrated on the visual as opposed to more general sense of aesthetics. A possible reason for the avoidance of sense perception more generally could well be the analytical ‘softness’ or subjectivity that such an approach would appear to imply, reflecting the common (and possibly misplaced) critique of the universalising tendencies of aesthetics in general (see Gell 1999a). Similar criticism of broadly phenomenological studies in archaeology (e.g. Tilley 1994), in which the particular ‘embodied’ experience of the archaeologist is apparently generalised to encompass the life-world of past peoples,

may reflect a suspicion that such an approach can only create the vaguest (and therefore virtually meaningless) of generalities about archaeological objects.

Gell (e.g. 1999a) has been particularly critical of the aesthetic turn in anthropology, arguing that an anthropological theory of art must make a complete break with aesthetics (1992: 42, 1999b: 210). However, Gell does not in fact advocate the abandonment of aesthetics altogether. His critique, rather, is centred on those who see in aesthetics a universalising potential or those who tend to 'reify the aesthetic response' independently of social context (Gell 1998: 4). Part of the problem is the narrowness with which aesthetics has become defined. While I agree with Coote (1992: 246) that the category of 'visual art' has become so broad as to subsume many 'aesthetics' qualities within contemporary theory, I nonetheless concur with Gell (1998: 82) that the aesthetic response cannot be treated in isolation from the production of artworks and their social context. However, Gell's (1998: 81) claim that the pure aesthetic response is a myth is perhaps less contentious than he suspected. I believe the apparent dichotomy between artwork and aesthetic approaches can be largely transcended in analysis by recognising the impact and potential of aesthetic responses within a particular social (or cultural) frame.

Within these discussions the status of the 'object' is of course of central importance for archaeology. There is a general consensus in certain archaeological and anthropological circles that a focus on the formal and active qualities of objects as objects is of importance if we are to more fully appreciate their roles in mediating, generating and changing social relations (e.g. Gell 1998; Gosden and Marshall 1998). Art objects can be usefully thought of as exercising or referring to a particular type of agency, just as bodies can also act as art objects, blurring the theoretical distinction between the bodies of things and humans (Appadurai 1986; Gell 1998; although see

critique in Gosden this volume). Here, I believe, is where the aesthetic line taken by authors such as Coote (1992) can be reconciled with Gell's (1998) action-centred approach to art. Objects can be understood to have aesthetic effects that are conditioned by the conceptual regime of which they form part. Aesthetic response and effect – both visual and perceptual more generally – are the means through which ideas and social relations are objectified and experienced. Attention to the formal qualities of objects, advocated by both Gell and the 'aestheticians', within the general structuring context of a particular 'art production system', enables us to move towards a historically and cultural specific aesthetics (in its broadest sense) which is firmly anchored within the context of specific social relations and is not merely the elucidation of individual, subjective response.

The aspect of the 'art production system' which interacts most clearly with sexual difference in the figurative art of Late Bronze Age Knossos is the manifestation of a singular form to the human body which cross-cuts all other distinctions. Moreover, in this system sexed differences are not marked in a clearly binary fashion (Alberti 2001). Treating this observation as the general context of figurative representation at the site, I analyse the relationship between two sets of figurines from the Palace at Knossos: the faience figurines (Figs 1, 2 and 3) from the so-called 'Temple Repositories' and the remains of the ivory bull-leaper figurines (Fig. 4) from the 'Stair Closet' and 'East Treasury' (see Fig. 5). I draw upon a series of structural oppositions and depositional symmetries as analytical resources to enable the general, material and aesthetic similarities and their potential relationship to specific, practice-related differences in means of representing the human body at Knossos to emerge. From this evidence, I argue that a general visual regime of sexual difference was mobilised and manipulated in varying contexts associated with the

potential effects of particular, aesthetically distinct objects. Always within the greater structuring context of the Palace itself, social relations were mobilised and maintained through such material differences.

### **Art and gender in Minoan studies**

The figurative imagery found at Bronze Age Aegean sites includes frescoes, seal-stones, sealings, large-scale relief sculpture, and ceramic, bronze, ivory and faience figurines. There is an analytically hazardous familiarity about this artwork, above all the impressive frescoes from sites such as Knossos and Akrotiri. The formal similarities between the art and contemporary Western visual aesthetic standards have led to the development of easy analogies between two temporally distant cultural contexts. As a result, the study of the art has moved from an original concern with the purely visual aesthetic impact of such work (e.g. Evans 1921—35) to the more recent trend of the painstaking yet relatively uncomplicated classification of the various elements that make up the imagery, especially the iconographic and symbolic aspects (e.g. Younger 1993). Gender has generally been considered an uncontroversial and key element of such classification, and almost exclusively interpreted as polarised in terms of iconography and hence actual activity, role and status within Bronze Age Aegean society (see Alberti 2001; Preziosi and Hitchcock 1999: 18—20).

The varying interpretations of the artwork have been strongly influenced by the cultural milieu of their times (see Bintliff 1984; Lee 2000). Although establishing the origins and connections between the formal and stylistic contents of the art has always been a concern, the last few decades have seen an increased need to classify

and order the material in a more systematic way. This work has mainly concentrated on, but is certainly not restricted to, studies of glyptic imagery (see Kontorli-Papadopoulou 1996; Younger 1993; Laffineur and Crowley 1992), and although enormously useful for purposes of data collection, description and stylistic comparison, it is based on the sorting of images by imposing, in a largely uncritical fashion, categories and classes which can obscure other ways in which the images are organised. A particular outgrowth of this classificatory urge has been the development of a loosely defined structuralist analysis of the imagery. Types are then accommodated into oppositional categories, in the case of the figurative imagery these categories are inevitably male versus female, and these images are then treated as evidence for a radical gender polarity throughout the Bronze Age Aegean (e.g. Marinatos 1987a, 1995).

The various classes of figurines from the Bronze Age Aegean have been assigned gendered roles or functions based on the interpretative schema outlined above. They are functionally understood to be either offerings, or actual venerated images of deities. The greatest numbers of figurines were found at so-called shrines, such as the peak sanctuaries, or at elite centres such as the palace sites. During the late Bronze Age on Crete, bronze figurines are found most commonly at peak sanctuaries associated with major centres and are considered to be luxury goods (Hitchcock 1997; Preziosi and Hitchcock 1999: 132). There are a few examples of ivory (or chryselephantine) figurines or their manufacture, most notably at the palace site at Knossos, on the 'royal road' in the surrounding town, and a figure from Palaikastro (MacGillivray 1987). Faience figurines have only been found at Knossos.

Notwithstanding the contextual and numerical dissimilarities between the various types of figurines, they have generally all been used as comparable classes of



evidence for the elucidation of gender. In the case of the faience figurines, their uniqueness as evidence is often ignored due to the clarity with which they display certain features such as clothing and patterning. Consequently, their material specificity has been under-emphasised in favour of using them as the ideal type of Minoan woman, or as the basis for comparative studies of Minoan dress (e.g. Lee 2000). Similarly, the ivory figurines are taken as the quintessential male Minoan athlete – lithe and muscular – whose explicit lack of male genitalia is ignored.

### **Art objects and sexual difference**

Previous approaches to the art works from the Bronze Age Aegean have generally either studied the visual aesthetic norms of a culture or implicitly understood the iconography and imagery as symbolic of cultural meanings. However, rather than see the art as encoded symbolic messages, Gell (1998: 6) urges that we think of art as ‘a system of action’. To this end, there is no distinction to be made between persons, bodies and art objects, for each is subject to an ‘abduction of agency’ (ibid.: 13), and can therefore be perceived of as acting like a social agent. Gell (ibid.: 15) argues that the understandings or interpretations we bring to bear on the aspects of art objects is similar or identical to how we interpret social others. In a discussion of the significance of fetishes (which can be generalised to other art objects), Gell (ibid.: 62) argues:

An instructed person, approaching such a fetish, does not see a mere thing, a form, to which ... [they] may or may not respond aesthetically.

Instead, what is seen is the visible knot which ties together an invisible skein of relations, fanning out into social space and social time. These relations are not referred to symbolically, as if they could exist independently of their manifestation in this particular form; for these relations have produced this thing in its concrete, factual, presence; and it is because these relations exist(ed) that the fetish can exercise its judicial role.

Art objects therefore are ‘indexes’ of the relationships which constitute them and which they objectify.

There is an obvious advantage for archaeologists in thinking of humans and objects as analytically similar, as we study their interrelation from the inanimate remains of their interactions (see the biographical approach to material culture, in Gosden and Marshall 1999; Kopytoff 1986). It also meshes well with recent feminist scholarship which emphasises the constitutive power of performance, construed in its broadest sense (Butler 1990, 1993). Both approaches avoid intrinsic meanings and core, fixed identities; rather, they emphasise the generative role of material culture, the relational aspects of identity, and the citational power of practice as precedent.

Butler’s (1990) thesis of performativity involves a move away from the idea of an ‘interior’ space which contains a person’s gender core. She argues that the body mobilises psychic action in the first place; a gendered identity and a sexed body are produced by processes that occur on the surface of the body. The repeated stylisations of the body – everyday acts and gestures – produce the gendered identity of which they are thought to be the expressions. Because there is no transcendental inherent quality to gender, the stylisation of the body must be continually repeated. Through

that repetition the acts of gender congeal over time and give the appearance of a substance – of ontological integrity – to gendered identities. Consequently, there is no a-historical corporeal core to gendered identities posited on the universal characteristics of sex. Gender is performative in that it constitutes the identity it is purporting to express (Butler 1990: 25).

Gell (1998) and Butler (1990, 1993) allow us to make the connection between the constitution of lived ideas of sexual difference through practice (or performance) via the medium of the aesthetic reception of art objects. Moving away from passive notions of art, gender and the relationship between practice and ideas, allows us to reformulate a number of common understandings. Firstly, art objects have real effects on practice and ideas, and do not merely reflect or simplistically transmit these ideas or social messages. Further, bodies, sex and gender are not as distinct from objects (such as clothing, adornments, and painting) or from their representations as has been considered. In other words, they are neither reflections of ideas nor cultural elaborations of an uncomplicated natural body. Lastly, and consequently, ideas of bodies and sex/gender emerge through material practices that are intimately related to the manipulation and sensory perception of particular forms. The culturally bound aesthetic effects of figurative imagery play an active role in producing specific conceptualisations and embodied experiences.

A particular area of convergence between these two theorists concerns their understanding of ‘gestures’ and performances as in some ways constitutive. In Butler’s (1990) case they are constitutive of gendered identities, rather than expressions of such identities. Gell (1998: 191) argues that ‘graphic gestures’ can be constitutive rather than merely representational; they do not stand for something else which is absent, but are themselves an example of the supposedly absent thing.

Nonetheless, the means by which the legitimacy of that ‘graphic gesture’, and hence its efficacy, is guaranteed is through its stylistic coherence and hence resemblance to other imagery. Similarly, Butler (1993: 12—16) argues that the power of a particular act is through its citation of the network of prior, accepted practices. In other words, objects are never just singular entities, but rather are members of categories of objects, artefacts or art works. They have relationships with other objects which crucially effect their significance. The relations between art objects and other, related art objects is akin to the relationship between other social agents (Gell 1998: 153). In the following discussion, the relationship between the two sets of figurines is understood as a key to their significance and for understanding the corporeal aesthetic which they embodied and of which they formed a part. After Gell (1998: 153), and contra the idea of a universal aesthetic, I argue that the form and aesthetic particularity of objects gains meaning from their inclusion within a ‘culturally and historically specific art-production system’.

### **The material lives of the figurines**

The remains of the ivory figurines (Fig. 4) were found in a closet under the so-called ‘service staircase’ in the ‘Domestic Quarter’ of the Palace (Fig. 5; Evans 1901-2: 70), alongside objects of gold, bronze, ivory, faience and crystal. Evans (*ibid.*: 71) associated the finds in the closet with another deposit from the ‘East Treasury’ six metres to the south. The faience figurines (Figs 1, 2 and 3) and clothing were recovered from the ‘Temple Repositories’ (Fig. 5) in an area on the opposite side of the ‘Central Court’ to the ivory deposit, below two cists of a later date (Evans 1921:

464). The faience objects were predominantly found carefully laid out in the lowest layer of the eastern repository (Evans 1921: 498); other finds included further faience objects, gold foil, a large number of pots, bronze handles, a large number of faience and ivory inlays, and sealings. The faience figurines were found in a damaged condition and have been fairly heavily restored with plaster (Panagiotaki 1995: 146).

The ivory figurines were found in a 'very friable condition' (Evans 1901-2: 72). Gold-plated bronze hair attachments were also found, in one case still in place on the head. Evans (*ibid.*) suggested that the thin gold plate found in the deposit may have been loin-clothing for the figurines, although none was found attached to the actual figurines. According to Evans (1901-2: 70), the ivory figurines were found immediately below a layer of 'transitional' (MM IIIB/LM IA) Minoan vessels. The faience figurines were dated by Evans (1921: 495—523) to the same period, but Panagiotaki (1993: 88) has argued on the basis of motifs on the sealings and faience objects from the deposit, as well as the pottery, that the deposit is more likely to have been from a LM I destruction context.

The 'Stair Closet' and 'East Treasury' where the ivories were found are very secluded areas. If Evans (1930: 401) is correct in assigning them to an upper storey room, then the space would have been more secluded, with no windows or light-wells, and a solid floor of rough-hewn limestone blocks. The 'Treasury' room may have had a marine-style rock pattern flooring of red porphyry limestone (Koehl 1986: 407), creating an impressive visual effect, and lending strength to the idea that the room was of some importance. The existence of carbonised wood and bronze handles amongst the deposit lead Evans (1901-2: 71—2; 1930: 401) to suggest that the items were originally kept in wooden chests. Access to the area would have involved following a circuitous route through a large part of the 'Domestic Quarter'.

In contrast, the faience figurines were recovered from two specific storage units and were deliberately placed and arranged within them. All the remains of the figurines and associated objects were found laid out in the bottom context of the east repository, apart from the 'upper part' (Evans 1921: 495) of the larger figurine which was found in the fill of the west repository. Panagiotaki (1993: 86) states that the objects must have been broken before they were introduced into the repositories, as no further fragments were found in the fill.

The room in which the 'Temple Repositories' are located is immediately north of a room where a large pithos was found embedded in the floor and which was apparently used for storage (Hallager 1987: 171). Both rooms form an adjunct off the 'Lobby of the Stone Seat', or 'Room of the Column bases', which gives access to the 'Central Court' to the east, a confusion of possible halls to the south, and the 'Pillar Crypts' and 'West Magazines' to the west (see Fig. 5). The area underwent structural changes throughout the life of the Palace, but appears to have served as the principal access route to the 'West Magazines'. During the Minoan palatial periods a tripartite 'shrine' was constructed directly facing the 'Central Court' to the east of the room with the 'Temple Repositories' (although see Panagiotaki 1999).

It is clear that the material used in the manufacture of both sets of figurines involved a great deal of effort to obtain. Ivory is not found on Crete, possible Minoan sources of which were Egypt or Syria (Watrous 1994: 750). The faience includes natron, a mineral not locally obtainable (Foster 1987: 287), and manganese from Egypt was used in the black colouring on the figurines (Foster and Kaczmarczk 1982). The various parts of the faience figurines were moulded, each figure and body part from a separate mould, and then pinned together. The ivory pieces were carved and then pinned. Ivory allows for intricate carving which can better express an idea of

movement and clean lines; faience is harder to work, but brighter colours can be produced on the objects. Furthermore, the faience figurines include an extra layer of finely-ground white quartz, applied as a paste (Panagiotaki 1995: 147); the result is an especially brilliant glaze which emphasises the colours of the figurines.

The manner in which the materials were deposited and the condition in which they were found differs. Panagiotaki (1993: 86; see also Preziosi and Hitchcock 1999: 93) has suggested that the careful deposition of the faience figurines and the layer of red earth carefully laid over the deposit indicates that the broken figurines were given a 'ceremonial burial', a type of consecration for the continuing use after reconstructions of the 'Temple Repositories' area. The idea that objects may be 'killed' (see Thomas 1996: 162) has been argued in the case of the Minoan bulls-head rhyton (Rehak 1995). Evans makes no reference to the condition in which the ivory figurines were found within the deposits, suggesting that such deposition was careless, or accidental, rather than deliberate.

### **The performative status of the Knossian sexed body**

An analysis of the presentation of the bodies of the two sets of figurines within the context of the general template for Knossian imagery of the body reveals that the presentation of the body and sexed differences is distinct for the two sets of figurines. It is argued that the appearance of breasts on the faience figurines is a specific instance of departure from the Knossian body template, and that sexed differences only appear in conjunction with specific types of figurative imagery.

The details of the body of the nearly complete ivory figurine include: clear muscular definition on the surviving arms; open hands, long fingers and protruding thumbs; long, flat feet; exaggerated ears; and, gold-plated bronze hair attachments. Seen from the front the restored figure gives an impression of great strength and movement; these traditional ‘masculine’ traits are not, however, backed up by an explicitly sexed body. The typical features – the broad shoulders, hand position, large ears, etc. – clearly place it within the Knossian template for representations of the body (see Alberti 1997, 2001).

Many of the same bodily details are emphasised on the faience figurines, including large ears, separately modelled hair, and particular hand positions. The musculature of the arms of the faience figurines is not emphasised, although the breadth and musculature of their backs is (see Fig. 3). Furthermore, the figurines do not have feet, but stand directly on the base of their skirts in an apparently more formal poise. The snakes emphasise the shape of the body of the larger figurine, and appear to be an integral part of the figure.

The ivory figurines emphasise the musculature and activity of the body; the faience figurines are in a more rigid and ‘fixed’ position, and were clearly meant to stand up. Similarly, the faience figurines are more closely associated with the snakes they hold and the elaborateness of the clothing, as well as with a number of separate items of apparel, some of which may have formed part of a compositional arrangement. Perforations through the faience clothing found with the figurines, for example, indicates they could be hung on pinned up.

The opening in the bodices where the breasts are placed on the figurines is not indicated on the faience robes. If these objects were ‘true’ representations of the dress presented on the figurines, then a cut-away section at the neck of the robes would



have been easily achieved to signify the absent breasts, and the shape of the female body around which the robes are supposed to open. Such a detail is not included; it would appear, rather, that breasts only appear, or are indicated, when the robes are combined with a body. Furthermore, the use of different colour glazes for the breasts and faces of the figurines alludes to the status of the breasts as distinct or detachable from the rest of the body.

The sexed body, therefore, is brought into being – materialises (see Butler 1993) – when a particular type of garment is combined with a body within a specific context of representation. As such, the breasts are an integral part of the costume of the figurines. A ‘naked’ body with breasts does not occur in the Knossian imagery. Rather, the breasts combine with the dress and ornamentation of the figurines to produce a sexed body. As such, a gendered body does not pre-exist its representation in Knossian imagery; rather, the costumes, adornments, acts, body position and medium of representation combine to performatively produce gender on the figurines.

### **Aesthetics and material practices**

The two types of body appear to represent a dichotomy between a lithe, athletic, male body and a formal, religious female body. However, both groups of figurines adhere to and depart from the common body-shape. The discrepancies between the two have more to do with the ways in which the general body template interacts with the aesthetic potentialities of the figurines within the context of the social practices of which they were a part than with a straightforward and a-temporal male/female dichotomy. The task is to elucidate specific areas of practice in light of these

arguments about the body in order to draw out the differences in the presentation of the human form and their relationship to the formal qualities of the art objects under consideration. The place of these objects within a number of overlapping contexts – material and social – enables their potential social effect to be elucidated. These consist of the actual material from which the figures were created, the process of their production, and their existence within the larger ‘artefact’ of the Palace itself.

The materials from which the figurines were produced indicate similarities and differences in their reception and aesthetic effects. The effect in a sense was double, or complimentary. The materials from which they were made would have ‘enchanted’ through the difficulty with which they were obtained, referencing, as they would have, the ability of certain people at Knossos to attract trade and goods from far-off lands. However, the value of the objects, and their effect on social relations, did not merely accrue to these materials because they were difficult to obtain. Rather, the individual aesthetic qualities and potential of their ingredients within the context of the Palace at Knossos gave them value. Although both essentially of foreign extraction, there are important formal and material differences between the sets of figures which reference distinct deployments of aesthetic qualities which are linked to the deviations from the general codes of Knossian sexed body imagery.

Apart from their probable involvement in ritual, the efficacy of the faience figurines, and a probable reason for their careful deposition as still-potent ‘agents’ after their breakage, was guaranteed by the density of the relationships of which they were the objectification. The faience figurines were found in association with an area of the Palace explicitly devoted to storage. This function of the Palace was complemented by an equally explicit display of ‘religious’ or ‘cultic’ paraphernalia. Preziosi and Hitchcock (1999: 120, 132) argue for the recurring association of storage

activities with certain cultic equipment or representations, such as the double axe and pillar rooms. Furthermore, Hallager (1987) argues that the storage of goods at Knossos during the Minoan periods had a religious as well as secular significance. The images may well have served as vehicles for divinities, or have been considered divine themselves. Such an interpretation is supported by the large, hypnotic eyes on the faience figurines, often a sign of the animation of idols as divinities (Gell 1998). There were other faience objects found in the area, but not of the same scale as the figurines. It seems likely that the figures themselves embodied, quite literally, the various types of exchange that defined the character of the palace; the material not only manifested the ability of the Palace to continue successfully in such endeavours, but also reflected the efficacy of the social relations that surrounded them. The faience has often been quoted for its brilliance and the clarity of its polychrome decoration. In comparison to the unadorned and stark simplicity of both the metal figurines from other sites on Crete, and to some extent the ivories, the faience figurines would have exerted a marked visual effect. Add to that the nature of their exposure to the ‘public’ – most certainly restricted and probably limited to a particular group – and one begins to get a sense of the potency of their involvement in the maintenance of asymmetrical social relations in and around Knossos.

Other formal qualities of the faience figurines will have had an effect on their reception. The figures are moulded and painted in three dimensions, indicating at the least centralised display and perhaps also a tactile role. Furthermore, the detailed treatment of their clothing, apart from colluding in the aesthetic of sexual difference they present, ties them to both the practices associated with textile production and other imagery which displays a similar level of detail and/or similar patterns.

The ivory figurines share the exotic origins of the faience. However, their aesthetic affects on social relations are likely to have been quite different. They do not display such a rich layering of abducted meaning, nor a similar level of aesthetic effect. Against the singularity of the faience figurines, they are a more consistent, if not common, means of representing the human form. Furthermore, they present the more common ‘unsexed’ body of Knossian art. Their depositional context was likely casual, not deliberate, and although undoubtedly considered ‘valuable’ they were not nearly as effective as the faience figurines. Their active constituents consisted of imported raw materials, but their manufacture may have been more straightforward. As such, the types of ‘abductions of agency’ (Gell 1998) they would have motivated may not have transgressed the realms of the natural. Moreover, it is possible that they were commodities or valuables rather than actual iconic representations of divinities, which does not lessen their active participation in the world of cause and effect, but merely hints at their mortal status.

The most important material context for both sets of figurines is of course the Palace site itself. The areas in which the figurines were found contain multiple, but controllable access points: evidence from Knossos (Evans 1930: 12; Shaw 1973: 149) indicates that doors could be barred and/or locked from either side. During the MM IIIB—LM IA transition period access points to the Palace and to areas within the Palace were extensively changed (see Evans 1928: 679—82; MacDonald 1990; Walberg 1992: 114—7). The changes in architecture did not occur at a single point in time, but were on-going projects of construction and reconstruction. During the course of such reconstruction and construction various means of accessing and leaving the Palace and areas within it were blocked off and opened or re-opened. It is becoming increasingly clear that a large part of Minoan architectural design was dedicated to

transient areas, such as corridors, doorways and stairs (Hitchcock 1994; Palyvou 1987; Preziosi 1983). Furthermore, the Minoan system of pier-and-door partitions enabled particular areas to be closed of and opened, allowing control of multiple configurations of space (Hitchcock 1994). A general feature of the Palaces in the Second Palace period was the increase in number of corridors, leading to the greater possibility of privacy (Preziosi and Hitchcock 1999: 111—12).

There are two aspects of the Palace which will have played a role in the channelling of the aesthetic effect of the sets of figurines. The first is the simple result of an obvious aesthetic of display which was controlled, enabling the exhibition or closure of certain areas of the site. The figurines were in particularly isolated and controllable areas, lending support both to the idea of the figures as efficacious partly through limited access and also to the idea that the entire complex, in some sense, was designed for procession and display. As such, an integral part of seeing and/or touching the images would have involved the sensory (haptic and motor) experience of manoeuvring through the spaces of the Palace, themselves richly adorned with static wall paintings and grand passageways.

This leads to the second aspect of the palace layout. It may not have only been the effect of particular spaces and images that lead to a final destination, and perhaps the small-scale but densely aesthetic figurines deep in the Palace, but the overall effect of the layout which enhanced that effect. The labyrinthine plan of the palace has often been noted. This was undoubtedly by design rather than accident, and has to do with the Palace itself constituting a kind of artefact, or even ‘body’, within which were housed other, potent artefacts. The experience of navigating these spaces – perhaps in the capacity as a foreign emissary – and, of course, without the benefit of a floor plan, would have been extremely disorienting. Gell (1998: 83-95) has discussed

the ‘enchantment’ that is a vital part of the aesthetic of certain complex designs such as mazes, the desired effect being to ‘tantalise’ and so ‘capture’ an opponent or malignant spirit. The Palace structure itself seems to have operated as a large ‘trap’ in this way, with the intention of perhaps ‘capturing’ a local populace (through seasonal embodied experience of the effects of the Palace) and/or ‘dazzling’ foreign emissaries or exchange partners through an ostentatious display of ‘unfathomable’ artistic skill and aesthetic effect.

## **Conclusions**

The faience and ivory figurines represent two different deployments of Knossian bodily representation. The significance of different representations of the body is highly contextualised and dependent upon the aesthetic qualities of the medium of representations, the medium’s embeddedness within a common style, the significance attached to particular spaces, and the mobility and potential visibility of the particular image. The sexed body only emerges in specific performative instances and in association with specific types of clothing and adornment. Furthermore, the wider significance and distinctions between various representations of sexed differences can be understood as deployed in aesthetically distinct fashions. The particular aesthetic responses elicited by the material existence of the figurines within the cultural context of the Palace site at Knossos, itself a vehicle for a particular sensory experience, facilitated the social relations through which that idea of the sexed body was sustained.

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## **List of figures and captions**

Figure 1: The larger partially reconstructed faience figurine from the ‘Temple Repositories’. Photo by the author.

Figure 2: The smaller partially reconstructed faience figurine from the ‘Temple Repositories’. After Evans (1921: fig. 362).

Figure 3: Back views of the faience figurines. After Evans (1921).

Figure 4: The restored ivory ‘bull-leaper’. After Evans (1930: fig. 296).

Figure 5: Plan of Knossos. A. Area around the ‘Temple Repositories’; B. The ‘Domestic Quarter’.