Gesture and Movement in Wall Paintings as Directives of Viewing[*]

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Abstract   *This essay examines the relationship between human figures in wall paintings within their architectural context and potential viewer reception. Large scale figures are inextricably bound to their spatial positions in communicating meaning, and it is the relationship between these and the bodily action of the viewer as they move through space that elicits response. Small scale figures lead the viewer's eyes between passages of meaning. In both, communication between painted figures within the image and between the image and the viewer is orchestrated through gesture, stance and movement. The essay explores directionality and positions on walls in relation to stasis and movement, on the premise that communicative action is the key to viewer response to painted figures within architectural space.*

Introduction

The power of figurative art to elicit response in the viewer is founded on gesture and movement. Expression is conveyed through positions of hands, inclinations of head, directions of gaze, movements of body, feet and (in some artistic traditions though by no means all) facial muscles. Above all, it is the relationships of figures to one another within the spatial configuration of the image that communicates meaning. These are the tools of the artist in turning form into meaning. So much is true of all media, whether the hard surfaces of stone, metal or ceramic, or the flat yielding surfaces of papyrus, parchment, paper or canvas. The surfaces of walls, however, are fundamentally different in one, crucially important way – they are created within an architectural space that structurally guides the viewer. In temples, chapels, palaces and houses responses are predicated on movements of participants through space and the varying emphasis of their gaze.

In this essay, I discuss some principles of spatial organization of figurative mural art in relation to architectural space and human action, first broadly, then specifically in relation to the Cyclades and Crete. The aim is to consider how gesture, movement, and spatial organization of images connect with and influence the experience of the spectator – how, in other words, mural images elicit response.

Modes of Viewing

Mural art is *experienced,* rather than simply seen. Murals have an environment, the images relating not only to the walls on which they are painted, but to the circulatory patterns of their surrounds (Palyvou 1987). Architectural schemes stimulate bodily movement and direct the gaze to places where only the eyes can reach (Bloomer and Moore 1977). Response is both spatial and temporal, dependent equally on the placement of images and the movements and focus of the participant. Experience is cumulative, as the viewer progresses through space, but also simultaneous, as the eye sees relationships between zones of imagery on each wall. Scale, both of painting and of painted space, affects viewing, as does where the images are situated in relation to entrances and exits, windows and seating arrangements, encouraging movement, visibility and stasis.

Experiencing mural images in their spatial contexts is *interactive.* The body is literally encompassed *within* the images. All the senses are involved. Ancient temples are now devoid of

[*]   The word 'directives' is used here in a positive sense, as in directionality.

their colours and emphatically lack the sounds, smells, and ritual actions of the past, but would have been experienced within a cornucopia of sensory experience (witness Hindu temples and Orthodox Christian churches today). Where paintings survive on their (or reconstructed) walls, we see them today by electric lights installed for maximum visibility, but in their original contexts ancient and medieval paintings would have been glimpsed by sunlight controlled by the placement of windows and dependent on time of day or by oil lamps carried or positioned to highlight specific images glinting in the gloom, radically affecting response, especially to depictions of human figures. Placement of figures within a programme of images involves juxtapositions with and references to figures on surrounding walls or adjacent rooms or even, in multi-storeyed buildings such as Xeste 3, to those above or below. As such, memory comes into play as the participant moves through the painted spaces (Morgan 2019, 372).

Architectural space has thresholds, boundaries and zones of increasing privacy or sanctity. Images in entrances and thresholds leading from exterior to interior alert the visiting participant of the rationale for these spatial and spiritual demarcations. External walls, door jambs, entrance passages or vestibules may announce those who enter the building (Procession Frescoes at Knossos and Pylos), honour the occupant of a tomb (Mereruka at Saqqara), or propagandize the deeds of the king at his mortuary temple (Medinet Habu, Thebes). Donorship is also deemed worthy of display near the entrance. In Byzantine churches the donor may be shown presenting a model of the church to Christ in a conspicuous position above the doorway leading into the naos (Chora, Istanbul), while Silk Road merchant-donors are represented processing along the lower walls leading into Buddhist cave temples (Dunhuang, China).

Mural art presupposes sequence. Whether or not it has a narrative, this sequence has direction through which attention is focused. Corridors guide the participant from one zone to another; thresholds act as liminal zones of transition; small enclosures define limited access; large halls encourage circulation or congregation. Horizontal zoning encourages movement of the body, while vertical zoning entails shifting the gaze upwards. Mural sequences take many configurations, according to both story and potential use of space, designed with the movements and viewing positions of participants in mind (Morgan in preparation).

Spatial sequence, gesture and movement are all directives of viewing. Bodily movements comprise gesturing in the widest sense (Mauss 1935/2005). In art, it is arrested movement that communicates (Morgan 2000, 926, 932–933; 2020, 50–53; Morris 2001, 247; Poole 2020; all with further references). Gestures encode meaning through stop-motion positions, communicating intention through recognizable gestural expression. Within each scene, figures can 'speak' to one another and to the viewer with their hands despite having closed mouths (*cf.* Barasch 1990, 15–39 on Giotto). Occasionally in Aegean art, a slightly open mouth communicates active speech (as in the youthful figures in Xeste 3; *cf.* Blakolmer, this volume) but, in most cases, it is the movements of the bodies and the gestures of the hands that speak. Repeating a gesture across figures – hands offering, arms raised, head turned or looking down – visually and conceptually links scenes, directing the eye of the viewer from one part of the story to another.

Some images include the viewer in the painted action through the disposition of figures. In the miniature Grandstand Fresco from Knossos the focus is not the unseen action watched but those who are watching (Marinatos 1989, 39; Adams 2013, 8–10). Looking at the painting, we the viewers become the performance. Frontal face images, such as those of Byzantine icons, directly engage with the eye contact of the viewer in their role as intermediaries. Back-views of figures in the forefront of a pictorial plane include the spectator into the scene of those observing the action beyond (Giotto, *The Apparition of St Francis at the Chapter Meeting in Arles,* Assisi). In each case, the viewer is invited to become a part of the pictorial message through the postures of the painted figures.

Structuring space

Most of the world's sacred buildings have a defined trajectory through zones of variable access from public to private, leading to the innermost area and revelation of the divine image, spatial design expressing notions of the cosmos (Wightman 2007, 932–952). In some cases (as in Egyptian temples) access to the public was limited to outer courts, interior action being the prerogative of priests. In others (as in Christian churches), direction for worshippers is linear from exterior to interior to a certain point, beyond which only priests access the inner ritual zone. In others (as in Buddhist and Hindu temples) circumambulation routes direct devotees in a circular motion. Structuring of space in this way is designed to be transformational and it is above all figurative images that define the experience for the participant.

In Egyptian tomb chapels, space is ritually zoned from the outside court to the mediating zone of the Transverse Hall to the Inner Passage of transformation and rebirth. The images are orchestrated with this ritual zoning and would have synchronized with movements of participants in the funerary cult. Large scale figures of the tomb owner oversee the action in the registers of small-scale scenes. The 'ka'-servants (priests) attending to the deceased's daily needs and family members visiting on feast days would face the receiving figures of the tomb owner, echoing the movements of offering bearers in the registers. In the same way, the 'ka' statue, depicted actively walking as though the spirit were emerging through the wall from the tomb below, faced towards the living bearers of food offerings or their eternal substitutes in the form of images on the walls.

In the tomb chapel of Rekhmire (Davies 1944), images, texts and space work in unison, with progression inwards and upwards towards the divine realm, painted figures leading the viewer's eyes (Fig. 1; Morgan, in press a; in preparation). On the right end wall of the Transverse Hall, a "spirit-door" to the beyond (Davis 1944, 14), Rekhmire faces outwards while his relatives face towards him, as though entering the chapel from the outside world or from the world of ancestors beyond. Deep in the inner passage on the right wall, opposite the funerary procession, are scenes of rites over the statue, in which the statues all face outwards and most of the officiants face inwards, echoing the movements of priests. Everything leads to the end wall, with its false door through which the 'ka' spirit could pass. High up, inside a niche was the 'ka' statue, animated through the rites of the Opening of the Mouth shown on the preceding wall. Directional postures of the painted figures lead towards the focal point of ritual transformation.

Coordination of ritual actions with the placement of images within architectural space is nowhere more evident than in Byzantine churches (Ousterhourt 1998; Patricios 2014). Space is hierarchic, progressing in sanctity from west to east and low to high. To experience the mosaics and paintings, the participant must walk through the ritual space, looking up and across, through doorways and arches, beneath vaults and domes, enveloped in the three-dimensionality of the iconographic programme. Each spatial zone has a range of
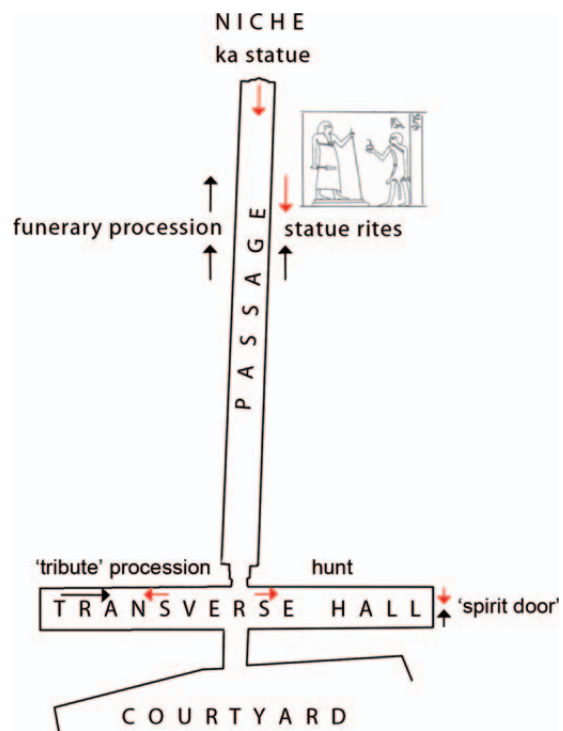

Fig. 1: The Tomb Chapel of Rekhmire showing some of the directional movements of figures. Red: Rekhmire or his statue; black: others (adapted from Morgan 2016, pl. LXII b; insert: Davies 1944, pl. CVI, detail).

images relevant to the action of participants. In the liminal zone of the narthex, saints, apostles and patriarchs line the lower parts of the walls, their frontal faces greeting the worshipper's gaze as they enter the church. On the walls and vaults of narthex and naos are narrative sequences relating to the Orthodox festivals (Patricios 2014, 256, 403). The New Testament cycle of birth, death, and resurrection echoes the seasons and is reflected in the liturgies and sermons of the church year (Maguire 1998, 129). A screen, the iconostasis, separated the naos from the bema at the eastern end, limiting visibility of the sacred mysteries of the Eucharist from the congregation while providing a surface on which to place icons as intermediaries. The frontal faces of the icons, alive with the flickering light of candles, met the gaze of worshippers, who would kiss the image in response. In the apse behind the altar is the image of Christ offering consecrated bread and wine to his disciples, mirroring the real-life ritual of the Eucharist that takes place at the Holy Table below (Patricios 2014, 257).

The painted figures lead the eye, descending the walls in order of hierarchy: celestial realms, biblical narratives, saints and ecclesiastics. Sunlight, symbolizing the source of spiritual illumination, harmonises with the images. On the ceiling, figures relate to the position of the spectator, facing west at the eastern end and east at the western end, while on the domed vaults representing the heavens, the figures lead the eye in a circular motion. The church, as a microcosm of the universe, connects the divine with the world of worshippers through the spatial organization and postures of its painted figures. This intricate plan works only through the active viewing and movements of the participants.

Wall Paintings in the Cyclades and Crete

In Aegean buildings, the loss of contextualization makes it difficult to identify spatial functions (Palyvou 2005, 107–109) or ritual movements, but the ground-breaking work of Clairy Palyvou (1987, 2000, 2005, 2012, 2018) has demonstrated how, here too, architectural design accommodates and influences patterns of human interaction. In recent years, relationships between architecture and wall paintings have been fruitfully explored in terms of visibility and viewing situations at Akrotiri (Palyvou 2000, 2012; Paliou 2008, 2011; Paliou et al. 2011; Günkel-Maschek 2011) and in Neopalatial Crete (Letesson 2012; Panagiotopoulos 2012; Günkel-Maschek 2020).

Processions and the offering gesture: Knossos and Thera

Wall paintings link space with human action. Dark corridors, such as those of the Procession Fresco at Knossos (Boulotis 1987; Günkel-Maschek 2020, 153–275 with earlier references) or the Corridor of the Mature Ladies in Xeste 3 at Akrotiri (Vlachopoulos 2008, figs. 41.33–36; Vlachopoulos and Zorzos 2014, pls. LXI–LXIV), lead inwards (Figs. 2, 6). In both cases, the large-scale figures on the corridor walls surrounded the participant as they made their way inwards, the apparent movement of the figures guiding the participant along the way like "sign-posts" (Cameron 1970, 165) while perpetuating ritual action through imagery (Hägg 1985, 210–211). Corridors led to light and controlled visibility of further images, concealing and revealing through pier-and-door partitions. At Knossos, from the open, symbolic space of the Central Court (Panagiotopoulos 2006), the sun pierces through the doors of the Throne Room at specific times of day and season (Goodison 2001, 81–87; 2004; Soar 2018). In Xeste 3, the corridor procession bends round to be framed by multiple doors controlling visibility of the images within. In Xeste 4, male figures were painted as though ascending the staircase (Doumas 1992, pls. 138–141; Rehak 1996, fig. 10; Boulotis 2005, 30–31, fig. 8; Marinatos 2020, fig. 1), as was proposed by Mark Cameron for the East Staircase at Knossos (Cameron 1978, 587, pl. 4). Like Mycenaean processional figures (Peterson 1981; Hägg 2001; Blakolmer 2007, 2008), these corridor and staircase figures acted as directional guides for those with privileged access. One can imagine actual persons walking alongside the painted figures, greeted at the end of their trajectory by persons who (with the notable exception of the Goddess in Xeste 3) are not themselves represented.
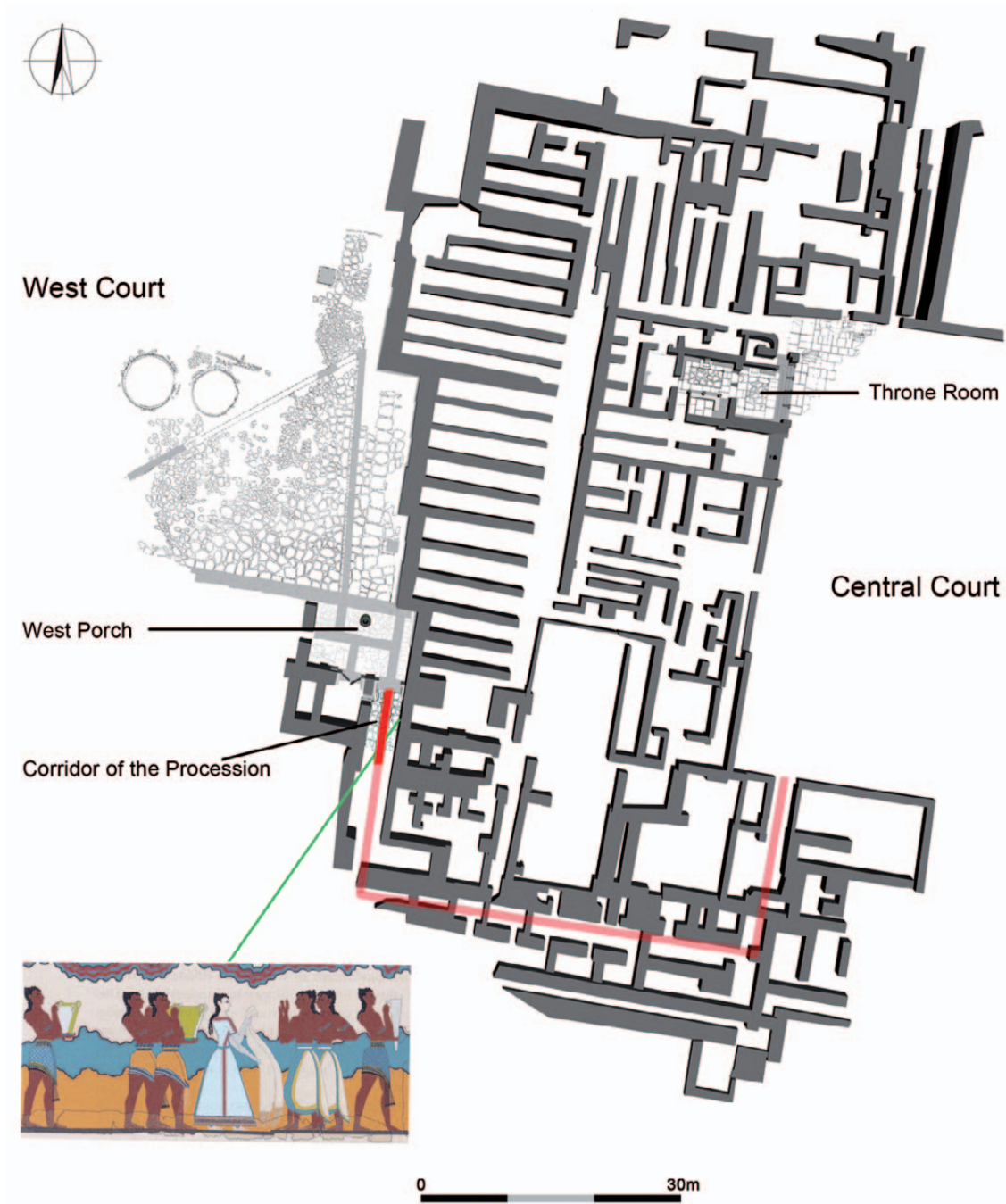
Fig. 2: The west side of Knossos showing the Corridor of the Procession (after Günkel-Maschek 2020, 157, fig. 4.1 and 259, fig. 4.16 [inset reconstruction]. Courtesy of Ute Günkel-Maschek. Red: painted Procession [light red: probable continuation of the painting]; grey in the West Court: causeways).

At Knossos, the raised walkways in the West Court marked performative movement, while signalling processional action towards the palace (Driessen 2004, 79–80; Panagiotopoulos 2006, 35–36, pl. 1; Vander Beken 2010, 145–148; Günkel-Maschek 2020, 162–163, fig. 4.1). Passing the guardian bull at the West Entrance, expressive of Knossian power (Hallager and Hallager 1995), into the Corridor of the Procession, the route, along a bent axis, provides visually sanctioned passage into the palace (Fig. 2). The action in the Procession Fresco, however, is nuanced in its directional thrust. Towards the centre of the east wall, four men face in the opposite direction to greet a female figure processing inwards. A cloth, surviving only in the lower fringe, was

either presented by the men to the female (Boulotis 1987, fig. 8) or was held out by the female (Fig. 2, inset; Günkel-Maschek 2020, fig. 4.16). The artist has subtly distinguished the spatial zones in front of the female figure by slightly raising the ground line of the group of men walking towards her and of the other men walking in the usual direction beyond this group (Günkel-Maschek 2011, 133, fig. 3; 2020, 176–177, 181, 253, 258, 270–271, fig. 4.5). The device of alternating the directions of figures expands the spatial and perhaps also temporal interactions between figures and may well have reflected movements of participants in ritual action.

A distinct engagement between figures in front and behind occurs when a figure looks over their shoulder, as in Xeste 3 (Figs. 6–8), where a youth looks back in the direction from which participants would be approaching, thus engaging with them, the girl with veil looks back at the altar to direct the viewer's gaze towards the focal point, and, on the floor above, a Crocus Gatherer looks back at her co-worker (Doumas 1992, pls. 107–109, 113; 107–108; 116–118; *cf.* Morgan 2000, 936, 941). It is a device that also appears in scenes of men meeting in the Miniature Friezes of Thera (Doumas 1992, pl. 27) and Kea (Morgan 2020, 48, 84, 203–204, cat. 36, fig. 7.12, pl. 4). Just as the change of direction in the Knossos Procession Fresco draws the viewer's attention towards a focal point, so these guide the eye in clarifying meaning and engaging with the potential movements or stasis of the participant.

The Knossos Procession Fresco is preserved only in the lower part, but at least one fragment shows a man with his lower hand at the base of his vessel while the other would have held the handle (Evans 1928, suppl. pl. XXVII; Rehak 1996, fig. 6; Günkel-Maschek 2020, figs. 4.2, 4.16). Some of the other figures in the Procession Fresco are reconstructed in the same manner, based on the better-preserved Cupbearer with his rhyton. The characteristic position of one hand below and one above is a variant of an 'offering gesture' used in Egyptian art for processional figures carrying produce as gifts, in which the lower hand is extended (Wilkinson 1992, 52–53) and the other hand (depending on the object(s) carried) is sometimes poised above in a gesture of praise or protection (Wilkinson 2001, 21, 23). In Aegean art, the size and weight of the object carried determines degree of separation of the hands but does not change the relationship between them (*cf.* Morgan 2000, 933). The Priestess from the door jamb between Rooms 4 and 5 in the West House at Akrotiri (Fig. 3b, inset; Doumas 1992, pls. 24–25) holds her hands in this position, the one below supporting the base of the brazier between fingers and thumb, the one above holding saffron over it in the offering gesture, despite the fact that the vessel has a functionable handle (Morgan 1988, 143, n. 4 on 207; brazier: Papageorgiou 2000, 959–961). All the male figures in Room 3b of the ground floor of Xeste 3 (Fig. 7; Doumas 1992, pls. 109–111) hold their hands in the same position, one below and one above, varied only by what they are carrying. The gesture is performative and together with the directional movements of the figures corresponds to potential ritual actions of human participants as they pass through thresholds and corridors.

Miniature friezes of Kea and Thera

The small scale and high position of Miniatures means that they acted as referents rather than directly engaging the participant. They were to be experienced alternately with the eyeline views of other people in the room and views from the windows. The movements and gestures of the painted figures led the eye through passages of meaning, sometimes echoing the action and views of the participants in the room.

In the Northeast Bastion at Agia Irini, Kea (Fig. 3a), participants would have entered through N.18, where they were enveloped by images of large-scale plants (Morgan 2020, 275–302, fig. 8.9), connecting outside and inside as they lingered or passed through. Their passage into N.20 revealed a completely different spatial experience (Morgan 2020, fig 7.27). There, with no large-scale figures, it was necessary to lift their heads and to turn their bodies in order to take in the various scenes of the Miniature Frieze painted, no doubt as at Akrotiri, above a series of windows. What they saw painted on the east wall – a marsh – most likely correlated with the
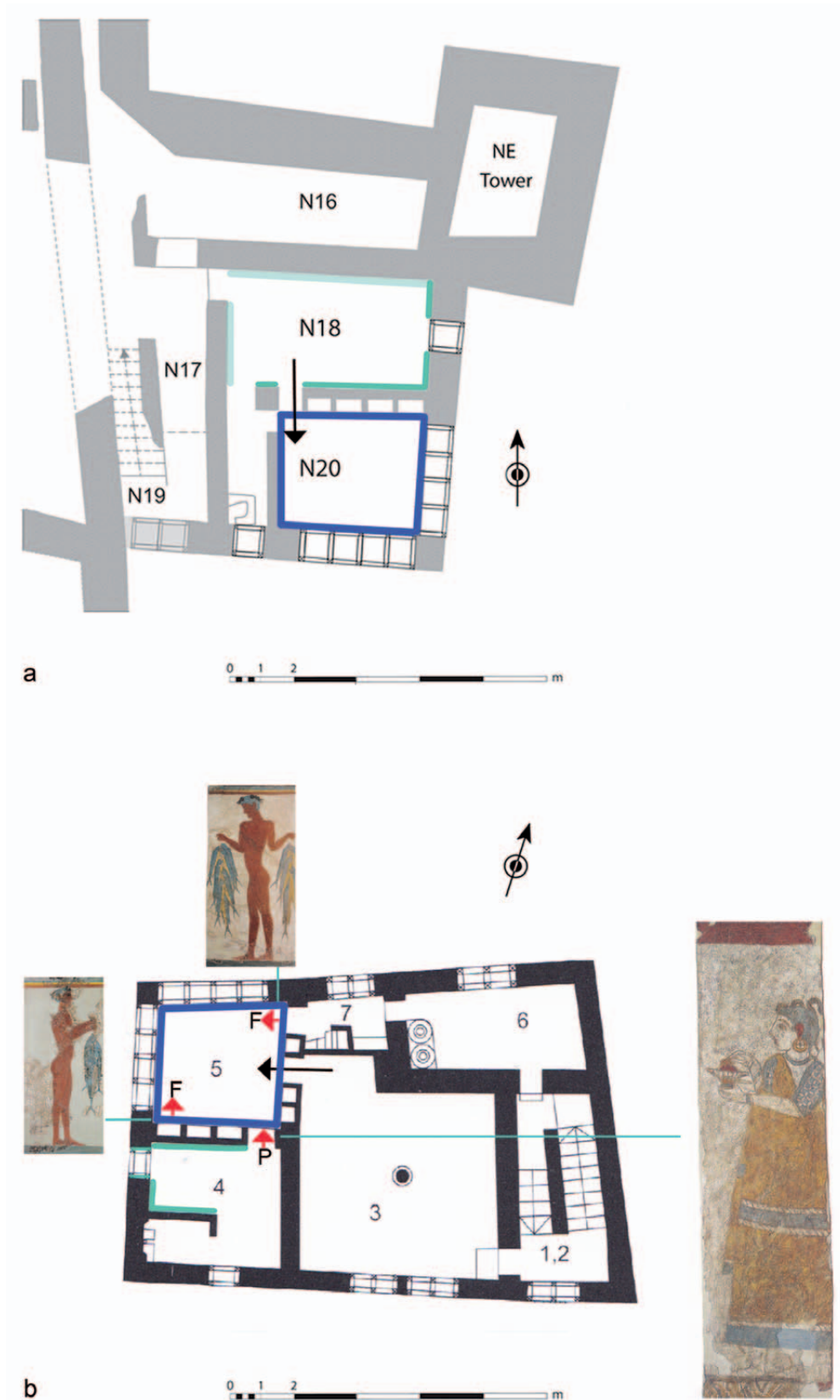
Fig. 3: (a) Northeast Bastion, Agia Irini, Kea (after Morgan 2020, fig. 11.2). (b) West House, Akrotiri, Thera (plan after Palyvou 2005, fig. 62; insets: Doumas 1992, pls. 18–19, 24). Colour Key: blue: Miniature Frieze; green: Panels (light green: not preserved); red arrows: directions of large painted figures; F: Fisherman; P: Priestess; black arrows: entry into the rooms.

view from the eastern windows. What they saw on the south wall – preparations for a feast outdoors and ships on the sea – was potentially what they would have seen through the southern windows. N.20 appears to have been a banquet hall in which visitors from overseas no doubt met with local elites (Morgan 2020, 389–408). In the painted scenes, figures communicate with one another with raised arms and distinct hand gestures (Morgan 2020, 50–53; *cf.* 1988, 117–118 on Thera). Amongst the south wall scenes were men greeting one another bearing gifts (Morgan 2020, figs. 7.11–12, pls. 2–3), their movements and gestures perhaps reflecting the meaning of the gathering in the room and echoing the participants' gift-bringing in a visual reinforcement of social performance.

The West House at Akrotiri, Thera (Morgan 1988; Doumas 1992, pls. 18–64; Televantou 1994) uniquely combines small- and large-scale imagery within a single space (Fig. 3b). In Room 5, the ships in procession, flanked at both ends by townspeople focusing their attention inwards, move from left to right (east to west). The south wall on which the painting lay faced the sea and probable harbour, thereby reflecting action outside (Morgan 2007a, 120–121). The two large-scale Fishermen on the north and west wall carrying their fish walk towards the north-west corner. They can be seen as guiding the viewer to the corner, where a marine table of offerings was found (Marinatos 1984, 37–38, foldout A, fig. 17; 1993, 216–217) or as facing one another "moving out of the walls and into the room towards its centre" (Palyvou 2012, 12–13, fig. 5). Slightly less than life-size, their feet rest on a painted dado, raising their heads to a height that relates to the human body (Palyvou 2012, fig. 4; *cf.* Palyvou 2000, figs. 4–6 and 2005, figs. 241–243 for this principle at Akrotiri). The design of the architecture ensures that the participant enters the centre of the room (Palyvou 2012, 11, fig. 3) guided in direction by the left-facing Fisherman at the north-east corner, following in his footsteps. At the same time, on entering the room and turning towards the south, the culminating scene of the ships would have been flanked by two figures facing the participant: the other Fisherman at the south end of the west wall, immediately following the Ship Procession, and the Priestess on the door jamb between Room 4 (with its large-scale ships' cabins but no other access) and Room 5, seemingly entering the room. The participant as they turned on entering was greeted by these figures, both facing inwards and both carrying an offering. The beginning of the Ship Procession is heralded by the Priestess, who makes an offering that would in life have taken place at the stern prior to the movement of the ships (Morgan 1988, 143–144); at the end of the procession of ships the Fisherman at the corner of the adjacent wall leads the eye round to where the two Fishermen would, in the mind of the viewer, meet. The movements of the three large scale figures – all bringing offerings relating to the sea and the ships – lead the viewing patterns of the participant in the room. The Priestess, hands holding incense in the offering gesture, visually and conceptually linked the more secluded Room 4 and its Stern Cabins with Room 5 and its ships, leading the participant through the threshold.

Room for the Goddess: Agia Triada and Phylakopi

In contrast to Egyptian tomb chapels, where large-scale figures and small-scale registers coexist, in the Aegean (the West House excepted) large- and small-scale figures were usually in separate buildings. Their contexts and functions are distinct. Rooms with large- or medium-scale figurative paintings of the LM I A/LC I period (Agia Triada, Thera, Melos,) were relatively small, secluded, and invariably interior (Morgan 2016, 188). These paintings focus on the realms of ritual and myth, incorporating the participant into those realms through the directional movements and gestures of the painted figures and enhancing participatory experience through mimesis.

In Room 14 at Agia Triada (Fig. 4) the participant entering the tiny space would have been enveloped by the three painted walls (Militello 1998, 250–282). Access and light were controlled through the multiple pier-and-door partitions on three sides of adjacent Room 13, itself painted with a landscape (Halbherr et al. 1977, 88–89, fig. 54; Militello 1998, 72–73, pl. 21b; Vlachopoulos 2021, 276, pl. LXV b). The narrow rectangular room, only 1.60 m wide, suitable
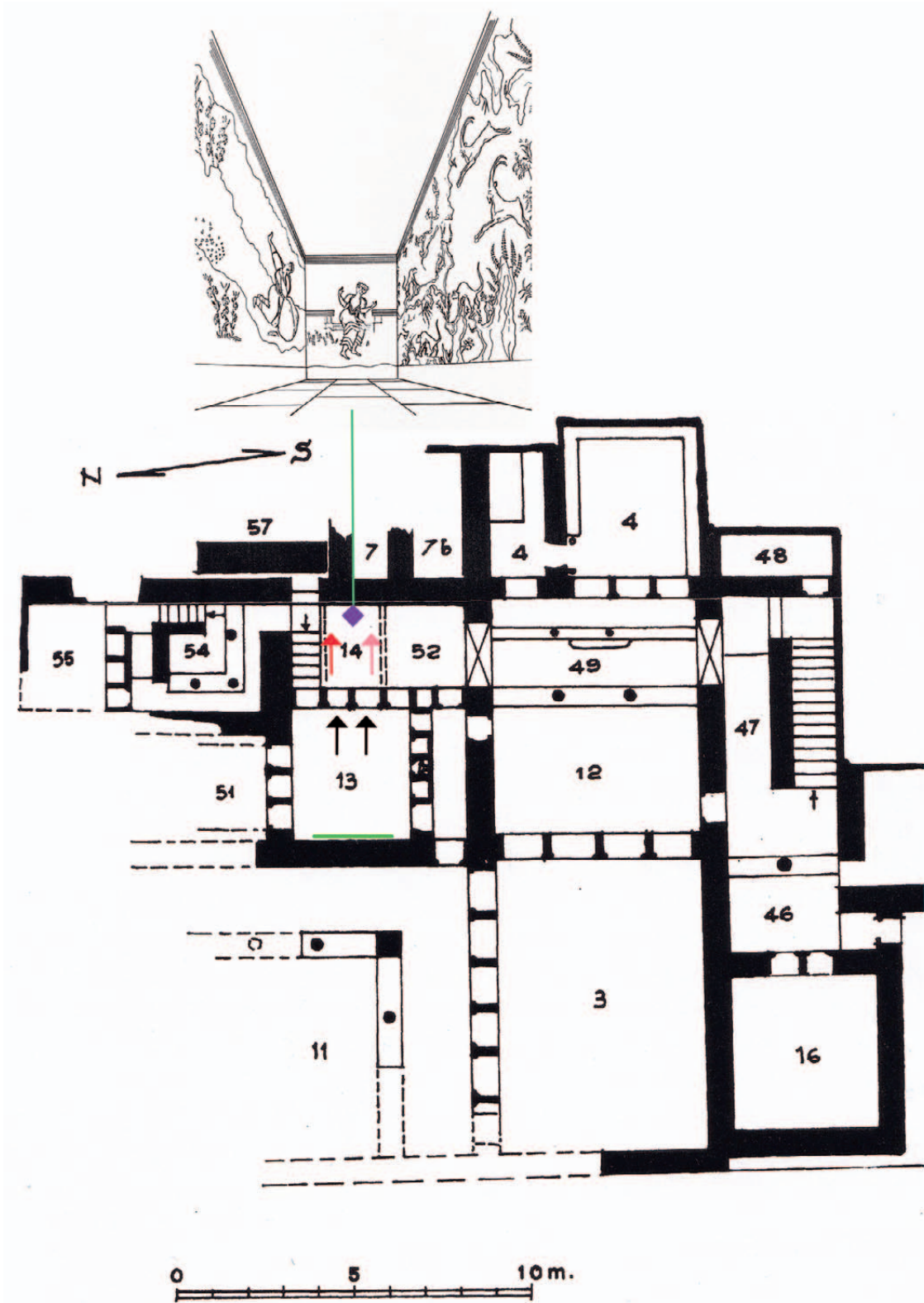
Fig. 4: Rooms 13 and 14 at Agia Triada (plan after Militello 1998, 67, fig. 4; inset: Militello 2000, 79, fig. 1. Courtesy of Pietro Militello). Key: red arrows: directions of painted figures (pink: main direction of animals); purple: central figure; green in Room 13: probable location of landscape; black arrows: passage into Room 14.

for a single worshipper (Rehak 1997, 174), was painted on the left wall with a kneeling female figure (and probably a second figure: Militello 1998, 119, V8; Militello and La Rosa 2000, 993; Jones 2014, 493–494, pl. CLIV b, d) and on the right with animals, both in a landscape. The protagonists of the two scenes led the eye to the short end wall on which a female figure, surely the Goddess, stood with bent knees before a platform (Militello 1998, pls. 3 a, D, E; 2018; Vlachopoulos 2021, pl. LXV a). The upper parts of the figures have not been preserved but the kneeling lady on the left wall clearly kneels towards the right, hence facing the Goddess. She has been reconstructed with head facing back (Militello 1998, pl. 2; *cf.* Blakolmer 2012, 94–96) or facing forward (Jones 2014, pl. CLIV a). In the former, she would be invoking a presence behind her, the direction from which the participant would enter the room. In either case, the direction of her kneeling posture guides the gaze of the viewer towards the end wall. The Goddess sways the lower part of her body to the right but turns her upper body to face the spectator approaching from the doorway. Her arms were raised. Her head, which has not survived, may have been turned either to the left, back towards the kneeling woman (Militello 1998, pl. 4), or to the right towards the animals (Cameron 1987, 326, fig. 10 [accidentally reversed]; Jones 2014, pls. CLIV f, CLV b; Blakolmer 2012, 94–96). Either way, the profile view of the head was an idiom that belies intention in terms of viewer response. Given the spatial position on the end wall, the frontal torso surely indicates that the Goddess is to be thought of as *facing* the spectator as they enter the room. (Compare the impact of the Throne Room at Knossos (most recently Galanakis et. al. 2017, 87–91; Günkel-Maschek 2020, 415–557) when the throne was occupied by a living person, seen in side-view as the participant approached and frontally as the participant stood before them.) Since the painted Goddess could not be depicted with frontal face according to the Minoan use of this idiom as liminal and associated with death (Morgan 1995), the opportunity
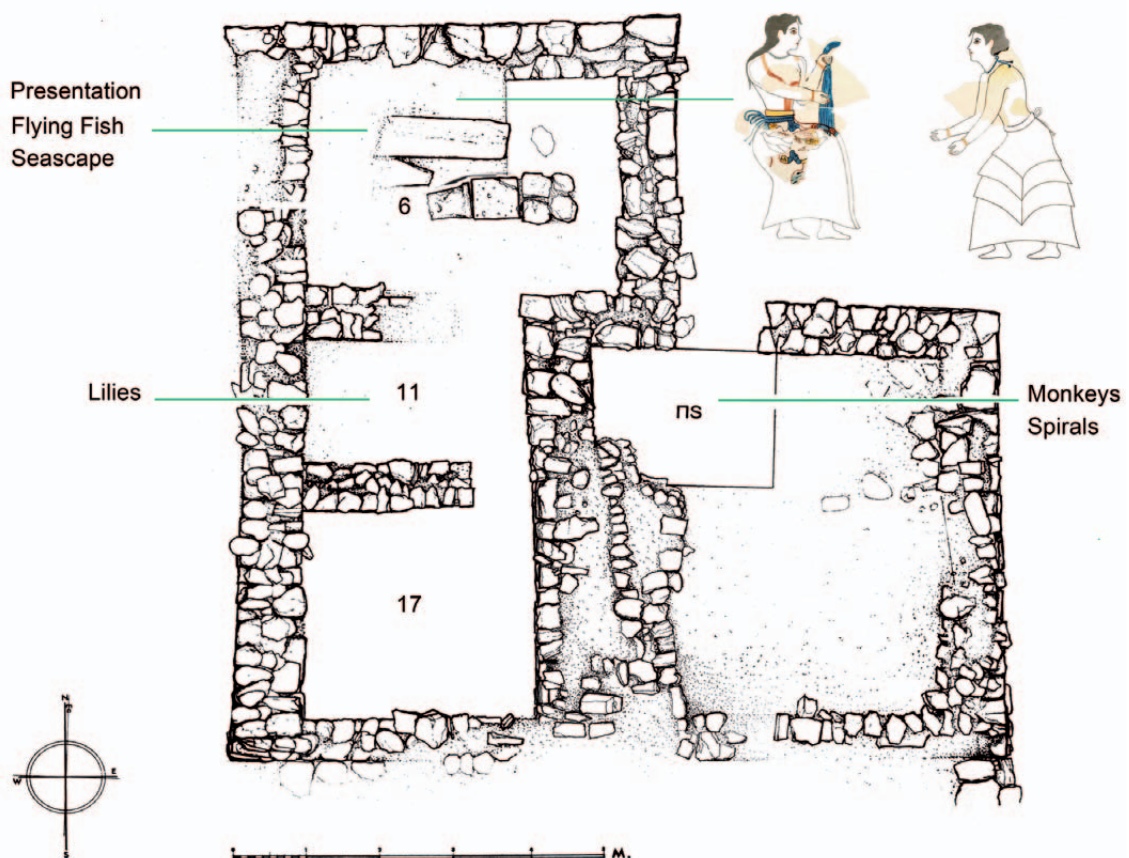

Fig. 5: The Pillar Crypt complex at Phylakopi (Morgan, in press b, fig. 1 and pl. XXII [inset reconstruction]; plan after Renfrew et al. 2007, 48, fig. 3.29).

for eye-contact between participant and deity was excluded (Hägg 1985, 213). However, the kneeling woman directs the participant, who then takes her place before the Goddess. Within the narrow space of Room 14, the bodies of the painted figures complement the movements inward and ahead and perhaps, for all we know, the gestures of the participant of the ritual.

A similar participatory role may have been played by the female figures in the Presentation scene of Room 6 of the Pillar Crypt Complex at Phylakopi on Melos (Fig. 5; Morgan 2007 b, 384–386; in press b, pls. XX–XXIV a). A seated female, most likely a Goddess, holds out a cloth which she appears to have received as an offering from a second female figure who bends forward towards her. Unfortunately, it is not clear to which wall this belonged (the Flying Fish frieze came from the same room) but the room is at the end of a series of three and hence secluded and there can be little doubt that the Presentation was the focal point encountered by participants.

At Agia Triada, Phylakopi and Xeste 3, the action culminates with a female, most likely a Goddess. In each, the secluded position heralded the focal point in the movement of participants through the building. And in each, the torso of the Goddess is partially or fully frontal, intimating that she turns not only to the figure painted before her in a narrative gesture but also towards the living participant who has reached and responds to the focal point of the series of images.

Experiencing Xeste 3

Much has been written about the phenomenal paintings of Xeste 3 (Figs. 6–8), in particular by Andreas Vlachopoulos, recently with stunning reconstructions of the layouts of the walls (Vlachopoulos 2008, 2016, 2021; Vlachopoulos and Zorzos 2014). I have previously focused on the boys on the ground floor (Morgan 2000, 2016). Each zone of the building was marked by indicators of participatory pauses and movement. As at Agia Triada, Phylakopi, and the House of the Ladies at Akrotiri, it was necessary to walk through the building before reaching the pivotal image, in each case with plants or landscape in an adjacent room. But at Xeste 3, figurative paintings accompanied the participant from start to finish, leading gradually and in multiple directions towards the focal point of revelation.

In the vestibule, pairs of young men grappled a bull (south wall) and a wild goat (north wall, Fig. 6 inset; Papageorgiou 2018, 2021; Vlachopoulos 2021, 253–256, pl. LX a), reminiscent of the charging bulls at the entrances at Knossos as well as the hunt scenes at the entrances to some Egyptian tombs, where the scenes had an apotropaic function of expelling chaos from the interior of the ritual space. Danger is averted from both directions for the participant, whether their destination is up or down the stairs or inwards on the ground floor. The young men simultaneously lead the way for the participants and protect the interior space from the outside world.

Walking into Room 4 on the ground floor, participants were surrounded by pier-and-door partitions affording choices of direction. Ahead lay the ritual zone of Room 3. Much discussed in terms of representations of what have been seen as initiation rites, the area is of fundamental interest in terms of potential movements and responses of human participants to the figures painted on the walls. Room 3, with its pier and door partitions, both on the ground and the first floor, exemplifies the principle of concealing and revealing. Crucially controlling light, visibility and access, the architecture was coordinated with the positions, postures, gestures and directional movements of the painted figures, anticipating the passage of living people through the spaces.

Room 3 on entry was lit by two windows on the right and controlled by pier and door partitions on the other three sides. On the left (3 b) these marked two narrow passageways, on the walls of which were painted three young males (Fig. 7; Doumas 1992, pls. 109–115). Participants would have walked in single file in such narrow spaces. In the *left* (south) passageway, the youngest boy (defined by diminutive size, yellow skin, and shaved head) has his hands in a variant of the offering gesture holding a vessel (apparent only as a faint outline) as he moves forward behind an older youth (Figs. 7, left inset; Doumas 1992, pls. 109, 112–113). The boy's knees are flexed but there is a feeling of concentration rather than fluidity in his movement and his
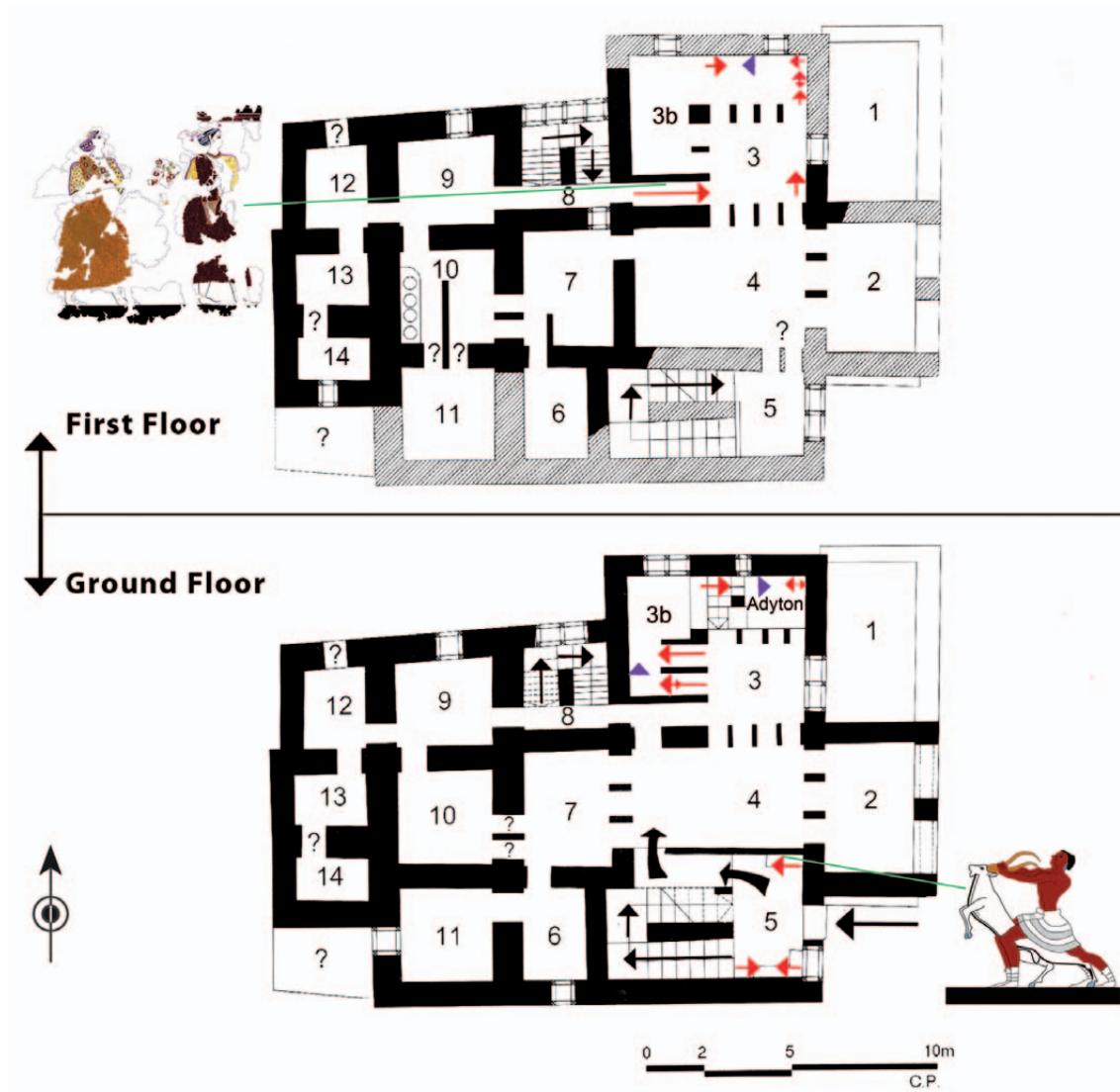
Fig. 6: Ground and first floor of Xeste 3 (plan after Palyvou 2005, 62). Key: Red arrows: directions of painted figures; small red arrows: figure turning head back; Purple triangles: central figures. Black arrows: passage through the building (excluding pier and door partitions, which offer multiple choices).

mouth is closed. In contrast, the animated movements of the youth in front, whose mouth is open in speech, signals not simply processional direction but communication with the human participant entering the passage. His shoulders are turned to the front and his head turns back. Though the eye is not preserved, the angle of his head indicates that he looks not down at the small boy but at the eye level of a person entering the passageway. His legs actively stride forward and with an open-angled offering gesture he holds out a patterned cloth, the curves of which echo those of his body. It is as though he calls back to the participant as they enter the passage, leading the way through his movement, signalling offering through his gesture, and speaking, not to the boy but to the viewer, as he moves. Attributed to the *right* (north) passageway was a male figure between the ages of the boy and the older youth (Doumas 1992, pls. 111, 115; Palyvou 2005, 166, fig. 245; Morgan 2016, pl. LXIV b). He holds a large gold vessel, also in a gesture of offering, his head erect, his mouth closed. Like the young boy, he is a processional figure, contained in his movements and apparently silent. The attribution of this figure to the northern passageway implies that both passageways were used to enter the ritual space, though presumably this was also the exit.
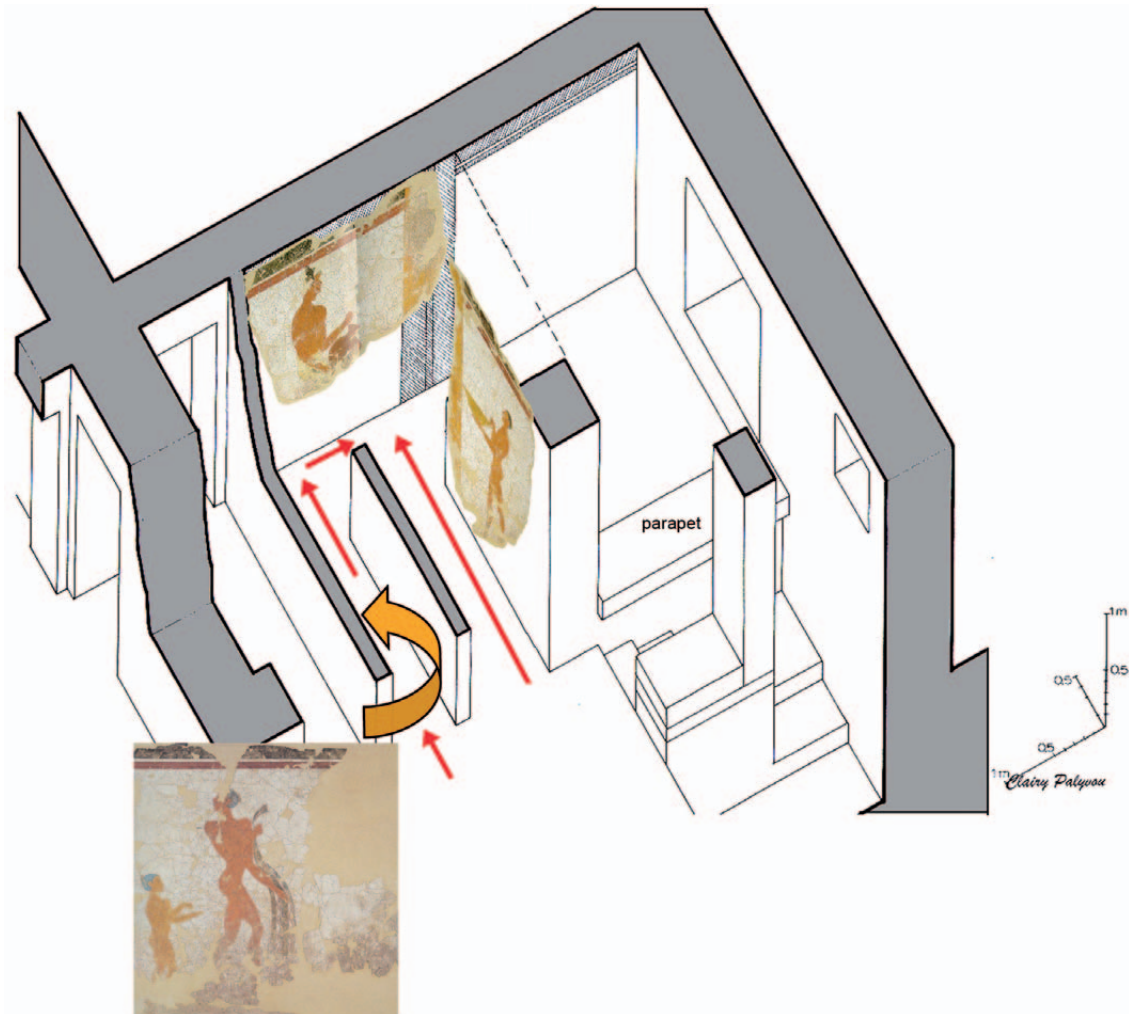
110

Fig. 7: Isometric drawing of Room 3b on the ground floor, showing the positions and directions of the figures (after Palyvou 2005, fig. 245 and Morgan 2016, pl. LXIVb. Courtesy of Clairy Palyvou).

The central partition that separated the two passageways would have at least partially obstructed from view the painting on the west wall of a mature man holding a large water jug, either seated or more likely standing with flexed knees (Doumas 1992, pls. 110, 114; Vlachopoulos 2019, pl. CLXV). He was both larger and on a higher level of the wall than the boy and youths (his head touching the border bands) and looks down, his mouth open in speech. The partition conceals, the boy and youths lead, the man is revealed. Movement, eyes, mouths open in speech, and no doubt the gesture of offering all serve to correlate painted imagery with the perambulation of human action.

The same is likely to have been the case with the girls depicted in the Adyton (Figs. 6, 8 below; Doumas 1992, pls. 100–108), glimpsed through four doorways separated by piers and reached via steps on the left (Marinatos 1984, fig. 57; Paliou, Wheatley and Earl 2011, fig. 5; Günkel-Maschek 2020, fig. 4.8). It was only from the top of the steps or through the level of the pier-and-door partitions that the participant would have been eye level with the figures (Palyvou 2005, 165, fig. 243). But only on entering would all the figures have been visible. The two flanking females, one holding a necklace, the other a veil, do not actively engage with the central seated, wounded female, as was the case with the boys and man in 3b. There, however, the youths with their vessels and cloth would have done so had they turned the corners at the ends of the passageways, a route that living participants would have followed. The youths, the man, and the two flanking girls are painted against plain white walls, indicative of internal space that
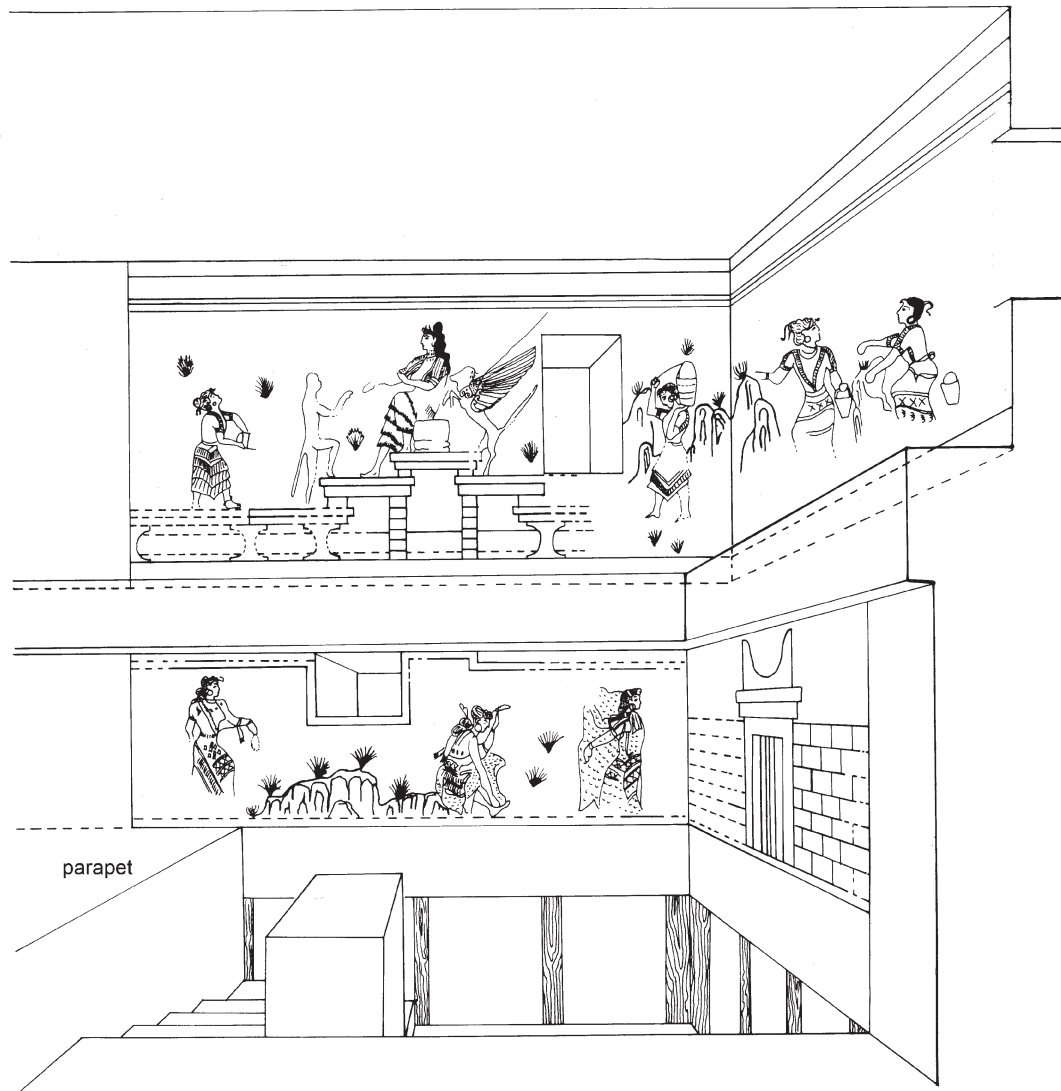
Fig. 8: Drawing showing the relationships between figures in the ground (adyton) and first floor of Room 3, Xeste 3. Drawing: Clairy Palyvou (after Immerwahr 1990, 60, fig. 20).

would enable the viewer to identify directly with their movements. In contrast, the central figure, the wounded female, sits on multi-coloured rocks dotted with crocuses, rocks also descending from above. This landscape relates her directly to the scenes in Room 3 above, as does the centrality of her position, corresponding to that of the seated Goddess in the Presentation above, with whom she is identified by Nanno Marinatos (2016, 8–9). Though the woman with necklace walks towards the wounded female, she is separated from her spatially by a small window (or niche: Doumas 2005, 76), just as a window separates the Crocus Gatherer from the Goddess on the north wall above (Vlachopoulos 2016, pl. CXIV, CXV a). Significantly, the painted landscape lies beneath the small window, symbolically linking interior and exterior space. We may imagine, therefore, that the woman on the left holding the necklace and the girl on the right with veil looking back at the altar on the adjacent wall are the painted equivalents of the human participants, whereas the wounded female transports the mind of the viewer to the outside and to the realm of myth.

Access to the male and female parts of the ritual space were separate and closely controlled. However, although the configuration of the northern part of 3b remains unclear, it is apparent that in the north-east part, beyond the northern passage wall, there was a low parapet that linked

3b with the area of the steps that led into the adyton (Palyvou 2005, 165, 166, figs. 243, 245; Morgan 2016, pl. LXIV b). Perhaps this parapet served as an offering table or a place to store water for the rituals in both male and female areas (Morgan 2016, 193). Unless covered by a moveable curtain, the parapet would permit visibility from 3b to the adyton, providing a direct view of the focal point of the altar painted on the east wall – a shrine within a shrine – towards which the girl with veil turns her head to view (Vlachopoulos 2016, pl. CXIV). One can only imagine the ritual movements of participants (presumably male) through 3b as the mystery of the altar dripping blood and vegetation (in the presence of females) was revealed.

Both male and female sections of Room 3 closely integrate wall paintings with architectural space, creating links between painted figures and human participants through directional flow – through doorways, along passageways, down steps, at the parapet – towards focal points. The altar is the crucial link. Revealed visibly from either side of the parapet, the heads of the girl with veil and the youth with cloth turn back in its direction, suggesting that the altar may have been the ultimate focal point for the performance of the participants.

Ascending the secluded subsidiary staircase to the west of Room 3, ritual movement continued on the upper floor with the Procession of Mature Ladies along Corridor 8 leading to Room 3 (Fig. 6 inset; Vlachopoulos and Zorzos 2014, pls. LXI–LXIV). Two on each wall, their mouths closed in solemnity and silence, the Ladies walk towards the end, east wall at the entrance to Room 3. Each has flowers and one (on the south wall) wears an elaborate skirt of rocks and swallows, akin to that worn by the seated figure in the Phylakopi shrine (Fig. 5 inset; Morgan, in press b, pl. XXIV). They lead the way, but clearly the path they take must have been restricted to those initiated into the rituals enacted in Room 3 at this level. On the end wall, facing left, hence into Room 3, was a fifth woman, here with flying fish on her garment, again linking her with the shrine at Phylakopi.

On this floor, the multiple pier and door partitions to north and west controlled visibility without physically separating the areas through passageways or a parapet. It would therefore have been possible for perambulation to begin in the western part, with its marsh landscape with ducks and dragonflies, then to turn the corner to reveal the scenes of Crocus Gatherers and Presentation to the Goddess (Figs. 6, 8; Vlachopoulos and Zorzos 2014, pl. LXV; Vlachopoulos 2021, pl. LXIVa). The fact that there are no human figures in the western part, however, means there was no directional guidance as to movement. It was, therefore, most likely through the four doorways on the north side that the revelation of the Presentation to the Goddess was encountered (Günkel-Maschek 2020, fig. 10a). On the east wall, above the image of the altar on the floor below, were the two animated Crocus Gatherers, communicating with eye contact and open mouths. They 'tell the story' of how the offerings to the Goddess were collected. A third Crocus Gatherer on the east edge of the north wall, behind the window, continues that narrative thread of bringing the stigmas to the Goddess. She links the two walls but though she walks in her direction she lies behind the Goddess, in her own space, separated from the divine realm by a window while directing the gaze of the participant from the scene of the Crocus Gatherers to the Presentation. This is the culminating scene of the entire programme (though reflected in the cosmological abstractions of the top floor above: Marinatos 2016, 5–7; 2018; Vlachopoulos 2016, 378–383 pls. CXV b–CXVIII): the seated Goddess, who, like the man in 3b and the wounded female in the adyton on the ground floor, looks down, here in direct eye contact with the girl who tips the stigmas out of her basket to be presented to the Goddess by the intermediary monkey situated between them. The girl holds the basket in a variant of the offering gesture as she tips the contents out. The scene – girl, monkey, Goddess, protective griffin – is framed by two windows, which set the action outside that of the marsh to the left and the rocky landscape to the right, while continuing the theme of crocus symbolically in repetitive clumps on the white background. As on the ground floor, which doors were open and which closed affected visibility. Revelation was controlled. The girl on the left of the composition is the link with the human participant, the final human figure in the visual narrative, now with direct eye contact with the God-

dess. The Presentation is the culminating mystery in the cycle of paintings, revealed to the (presumably female) participants, whose way had been guided by the actions of the painted figures and the controlled spaces of the architectural plan.

Conclusion

Mural art guides the participant through architectural and ritual space, painted figures acting as focusing devices through their movements, gestures and relative placements. Human action is stimulated by responses to the interrelationships between built space and figurative imagery that surrounds the body. Processional figures moving along walls with their offering gestures may directly guide participants through passageways and thresholds, while interrelationships between figures in complex scenes more subtly but no less powerfully act as directives of viewing.

The structural patterns of ritual movement through architectural space cited in the examples at the beginning of this essay resonate with what we know of Aegean wall paintings. In Egyptian tomb chapels, as in temples, space and painted figures define movement inwards and, in the case of Rekhmire, upwards. In Byzantine churches, the body moves inwards while the eye reaches upwards in zoned hierarchy from human to divine realms. In Xeste 3 the participant moved both inwards and upwards, from the physicality of earth (hunters) through intermediary zones (ritual and mythological action) to the realm of the divine, revealed in the scene of Presentation to the Goddess. The path was led by communicating figures. Wonder is aroused through revelation.

Painted buildings such as those of Knossos, Agia Triada, Akrotiri and Phylakopi, in which access and light were controlled, were marked by pauses and perambulation, choices of direction (in Xeste 3), concealing and revealing. Focal points were structured through the architectural plan, the painted figures communicating with one another and with the participants in ritual action through their gestures, stance and movements. In the Aegean as elsewhere, programmes of paintings came to life through the bodily movements and directed viewing of the human participants.

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