Adoration and Visionary Practices, or Expressions of Lamentation and Grief in Bronze Age Crete?

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Abstract *Grieving, emotionally distressed, or lamenting figures rarely appear in the scholarly discussion on early Late Minoan religious scenes. This is mainly due to the generally accepted view that Minoan religion was essentially focused on adoration and the invocation of divine epiphanies. However, a recent re-evaluation of gestures in two- and three-dimensional representations by the author has led to the identification of a considerable number of expressions of grief and emotional distress and of gestures of lamentation. A thorough examination of the contexts in which these gestures and expressions appear in the LM I period, of how they developed from their early beginnings in the Middle Minoan period, and of how they were carried forward into the LM II and LM III periods, reveals their consistent importance in religious representations. The fact that some of the gestures shown by figurines dedicated at peak sanctuaries first appeared in funerary contexts supports the assumption that they were expressive forms that originally fulfilled their function in relation to the deceased before they became part of ritual activities in the Middle Minoan period. Their continued use on figurines deposited in tombs during the LM II/III period and beyond confirms the persistent understanding of the gestures as expressions of sadness, grief, and mournful contemplation. In order to explain this surprisingly widespread appearance of mourning and lamenting figures in Minoan religious imagery, the old idea of a deity (or hero) who resided in the underworld and was therefore considered dead and/or absent from the world of the living is revived along with the argument that mourning for him was a central aspect of Minoan ritual practice.*

Introduction

Written and visual accounts of mourning and lamenting figures are a recurring feature in the cultures of the ancient eastern Mediterranean. We have various accounts of people throwing their hands in the air, pulling their hair, scratching their cheeks, beating their chest, and exposing their breasts, but also of quieter forms of mourning represented by figures touching the head, cheek, or side of the neck. In Ancient Egypt, where the textual evidence sheds light on the use and meaning of such actions, the associated imagery remained largely unchanged over time. Mourning figurines were placed in tombs from the end of the Old Kingdom to the Greco-Roman period, funerary paintings decorated the walls of tombs, and both Isis and Nephtis were depicted in an iconic way mourning the death of Osiris, thereby stimulating "the rebirth of nature, corresponding to Osiris' resurrection" (*e.g.* Colazilli 2018, esp. 221; Dominicus 1994, 6, 9, 19–21, 58–75, 180; Millward 2013; Kucharek 2011, 28–32). In Greece and Crete, depictions of mourning figures touching their heads and/or pulling their hair and scratching their cheeks in excessive and passionate mourning are known mainly from funerary paintings on LH and LM III *larnakes* (*e.g.* Vermeule 1991; Watrous 1991, esp. 291–292, 302; Cavanagh and Mee 1995; Kramer-Hajos 2015). The same gestures, along with others such as the touching of the face or neck, continued to be used in later periods (*e.g.* Merthen 2005; Margariti 2019). In funerary contexts, such representations were the appropriate means of expressing grief over the death of a person, thereby paying respect and ensuring a pleasant afterlife. But there were also reasons for mourning and lamenting other than the death of an individual, such as the absence of a loved

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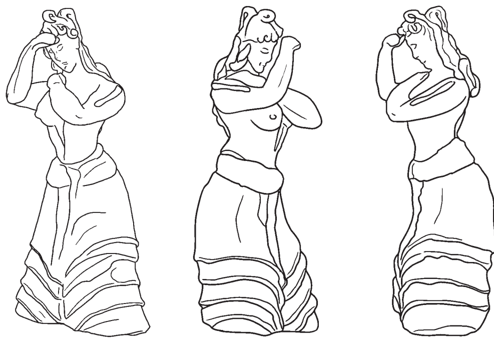

Fig. 1: LM I bronze figurine in Berlin (drawing U. Günkel-Maschek, after Berlin Antikensammlung: https://smb.museum-digital.de/object/11892; Verlinden 1984, pl. 16, cat. no. 33).

Fig. 2: LM I gold ring from Vapheio (drawing U. Günkel-Maschek, after CMS *I, no. 219).*

one at sea or in battle, the fall of a city, or festivals during which the death of a deity was collectively mourned before the joyful celebration of its resurrection (Alexiou 2002. *Cf.* Nilsson 1971, 277, 525, 527).

In representations from Egypt and later Greece, for which we are usually familiar with the context and occasion, figures covering their faces with one or both hands, figures standing or kneeling with their heads bowed, figures touching their heads or necks, or figures 'hugging' themselves with one or both arms are readily identified as figures expressing sadness and grief and/or as figures lamenting, often with an element of reverence for the subject of their emotional display. In contrast, Minoan figures adopting the same behaviour are rarely understood as expressing such emotions, but are usually placed within interpretive models built around adoration and divine epiphany. But this has not always been the case.

As early as the 1880s and 1890s, classical archaeologists Adolf Furtwängler, Maximilian Mayer, and Maxime Collignon described some of the clay and bronze figurines known at the time from the Aegean Bronze Age as depictions of mourners, including the well-known bronze figurine in the Antikensammlung in Berlin (Fig. 1; Furtwängler 1889, 93–94, fig. 7; 1900, 455–456; Mayer 1892, 197–198; Collignon 1903, 309). During the following decades, the same figurine became a priestess or votary in the influential works of Arthur Evans and Friedrich Matz (Evans 1921, 508; Matz 1959, 428). Martin Nilsson also objected to an interpretation of this and other bronze and clay figurines as mourners with the argument that none of them had been found in funerary contexts (Nilsson [1927] 1971, 298–299). Instead, he concluded that, because of their discovery mostly at the sites of 'villas' and in sanctuaries, these figures simply could not be mourning (in the narrow sense of mourning someone's death) but had to be votaries shown in an attitude of adoration or dancing (Nilsson [1927] 1971, 298–299; followed by Brandt 1965, 21, n. 3). In 1969, Costis Davaras stated in a footnote on the bronze figurine in Berlin that "the old theory that it is a mourning woman has long been abandoned" (Davaras 1969, 638, n. 8 [author's translation]).

However, even in more recent times, it has occasionally been suggested that figures usually described as worshippers are actually figures in an attitude of mourning. In 2012, Efi Sapouna-Sakellaraki identified the placing of both hands on the forehead on bronze figurines from the Minoan peak sanctuary at Agios Georgios sto Vouno on Kythera as a gesture of mourning, based on its close similarity with mourning gestures on later *larnakes,* and she proposed that mourning may well have played a role in non-funerary religious ritual at peak sanctuaries. As a comparable religious occasion, she cited a festival from nearby Laconia, the Hyakinthia, in which the mourning of the death of the name-giving hero on the first day was followed by the joyful celebration of his rebirth on the second day (Sapouna-Sakellaraki 2012, 71; *cf.* Persson 1942, 136–137). In

her final assessment of the gestures, she nevertheless identified the same hand position as an invocation gesture (Sapouna-Sakellaraki 2012, 149). Moreover, in her earlier 1995 work on bronze figurines, Sapouna-Sakellaraki had also already suggested an interpretation of the Berlin figurine's lowered head and arm posture as an attitude of lamentation, but in the end tended towards an interpretation as the benedictory attitude of a deity "looking down" (Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1995, 103–104, 109–110, 143). This example illustrates how hand postures that are recognised as relating to mourning/grief/lamentation, based on the knowledge of similar expressions that were widely used in antiquity, are nevertheless not accepted as such, because they do not fit into the religious models that have been created for Minoan Crete.

The identification of mourning figures was not limited to figurines. In 1942, the Swedish archaeologist Axel Persson, studying depictions on golden signet-rings, developed an idea already briefly expressed by Arthur Evans: the existence in Bronze Age Crete of a deity who shared aspects with the Egyptian Osiris and the Mesopotamian Tammuz. Their death and resurrection not only symbolised parts of the vegetation cycle, but were also "celebrated", he wrote, "with ecstatic expressions of sorrow and joy" (Persson 1942, 121). While Evans had based his reconstruction of such a narrative on two seal images from Mycenae and Vapheio (Fig. 2; Evans 1930, 140–144; *CMS* I, nos. 126 and 219, respectively), Persson found figures lamenting the death of the vegetation god in the depictions of figures leaning over what he identified as burial jars. Both Evans' and Persson's views failed to convince, however, not least because of some serious flaws in their readings of the seal images. While Evans saw mourning women where there were none (as already noted by Persson 1942, 37), Persson's identification of most of the oval objects as burial jars symbolising the death of vegetation and the burial of the vegetation god (Persson 1942, 32, 34–35, 88, 99) has been rightly refuted in favour of an identification as rock boulders (*e.g.* Niemeier 1989, 174–154). Due to this and other problematic readings, Persson's theory that the Minoans mourned the death of a god lost much of its credibility.[1] In the following decades, the appealing image of Bronze Age male and female figures engaging in ecstatic behaviour to invoke divine epiphanies largely superseded their identification as mourners, and their self-touching gestures and often hunched or slumped postures were subsumed within the wider field of adoration and ecstatic and/or visionary practices.

Towards a New Understanding of Minoan Gesturing Figures

One could provocatively argue that the early interpretation of figurines as mourners came at a time when it was necessary to focus on the details of the figures, such as their gestures and postures, whereas the interpretation as worshippers came with the gradual (re)construction of religious concepts based on emerging contextual features, into which the gestures of figures and figurines were then refitted. As we have seen, this has led to the abandonment of interpretations that had been based on their peculiarities and, in the case of mourning gestures, on knowledge of widely accepted representations of mourners from neighbouring or later cultures, in favour of seemingly more appropriate interpretations. However, alongside sex, clothing, and hairstyle, the gesture[2] and posture of a figure are essential, if not the defining, elements of a figure's presence in a context – be it a two-dimensional pictorial context or a three-dimensional physical context. The

1 See *e.g.* Nilsson [1927] 1971, 278–278. However, while criticising Persson for drawing parallels with Near Eastern religions that show "sorrow over the vanishing of vegetation and joy over its reappearing" (Nilsson 1971, 288), Nilsson himself argued in favour of "a tree cult with on the one hand joy and dancing, on the other mourning" (Nilsson 1971, 277), and also considered the idea of a dying fertility goddess, whose "death was celebrated annually", as an "un-Greek" and therefore "original product of Minoan religious genius" (Nilsson 1971, 527–528).

2 While there is a distinction between gesture and expression when applied in real life, the depiction of both gesture and expression falls under the category of gesture, as the depiction of both conforms to contemporary conventions of how to express them visually. Gesture is the pictorial means chosen by the craftsperson to depict any kind of arm movement or posture that conveys a message to the viewer. This message may be a communicative gesture, an emotional expression, or a functional action.

gesture and posture establish the figure's relationship with, and attitude towards its surrounding, e.g. whether it is intentionally and dialogically engaging with it, or whether it is expressing its inner or emotional state to it. Communicative gestures, which are particularly linked to culture-specific conventions of interpersonal communication, are often more abstract and therefore difficult to interpret without the supporting knowledge. While this may also be true when emotions are explicitly and intentionally expressed in social interactions, the observation that people's natural responses to emotion-evoking stimuli are (almost) universal is reflected, among other things, in the tendency of the emotional expressions depicted (according to culture-specific conventions) to show striking similarities across cultural periods and regions. This includes the classic expressions of emotion as well as the more subtle body cues or micro-expressions that have been shown to reveal suppressed or hidden emotions, especially in response to negative stimuli (*e.g.* Chen et al. 2023 with further references).

Among these, of particular interest for the present discussion are self-touches (also known as self-adaptors or self-manipulators), *i.e.* one part of the body touching and/or doing something to another part of the body, sometimes also to clothing or jewellery worn on the body (Lhommet and Marsella 2014, 277, 279). Studies in human behaviour have found these self-touches to be associated with negative emotional states and stress, anxiety, or discomfort, and to be involved in psychological regulation such as self-calming and self-stabilisation, *i.e.* they serve to comfort and release states of emotional discomfort. The display of such spontaneous gestures – both when applied in real life and in pictorial representation – indicates a person's need to use such pacifying actions. Consequently, self-touches such as touching the head, neck, or suprasternal notch (the large dip at the point where the neck meets the chest), feature regularly in guides to body language, as they reveal a person's emotional distress, insecurity, or anxiety in a situation (*e.g.* Morris 2002; Navarro 2008; Chen et al. 2023, 1349–1350).

More insight into the basic emotional attitude of a gesturer can be gained from the postures of the head and body with which the gesture is combined. For example, studies of the perception of emotion from posture have found sadness to be the emotion with the highest agreement rate, both within and across cultures (*e.g.* Coulson 2004, 118, 133–134; Kleinsmith *et al.* 2006, 7, 16–17). Sadness was also one of the emotions that was not confused with any other emotion (Coulson 2004, 136), especially when viewed in profile, and "the only emotion characterised by a forwards head bend" (Coulson 2004, 132), with other common features including a forward chest, collapsed posture, and arms at the sides of the trunk (Lhommet and Marsella 2014, 273, 278). The early identification of the bronze figurine from Berlin (Fig. 1) as a mourner therefore comes as no surprise.

Depictions of emotional expression show certain diachronic and transcultural continuities and similarities, precisely because they are often based on universal basic needs and related forms of behaviour. Self-touches such as touching the head, neck, or face, scratching the neck or cheek, pulling the hair, beating the chest, or tearing the garment represent a large part of the repertoire of mourning gestures found in depictions from Egypt and Greece, *i.e.* from cultures that 'embrace' the Minoan culture both chronologically and geographically. The same association of gestures with emotions persisted in depictions from later periods (*e.g.* Pasquinelli 2007; Morris 2019). This means that some pictorial formulae for depicting emotions – reproducing gestures and bodily cues that are perceived as such by the respective culture – have been in use for millennia. They can therefore be said to have a certain transcultural and diachronic validity, from which Minoan depictions should not be considered exempt. In addition to research on the representation and perception of emotions and feelings of distress in the field of bodily communication and non-verbal behaviour, studies of the depictions of emotions in Egyptian, Classical, and later art history can therefore provide useful comparisons and points of reference for the interpretation of Minoan gestures.

While the meaning of a gesture is specified by the context in which it is made – and may remain ambiguous in the eyes of the viewer without it – the presence of a gesture in a pictorial or

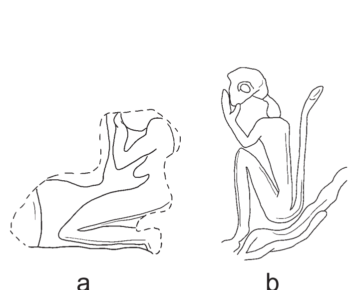

Fig. 3: Seal impressions from Knossos and Agia Triada depicting a woman and monkey covering the face with the palms of the hands or paws, respectively (drawing U. Günkel-Maschek, after a) CMS *II 8, no. 281; b)* CMS *II 6, no. 282).*

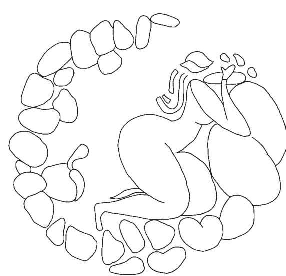

Fig. 4: LM I seal-stone from Knossos (drawing U. Günkel-Maschek, after Warren 1988, 17, fig. 9).

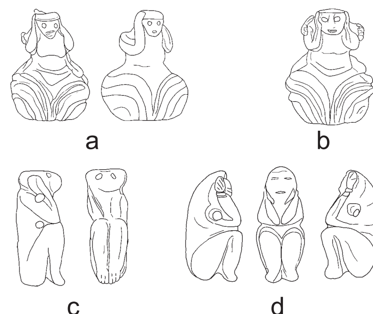

Fig. 5: Pendants depicting women (a–b) and monkeys (c–d) touching the sides of the head with the palms of their hands or forepaws, respectively. From a) Gournia, b) Poros, c) Isopata, d) Knossos (drawing U. Günkel-Maschek, after a) Hawes et al. 1908, 48, pl. XI, 14; Dimopoulou-Rethemiotaki 2005, 324; b) Vasilakis 2005, 101, fig.; c) Evans 1905, 542, fig. 131; d) Coldstream 1973, 162–163, fig. 258, pl. 95).

physical context results from the 'use' of the gesture in a context, for which it was considered appropriate *because* of its meaning. For example, the gestures chosen for figurines or figurative pendants that were deposited in burials or placed in peak or cave sanctuaries were chosen for the particular context because of the suitability of their meaning in relation to the focus of the deposition. In two-dimensional representations, gestures were reproduced in pictorial contexts for the suitability of the gesture to define the contribution of the protagonist to the overall content of the representation. Patterns of Bronze Age 'use' of a gesture, and therefore its suitability for certain contexts (and not for others), are reflected in the presence of the gesture in some contexts, and not in others. This 'use' can therefore be reconstructed by recording and analysing its repeated occurrence in physical and/or pictorial contexts over time.

In my research on Minoan gestures, therefore, I have been adopting an approach in which interpretation is based on the analysis of a gesture and its combination with head and body posture, on the dimensions of meaning ascribed to such combinations in studies of human behaviour and comparable representations, and on the analysis of the physical and/or pictorial context in which representations of the gesture in question recur.[3] By looking not at a single gesture, but at many gestures occurring in contexts over a long period of time, patterns emerge which reveal the Bronze Age 'use' of gesture representations, reflecting the Bronze Age understanding of gestures and the basic sense of their meaning. In this way, it is possible to give back to the gesture itself its meaning as a defining feature of a figure's presence in a context – and to gain further insights into meaningful aspects of the context itself.

Before moving on to the discussion of the representations, however, I shall briefly mention two important conventions that have emerged from the study of two-dimensional representations of non-symmetrical gestures, as they are important for understanding the more subtle nuances of Minoan gesture combinations. One is the consistent representation of non-symmetrical gestures with the primary hand in front of the body, while the other hand has a complementary charac-

3 This study is part of a research project that I have conducted at the University of Heidelberg from 2017 to 2023, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). The results of the research project will be published as a monograph.

4 Katerina Giannaki independently made the same observation, see her contribution in this volume.

ter.[4] This convention is a logical consequence of the representation of the torso in three-quarter to frontal view, *i.e.* a figure communicating in dialogue or expressing its inner state to someone or something in front of it uses the arm closer to the target to convey the message. Secondly, the depiction of a single hand in two-dimensional images represents a symmetrical gesture, *i.e.* a gesture in which both arms are held in the same way. This type of depiction is found alongside the explicit depiction of both arms in a symmetrical posture, usually slightly offset from each other. Non-symmetrical gestures always show both arms. Therefore, if only one arm is visible, this indicates a symmetrical gesture.

To give an example, the covering of the face with the palms of both hands was implied by the depiction of a kneeling female figure on a ring impression from Knossos (Fig. 3a). The same gesture is made by a monkey on a ring impression from Agia Triada (Fig. 3b). In both cases, only one hand, or paw, was depicted. The other one must be imagined in the same way on the side facing away from the viewer. The same rule applies to the figure bent over a rock on a seal-stone from Knossos: only one hand is shown as it is brought to the side of the head, indicating a symmetrical gesture of the two hands touching the sides of the head (Fig. 4). Crucially, the same symmetrical gesture is found on LM I pendants from Gournia, Poros, Knossos, and Isopata, where it is performed by female figures and by monkeys (Fig. 5) – two, if not three of them originally deposited in tombs. The same gesture was identified on two of the clay figurines from the peak sanctuary on Petsophas by Bogdan Rutkowski, who noted (in his 1991 article on 'prayer [adoration] gestures') that "this type becomes popular in the LM II/LH III and Archaic period, especially as the representation of mourning women" (Rutkowski 1991a, 17).

Expressions of Sadness and Emotional Distress in LM I Images – the Evidence

The figure on the seal-stone from Knossos (Fig. 4) is kneeling beside a boulder, her head bent forward and leaning onto it, her hands touching the sides of her head. She is *not* clasping and kissing the stone (*contra* Warren 1988, 17), but places her forehead on it. This head movement can be identified as a tie sign (*cf.* Morris 2002, 141), revealing her close, if not intimate relationship with what the boulder symbolises to her and provides the reason for her posture and emotional state, while the rest of the world is shut out from her contact with the boulder. The hands on the sides of the head, a gesture known across art history to express deep pain, despair, fear, or anger (Pasquinelli 2007, 168), reinforce her 'cut-off' attitude (Morris 2002, 141; 2019, 208–210). The same attitude is shown by the female figures and monkeys in the pendants placed alongside burials, and, if correctly identified, already earlier by clay figurines offered at Petsophas.

A male figure leaning over a boulder with his head deeply bowed is depicted on the gold ring from Kalyvia (Fig. 6). Due to the poor state of preservation, only the complementary part of

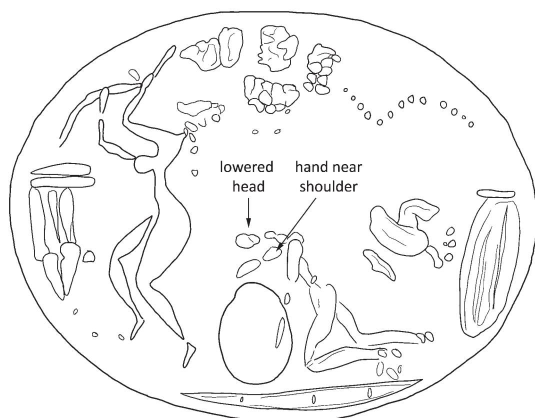

Fig. 6: LM I gold ring from Kalyvia (drawing U. Günkel-Maschek, after CMS *II 3, no. 114).*

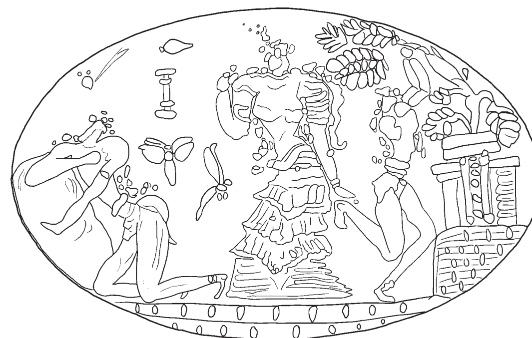

Fig. 7: LM I gold ring from Archanes (drawing U. Günkel-Maschek, after Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellaraki 1997, 655, fig. 722).

Fig. 8: LM I gold ring from Chania (drawing U. Günkel-Maschek, after CMS *VI, no. 278).*

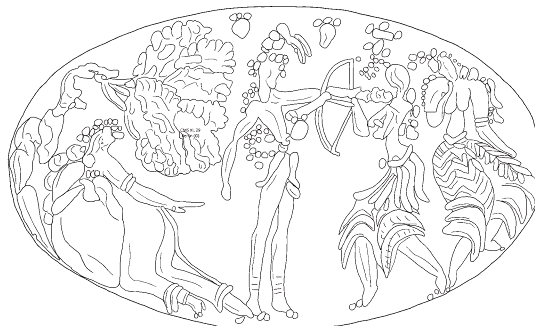

Fig. 9: Gold ring of unknown provenance, Berlin (drawing U. Günkel-Maschek, after CMS *XI, no. 29).*

his gesture combination is clearly visible, clasping the stone in the same way as the male figure kneeling beside a boulder on the gold ring from Archanes (Fig. 7). The latter places the primary hand on the chest near the opposite shoulder. The figure on the Kalyvia ring possibly had the primary arm in the same pose, but only two sections are preserved of it – perhaps the forearm and hand on the chest near the opposite shoulder, as indicated in Fig. 6. While the man on the gold ring from Kalyvia has slumped over the boulder with his head deeply lowered in a posture that would be recognized across cultures as an indication of sadness (see above), the man on the Archanes ring has the head turned away from the boulder and lowered to the other side. The excavators, Giannis and Efi Sakellarakis, considered the turn of the head as supportive of an interpretation as lamentation, concluding that his movement "appears to be theatrical, in the sense that it is an enactment of a ritual, in which the postures and movements are exaggerated and affected" (Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellaraki 1997, 658).

Fig. 10: Impression from LM I signet-ring, Chania (drawing U. Günkel-Maschek, after CMS *V Suppl. 1A, no. 176).*

Another depiction which indicates that the boulder causes the figures kneeling beside it to make gestures, body and head postures that express sadness is the depiction of a female figure leaning over a boulder with her head deeply bowed on a gold ring in the Ashmolean Museum (Fig. 8). It was previously described as presenting "an attitude of mourning" by Persson (1942, 32–33). Also leaning against a rock is a female figure on a gold ring of unknown provenance in Berlin (Fig. 9). The woman turns her upper body backwards, her head lowered, her arm extended towards the centre of the scene, where a male figure stands with his back to her, facing a female archer. The extension of the arm towards a target object or person is also found in standing figures as a primary gesture. For example, on a ring impression from Chania, a female figure extends her arm towards a built structure crowned by a tree (Fig. 10). As on the Archanes ring, her head is turned away from the target of her primary gesture and lowered towards the shoulder in sadness and self-intimacy (Morris 2002, 146). The other, complementary hand touches the suprasternal notch. This is a pacifying "micro-gesture" found to be typically made by women when feeling insecure, emotionally distressed, or worried in response to a negative experience (Navarro 2008, 35. 38–39, fig. 7; *cf.* Chen et al. 2023, 1352, table 1). Taken together, the depiction conveys the image of a woman who is at the same time longing for the tree-crowned structure and what it represents, and turning away from it in sadness, emotional distress, worry, and/or anxiety, as if she cannot bear to look at it.

A woman touching the suprasternal notch with the primary hand also stands next to the kneeling figure on the previously mentioned gold ring in the Ashmolean Museum (Fig. 8). In doing so, the expression of anxiety, worry, and emotional distress implied by the self-pacifying

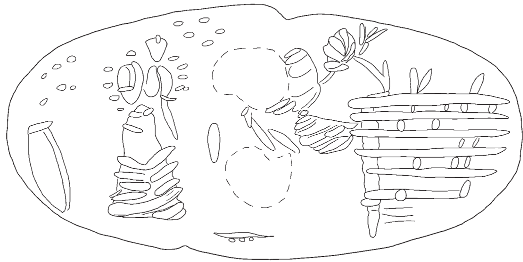

Fig. 11: LM I gold ring from Knossos (drawing U. Günkel-Maschek, after CMS *II3, no. 15).*

Fig. 12: LM I 'Sacred Mansion' ring from Poros (drawing U. Günkel-Maschek, after Rethemiotakis and Dimopoulou 2003, col. pl. 1).

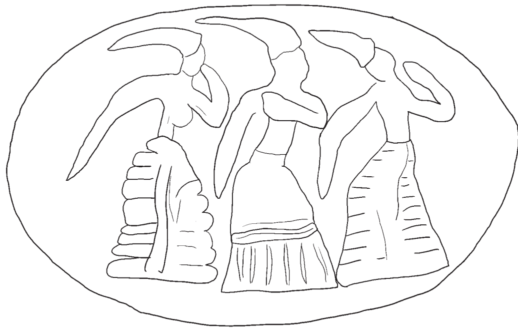

Fig. 13: LM I mould for ring bezel, from Cyprus (drawing U. Günkel-Maschek, after British Museum: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/811238001).

primary hand gesture is paired with the attitude of mourning of the kneeling woman. We also find as a primary gesture the touching of the suprasternal notch on the female figure flanking the couple on the gold ring in Berlin, to whom the kneeling woman described above turns longingly from the other side (Fig. 9). As can be seen from the long hair falling over the other, lowered arm, the side of the torso facing the centre of the picture is conceived as the front of the twisted figure, the arm raised to the suprasternal notch therefore as the primary one. With her head again lowered to her shoulder in a self-intimacing pose (*cf.* Morris 2002, 146), her expression complements the appearance of the kneeling figure with an arm outstretched in longing at the other end, while both of them face and thus relate their actions to the central motif of the male figure being targeted by a female archer.

A variation of the touching of the suprasternal notch, in which the hand is more on the collarbone of the same body side, is shown by the female figure on a gold ring from Knossos (Fig. 11), who stands looking at a structure crowned by a tree. This pacifying "micro-gesture", which indicates once again the woman's state of emotional discomfort, complements the lowering of the primary arm in front of the body, which emphasises the woman's motionless posture as she gazes at the tree-crowned structure with which a second, poorly preserved figure is engaged. All in all, these depictions of women touching the area where the neck meets the chest suggest that whatever they are looking at makes them feel emotionally distressed, worried, insecure, or anxious, and causes them to adopt this self-pacifying behaviour as a natural reaction to suppress these feelings.

A position of the arm, which, in combination with the other hand on the forehead, has been identified by Classical archaeologists as that of a wailer, is the self-hug, a self-intimacy that provides comfort by miming the act of being touched by someone else (Morris 2002, 144–145; Navarro 2008, 48–49). The left hand placed on the opposite shoulder in a self-hug complements the right hand of the bronze figurine in Berlin, which is brought to the lowered forehead (Fig. 1). The combination has a close parallel in the female figure on a gold ring from Poros (Fig. 12). Standing in a paved courtyard that is reached from below by a flight of steps, her attitude is focused on a building with palatial architectural features including 'horns of consecration', suggesting that this type of building, and the ideas it represented, could also evoke a need for self-comfort.

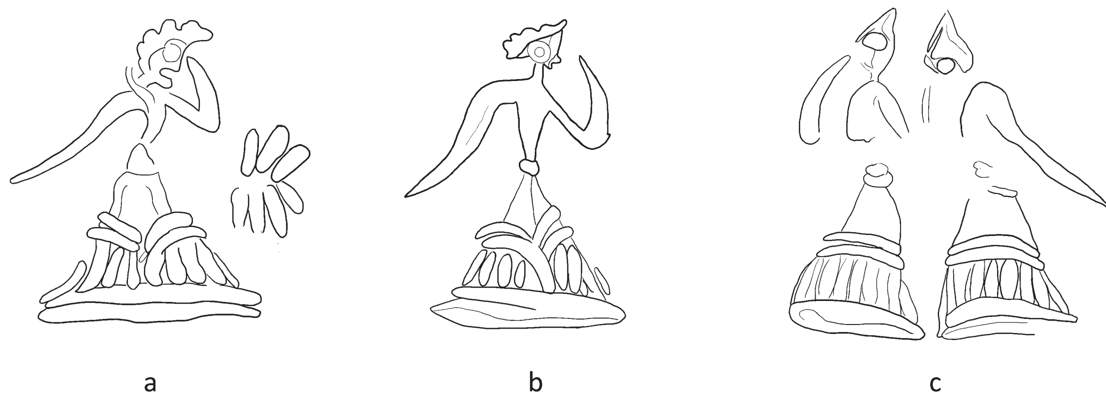

Fig. 14: Women raising the hand towards the lowered head or the mouth on LM I seal-stones: a) CMS *III, no. 351; b)* CMS *X, no. 262; c)* CMS *XI, no. 282 (drawing U. Günkel-Maschek, after a)* CMS *III, no. 351; b)* CMS *X, no. 262: c)* CMS *XI, no. 282).*

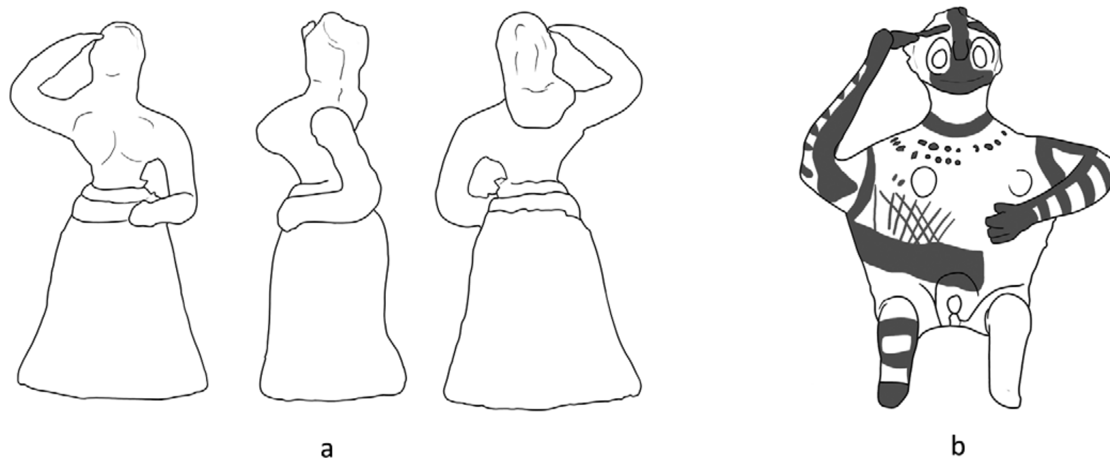

Fig. 15: Touching the temple with the fingertips: a) LM I bronze figurine from Psychro cave, b) LM III A2/B clay rhyton from Gournia (drawing U. Günkel-Maschek, after a) Verlinden 1984, pl. 18, cat. no. 37; b) Rethemiotakis 1998, pl. 32, cat. no. 10).

As a primary gesture, the self-hug occurs on the central of three female figures lined up on an LM I mould from Cyprus, all dressed in typical Minoan clothing (Fig. 13). She is standing with her head and upper body bowed forward, with one arm, the arm at the front of the body, placed across her chest, the hand resting on the opposite shoulder. The other arm is hanging down the other side of the body. The other two figures show gestures that are well known from LM I signet-rings and seal-stones, where they are performed by female figures in groups of two or three. The figure on the left raises the hand to the head which is inclined forward. This gesture is sometimes seen in combination with an open mouth, indicating oral utterance, which may be lamenting, wailing, recitation, singing, or other (Figs. 14 a–b); on this topic see also Blakolmer in this volume). The touching of the head with the extended fingers occurs also on a bronze figurine from Psychro Cave (Fig. 15 a). At the very basic level, this hand movement indicates that 'a person is struggling with something or is undergoing slight to severe discomfort' (Navarro 2009, 40, fig. 8). Crucially, its performance with one or both hands is well known from depictions of mourning figures from LM/LH III into historical Greece (Watrous 1991, 292; Cavanagh and Mee 1995; Merthen 2005). Combined with the lowered head, which can be read as an expression of sadness, an interpretation of the hand movement and body posture as an expression of emotional despair does not seem unreasonable for the Minoan seal images either, and the oral

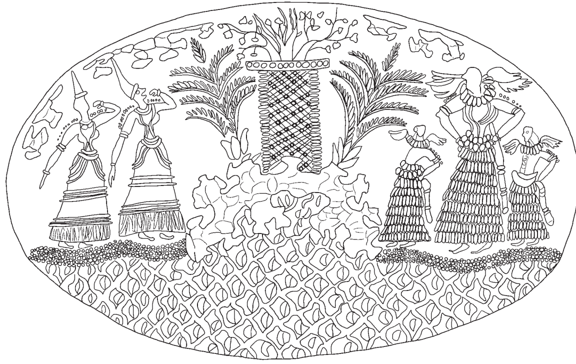

Fig. 16: LM I gold ring from the tomb of the Griffin Warrior at Pylos (drawing U. Günkel-Maschek, after Davis and Stocker 2016, 641, fig. 10a).

utterances are likely to be classified as laments or wails. The other arm is stretched out at the back, away from the body, as if the figure is trying to shake off the emotional upset.

The same complementary arm posture characterises the third type, represented by the figure heading the line-up on the mould in Fig. 13, who stands in an upright position with her head tilted backward and her primary hand raised towards her mouth. This posture is also encountered on numerous seal-stones (*e.g.* Fig. 14c: figure on left) as well as on signet-rings such as the LM I gold ring from the tomb of the Griffin Warrior at Pylos (Fig. 16). At least one of the women in the group of two, the figure in front, is again depicted with her mouth wide open. In view of the joint occurrence of this posture with the one just discussed on LM I seal-stones (Fig. 14c), which means that they were part of one and the same performance, it is reasonable to assume that the figures on the gold ring from Pylos also raised their primary hands and opened their mouths in lamentation. Once again, the group of two is associated with a tree-crowned structure that becomes the focus of the performative action, now on a rocky ground in a waterside setting.

Returning to the LM I mould from Cyprus thus the group probably also represents three women lamenting. The reason for their lamentation is not shown, but would have been known to the Bronze Age viewer from the composition and the group's action. It is presumably directly related to the other representations of women engaged in the same, almost iconic type of group performance, including the gold ring from Pylos where the focus of the lament is a tree-crowned structure. The scene on the mould thus unites three different displays of lament, of which two are regularly encountered in similar groups on signet-rings and seal-stones elsewhere and may have represented more passionate performances, whereas the third, the self-hug shown by the figure in the centre, is more indicative of quiet grief.[5]

The Roots of the Self-hug and Other Expressions of Sadness

The self-hug in LM I seal images and bronze figurines is a gesture with roots in the Middle Minoan Period. Here it occurs on clay and bronze figurines from peak sanctuaries such as Petsophas, Maza, Vrysinas, Traostalos and Kophinas and from Piskokephalo (Fig. 17). The small-sized figures from Vrysinas (Fig. 17f) have been attributed to a multi-figure model and thus represent a group of similarly expressive figures already in the Middle Minoan period (Sphakianakis 2016, 187. 205, fig. 16; 207). A small-sized female figure with one hand on the opposite shoulder, the other hand on the wrist of the self-hugging arm from Petsophas (Fig. 17a), which was described by John Myres (1902/1903, 378–379) as belonging to a figural group, may indeed come from a similar model. The discovery of such model(s) confirms that the collective expression of grief in groups was already an element of the ritual that took place in the peak sanctuaries during the Middle Minoan period. The Piskokephalo figurines also have the second hand grasping the wrist of the hand placed on the opposite shoulder, or alternatively placed around the lower torso to the opposite hip (Fig. 17c). These hand poses reinforce the expression of emotion indicated by the self-hug, with the grasping of the own wrist in particular "heightening the drama of the feelings expressed" (Pasquinelli 2007, 58 [author's translation]), perhaps characterising, as in works of art from later periods, the gesturer as somebody "who is present at a tragic event but does not

5 On quiet restrained vs. excessive and passionate mourning, see Margaritis 2019.

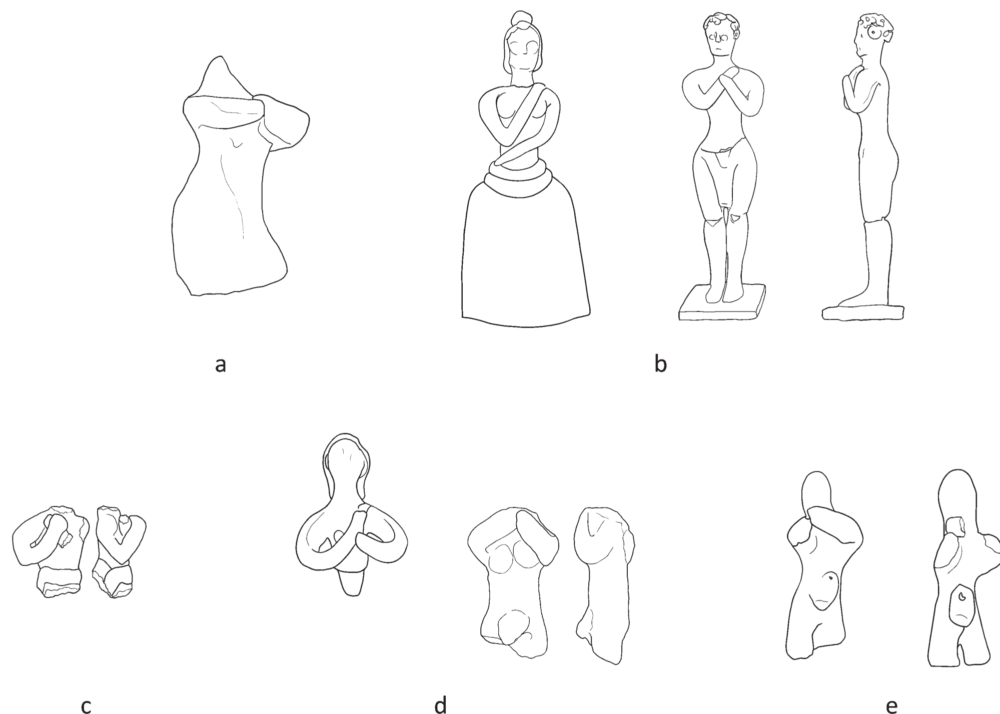

Fig. 17: MM clay figurines 'hugging' themselves with one arm, from: a) Petsophas, b) Piskokephalo, c) Kophinas, d) Traostalos, e) Vrysinas (drawing U. Günkel-Maschek, after a) Myres 1902/1903, 378–379, pl. XI, no. 30; b) Platon 1951, pl. H, figs. 1–2; Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1995, pl. 40.9; c) Spiliotopoulou 2018 (II), pl. 29, cat. no. 291; d) Davaras 1976, 93, fig. 51; Sapouna-Sakellaraki 1971, pl. 13β–γ; e) Sphakianakis 2016, figs. 11. 12).

take an active part. It is a gesture of deep compassion in the face of a painful reality" (Pasquinelli 2007, 162 [author's translation]).

When placed at sanctuary sites, the behaviour displayed by the figurines must be seen in relation to a focal aspect of the cult during which they were dedicated. Their attitude was thus deemed an appropriate behaviour in reaction to this focal aspect of the cult. The men and women represented by the figurines were affected by what they saw, commemorated, or contemplated, in a way that filled them with negative feelings and made them adopt a self-comforting behaviour. In doing so, the figurines, and, consequently, the people who dedicated them, displayed their emotion towards an apparently unsettling element of the peak sanctuary cult.

The gestures of the Middle Minoan figurines have parallels in Egyptian funerary scenes that are too close to be dismissed as coincidence. These gestures are used by the tomb owner's relatives, officials, and dependants to respectfully express their grief at his death, even during their everyday activity. Although listed as gestures of respect (Verehrungsgesten) by Dominicus (1994, 6, 9, 19–21, 58–75; see also Kekes 2021), the scholar well understood these gestures as expressions of the inner state (innere Haltung) of the figures (Dominicus 1994, 180). It is unlikely that the adoption of not just one, but indeed a set of gestures for the configuration of the clay figurines placed on display in Middle Minoan peak sanctuaries happened without any consideration of the dimension of meaning conveyed by these gestures in Egyptian funerary contexts. Instead, the variants of the self-hug combinations on the Minoan figurines, all of which have parallels in Egyptian depictions,[6] are probably also about showing respect by expressing one's own sadness or grief. The obvious difference in the use context – a sanctuary rather than a tomb – should

6 In addition to the hand on the wrist of the self-hugging arm, the placing of one arm across the lower body to the opposite hip appears in combination with a palm on the head; see Dominicus 1994, 66, fig. 15c.

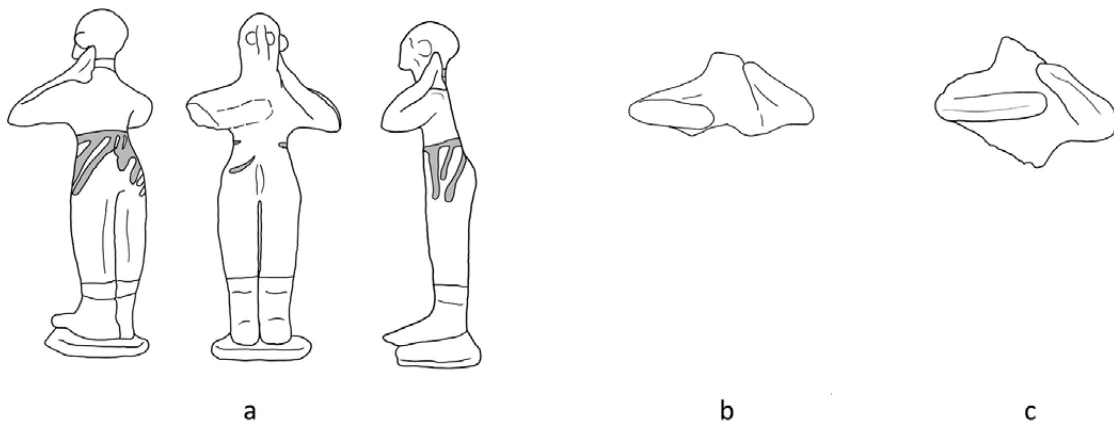

Fig. 18: MM and LM III A clay figurines with one hand touching the side of the neck: a–b) from Petsophas; c) from the LM III A Tomba del Sarcofago Dipinto *from Agia Triada (drawing U. Günkel-Maschek and B. Houllis, after a) Sapouna-Sakellaraki 1971, pl. 5β. γ; Rutkowski 1991 b, pl. V, figs. 1, 3; b) Rutkowski 1991 b, pl. XXII, fig. 6; c) La Rosa 2000, 88, fig. 2).*

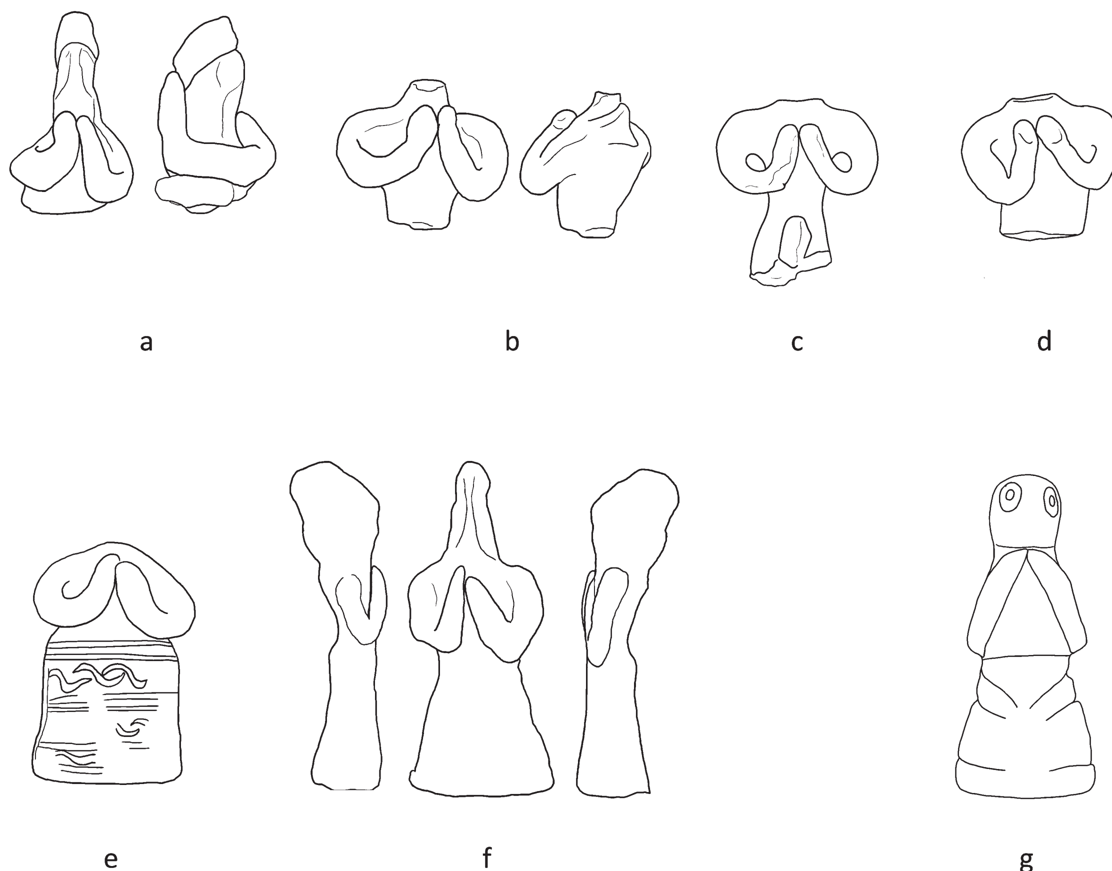

Fig. 19: Figures with hands gathered at the base of the neck, MM I to LM III B: a) Phourni, Archanes, Burial Building 9; b–c) Petsophas; d) Piskokephalo; e) Agia Triada, Complesso della Mazza di Breccia; *f) Agia Triada, 'villa'; g) Armenoi, tomb 76 (drawing U. Günkel-Maschek, after a) Sakellarakis – Sapouna-Sakellaraki 1997, 516, fig. 506 (second from left); b) Rutkowski 1991 b, pl. XXXII, figs. 12–13; c) Rutkowski 1991 b, pl. XX, fig. 1; d) Platon 1952, 632, fig. 13 (bottom row, fifth from right); e) La Rosa 1998, 149, fig. 49; f) Verlinden 1984, pl. 41, cat. no. 89; g) Tzedakis 1980, pl. 688ε).*

lead us to seek an explanation for the reasons that might have led to the adoption of the gesture on the Middle Minoan figurines, rather than serve as an argument for the rejection of the gestures' interpretation as expressions of grief. But I would like to look at some other types of gesture with similar connotations before attempting to give an explanation.

A gesture that conveys the same expressive content is touching the side of the neck. This is a self-touching cue that observers of body language have found is used primarily by men to provide comfort and reassurance when feeling insecure, anxious, concerned, or emotionally distressed (Navarro 2008, 40, fig. 9; 43). At least two male figurines from Petsophas are touching the side of the neck with one hand (Fig. 18a–b), thereby representing their (and the dedicators') feelings towards the focus of the cult at this peak sanctuary. Another expression of despair is the placing of the two hands close together high on the chest at the base of the neck, which is shown by both male and female figurines from Petsophas, Piskokephalo, and other peak sanctuary sites (Fig. 19). In the later history of art, this gesture 'stands for a feeling of intense, long-lasting pain and above all for one's own inability or even impossibility to change a situation' (Pasquinelli 2007, 164 [author's translation]). For its Minoan use, an original funerary association is indeed by one of its earliest depictions which comes from the MM IA context of Burial Building 9 at Archanes, namely the clay figurine which was found together with three skulls in secondary deposition (Fig. 19a; Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellaraki 1997, 210). In the LM I period, the same gesture appeared on a clay figurine (Fig. 19e) from the *Complesso della Mazza di Breccia* – the structure serving the *Tomba degli Ori* as well as cult activities carried out for the dead in the courtyard framed by the two structures on the edge of the cemetery at Agia Triada (Puglisi 2003, 188, 191). A bronze figurine with the same gesture was reported from the 'villa' (Fig. 19f).

This selection shall suffice for now to support the hypothesis that a considerable proportion of the figurines dedicated in peak sanctuaries (and at Piskokephalo) express grief, pain, worry, and/or anxiety as the appropriate behaviour towards a focus of the cult practised in these places. Given the place where most of the figurines were displayed, a sanctuary, I would like to hypothesise that this behaviour was addressed to a deity – Given the funerary connotations of the gestures but also the notions of worry, anxiety, and emotional distress conveyed by them, the suspicion arises that this could have been a deity who had suffered a terrible fate and died and/or was thought to be absent and/or in another world.

Mourning at a Deity's Tomb?

At this point, I would like to return to the LM I representations in seal images and bronze figurines, which partly continue the gestures of the Middle Minoan period, partly add new expressions of grief, worry, and anxiety. While the bronze figurines' original context of display is unknown, the figures in the seal images repeatedly occur in the same contextual settings: male and female figures kneeling at a boulder, and female figures standing in front of a tree-crowned structure. This structure is most often referred to as a shrine and thought to be a focus of ecstatic behaviour and invocations of divine epiphany (*e.g.* Warren 1988; Marinatos 1989). However, such interpretation does not explain the expressions of grief, worry, or anxiety shown *e.g.* by the female figures standing in front of the tree-crowned structure on the seal impression from Chania (Fig. 10) or on the seal impression from Knossos (Fig. 11).

In the search for an explanation of the emotional expressions shown towards the building with the tree growing out of it, it may be worth turning once again to Egypt, where the concept of mourning for a deceased deity who resides in the underworld has an element that is strikingly similar to the structure in Minoan depictions: the tomb or 'mound of Osiris'. Its main characteristics have been described as follows: 'The tomb lies on an island, or at least in the immediate vicinity of the shore. This corresponds first of all to the god's relationship to the water and is also reminiscent of the idea of the primeval mound. The tomb itself is divided into an "Upper" and a "Lower Duat", the former cannot be interpreted in more detail, but is probably directly connected with the sacred grove, the latter is a stone building of 16 × 12 cubits, which, like the real

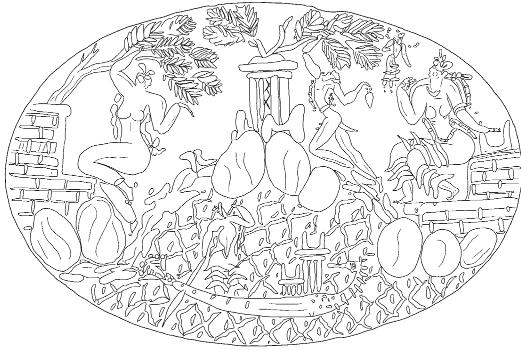

Fig. 20: Ring of Minos, allegedly from Knossos (drawing U. Günkel-Maschek, after Dimopoulou-Rethemiotaki 2005, 124–125).

Duat, has seven gates. A mound of sand was heaped up in the middle, which served as a place of burial during the annual funeral ceremonies. Next to the tomb of Osiris was a sacred grove, which was probably intended to serve as a place of residence for Ba and is to be regarded as an image of the god's creative power. This also applies to the tree that stands directly on the coffin or grows out of the body of the god and thus symbolises the resurrection' (Budka 2000, 14 [author's translation]; see also Colonna 2018, 227–239).

The visual concept of the Minoan structure shares many of these characteristics, even if not all of them are always present within one and the same depiction: the division of the tomb into an upper part associated with the tree and a lower part consisting of a stone building is clearly visible in many of the depictions (*e.g.* Figs. 6–7, 10–11, 20–21); its location in the vicinity of the shore is suggested by the gold ring from Pylos (Fig. 16) and by the Ring of Minos (Fig. 20); that the 'mound' contains a burial is suggested by the depiction of a pithos inside it beneath a tree on the gold ring from Vapheio (Fig. 2; *cf.* Persson 1942, 36–37); this depiction also suggests the existence of a 'mound-with-tree-only' motif, an observation also made by Nanno Marinatos, who noted that the tree and shrines were also shown separately (Marinatos 1989, 131; see also Figs. 8–9). The Egyptian reference to gates in the stone precinct finds its equivalent in the central opening of the Minoan depictions (*e.g.* Figs. 6–7, 10, 20–21). Marinatos compared these openings to the false doors in Egyptian funerary architecture, 'the purpose of which was to allow communication between the living and the dead', and she identified them as 'loci for communication with the beyond', suggesting that 'it is on this spot that some contact with the deity is expected to take place' (Marinatos 1993, 121; *cf.* Marinatos 1989, 140). The door in the Minoan structure may represent the gate of the tomb and locus for communication with its interior. Inside the precinct there must have been an elevation that allows us to see much more of the tree than just the upper part that we would expect to see if the tree were growing from the ground. Rather than assuming that 'the tree always grows on top of the constructed shrine' (Marinatos 1989, 131), we can perhaps imagine a similar kind of mound inside the Minoan structure, on which the tree grows. Upon close inspection, such a 'mound' is indeed visible in the detailed depiction on the 'Ring of Minos' (Fig. 20). Inside this mound, there may have been the dead deity, to whom the expressions of grief and the lamentation of the figures standing in front of the structure were addressed.

In view of these striking parallels, I would like to propose an interpretation of the tree-crowned structure as the tomb of a Minoan deity (or hero), conceived as absent, deceased, or dwelling in another world – similar to the concept of the 'mound of Osiris' in Egypt. The worship of this deity (or hero) began in the early Middle Bronze Age and involved the establishment of peak sanctuaries such as the one on Petsophas. The transfer of the self-hugging gesture in particular to representations on signet-rings and bronze figurines (in addition to the figurine in Berlin [Fig. 1], an LM I bronze figurine from Trianda on Rhodes shows a related gesture, see Marketou 1998, 59–60, fig. 7; *cf.* Kekes 2021, 7, fig. 8) reflects in a special way the adoption of the associated emotional expression by the palatial elite. This elite integrated the expression of sadness, grief, worry, anxiety, and lamentation into a complex cycle of representation which was introduced in LM I to illustrate a significant religious narrative – the Divine Drama cycle, as I will refer to it in my forthcoming volume. Its representations not only adorned signet rings and sealstones, but were also closely linked to the architectural form of the lustral basin, as evidenced by the findings at Xesté 3, Akrotiri, where a tomb painted on the wall was the focus not only of the

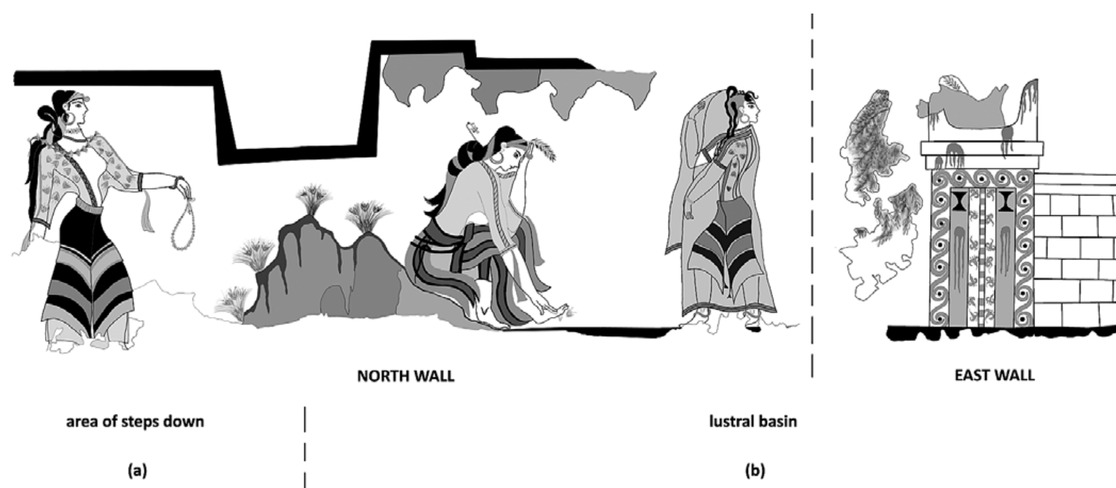

Fig. 21: Painting from the north and east wall of the lustral basin in Xesté 3, Akrotiri, Thera (drawing U. Günkel-Maschek, after Doumas 1999, 136–137, fig. 100; Vlachopoulos 2007, pl. XXVIIa).

seated woman covering her face in pain and the veiled girl looking back in horror, shock or surprise, but also of any ritual activity within the sunken space (Fig. 21). It is reasonable to assume that the lustral basin, whose use "in connection with chthonic ritual" (Shaw 2011, 161) has long been suspected, was in fact the architectural structure used to perform ritual activities based on the narrative surrounding the tomb of the dead deity (or hero). With the proliferation of lustral basins as part of the 'palatial architectural style' (Driessen 1989/1990) during the LM I period, the cult was carried to all corners of Minoan Crete, becoming an essential pillar of the LM I religious system, with the palatial and/or priestly elite as its main agents.

But let us return to the gestures which characterise the LM I representations of the Divine Drama cycle. The expressions of grief, worry, and anxiety directed towards the tomb in the above-mentioned representations are found on individual female figures: figures covering the face with the flat of the hand (Fig. 21), figures touching the suprasternal notch while turning their heads away, the other arm stretched out longingly towards the tomb (Fig. 10), or figures extending the arm towards a male figure (Fig. 9), the latter suggesting that it is indeed a male figure who is the cause of their misery and worry. It is possible that we are not dealing with human female worshippers at all, but rather with a myth represented entirely by mythological protagonists. Perhaps in some cases the main female figure even represented the partner/widow of the absent male figure.

However, the expression of grief over the deity's absence was not limited to female figures, but was also performed by male actors, insofar as kneeling before a boulder refers to the absence of the same deity. Persson (1942) identified the boulder as a funerary pithos and the kneeling figures as those who mourned the death of the vegetation god. The identification as a funerary pithos was rightly doubted by Niemeier (1989, 174–176), but his conclusion that these were therefore not representations of mourning rituals but invocations of divine epiphanies, is not self-evident. Rather, considering the nature of the gestures as analysed before, the stone can more convincingly be read as a place associated with an absent or dead deity, and evokes mourning for him. Although similar suggestions have been made before (see now Morris and Goodison 2022, 21 with further references), ultimately we lack any evidence of the religious narrative that could shed light on the relationship between the stone and the deity.

Women and men also participate in the Divine Drama cycle in the enigmatic action of pulling or shaking the tree growing from inside the tomb, sometimes in the same scene as mourners kneeling at a boulder (Figs. 6–7) or women standing passively and touching the suprasternal notch (Fig. 11). These tree-shakers are not overt mourners, but figures performing an action that is significant in this context and presumably as necessary as the 'correct' display of emotions at

the boulder or for the deity represented by the tomb. Exactly what the figures are doing is difficult to determine. On the one hand, their behaviour is characterised by an 'agonistic' element, as Caroline Tully explains in her contribution to this volume, *i.e.* it is an agitated behaviour that reveals the agony or frenzy with which the figures turn towards the tree. On the other hand, it can be observed that the tree is usually, but not always, in full leaf: while full leaves adorn the tree in the presence of the single female mourning figures and of the tree-shakers, only single leaves can be seen on the otherwise bare branches when the group of female lamenters approaches the tomb on the gold ring from Pylos (Fig. 16). The shaking or pulling of the leafy tree may therefore have had a different purpose or occasion than the lamentation at the less leavy tree. The frequent depiction of lamenting women, even without a tomb, reflects the popularity and importance of this lamenting event during the LM I period (Fig. 14).

The depictions in the LM I Divine Drama cycle thus represent the visual narrative for a cult dedicated to a dead deity (or hero) dwelling in the underworld, whose absence from the world of the living (deities?) was met with expressions of grief, worry, and/or anxiety as well as with lamentation, possibly in keeping with the annual cycle. The idea for this cult, which was monopolised by the palatial and/or priestly elite in LM I, had its roots in the peak sanctuary cult, where figurines showing grief and anxiety were already put on display in the Middle Minoan period. Could these peaks have been the 'burial mound(s)' of this deity? It is worth noting that similarities and indeed 'some conceptual overlap' between the communal rituals at the tholos tombs and the cult at the peak sanctuaries have been noted in the past (Peatfield 1987, 90; 1990, 125). This includes certain gesture types that first appear on figurines placed in MM I tombs and shortly afterwards on figurines offered at peak sanctuaries. Together with the origin of a whole group of gestures from Egyptian tomb paintings, where they symbolised respectful mourning for the deceased, there thus seems to be a strong case for the emergence or introduction of the cult of a deity dwelling in the underworld in the early Middle Minoan period, which was then developed into the sophisticated Divine Drama cycle of the LM I period.

Mourning Gestures After the End of the LM I Period

This cult was practised by the palatial/priestly elite throughout the island, with the underlying myth – visually expressed in the Divine Drama cycle – permeating their administrative activities and personal appearance. But all this came gradually to an end with the filling of the lustral basins in the LM I B period and completely with the destruction of the palaces and 'villas', at the end of the LM I period, with the exception of Knossos.

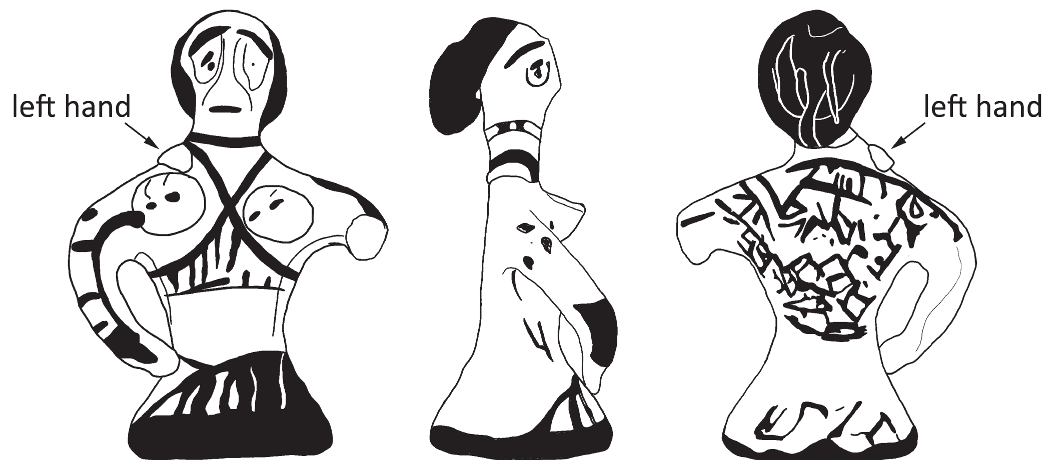

Fig. 22: LM III A clay figurine from Metochi Kalou (drawing U. Günkel-Maschek, after Dimopoulou-Rethemiotaki and Rethemiotakis 1978, 99, fig. 39).

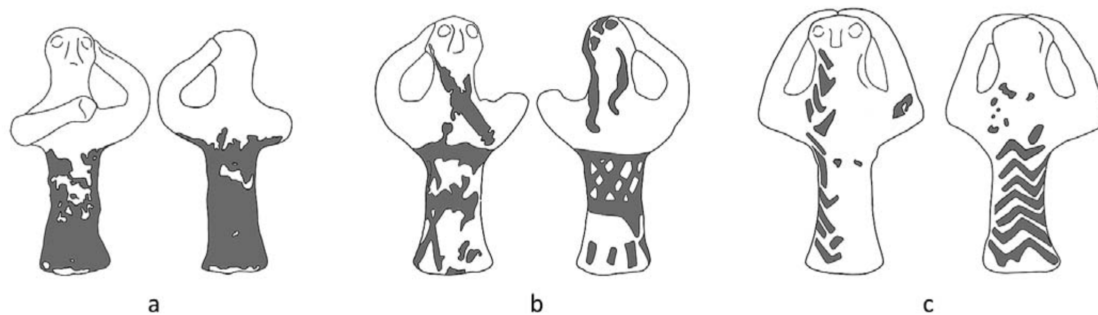

Fig. 23: Three LM III C to Protogeometric clay figurines from a tomb in east Crete (drawing Ute Günkel-Maschek and B. Houllis, after Schmid 1967, pl. 58, fig. 2).

The depiction of the gestures expressing grief, notably those already used for this purpose in the Middle Minoan period, nevertheless continued in the LM II and LM III period, now mainly in funerary contexts. A female figurine with one hand on the opposite shoulder was found in a tomb at Metochi Kalou (Fig. 22). The excavators suggested that the figurine was performing the same gesture of worship as the figurines from Piskokephalo, but probably as a deity rather than a worshipper (Dimopoulou-Rethemiotaki and Rethemiotakis 1978, 100–101). A presumably male torso with one hand on the side of the neck and the other on the chest was found in the LM III A2 *Tomba del Sarcophago Dipinto* at Agia Triada (Fig. 18c). At Armenoi, a steatite pendant in the shape of a female figurine with the hands joined below the neck was found in one of the niches carved into the dromos wall of LM III B tomb 76 (Fig. 19g). At both Armenoi and Chania, figurines with the hands joined on the chest – a gesture already found in the MM I A burials of Archanes and on plenty of clay figurines from Petsophas – were placed in LM III A/B tombs (Godart and Tzedakis 1992, pl. CLII, 2; Rethemiotakis 1998, 46, cat. no. 189, pl. 18α–γ). At Gournia, an LM III A2/B burial contained the clay rhyton shaped as a female figure touching her forehead with her fingertips in the same way as the bronze figurine from Psychro, which the excavators had already identified as an attitude of mourning (Fig. 15b; Hawes et al. 1908, 46, no. 11).

In the LM III C or Protogeometric period, the self-hug appears combined with a hand-on-head gesture amongst a trio of mourning figures from a tomb in East Crete (Fig. 23a). A second figurine in the same group originally had both hands touching the sides of the head (Fig. 23b), the third one both hands placed on top of the head (Fig. 23c). This display of the self-hugging gesture side-by-side with the better-known types of mourning gestures confirms the continued understanding of this self-comforting arm pose as a display of grief and its logical suitability for funerary contexts. The touching of the sides of the head with both hands remained associated with burial on Crete until the Geometric-Archaic period, as evidenced *e.g.* by a seated figure from tomb B at Arkades (Levi 1931, 184, fig. 205).

The deposition of figurines in tombs is generally regarded as "a sign of the Mycenaean influence which began to be active in Crete in LM III" (Nilsson 1971, 300), with the figurines known from tombs representing Cretan 'naturalistic' types (Dimopoulou-Rethemiotaki and Rethemiotakis 1978, 99). However, Minoan-inspired self-touches were indeed represented in Mycenaean tombs as early as the LH II period, namely by a 'Minoanising', if not Minoan, figurine from Peristeria (Hägg 1981, 37, fig. 1; *cf.* French 1972, 109), and continued into later times, as shown, for example, by a figurine from a tomb at Kara Hymettos (French 1972, pl. 17a). The Mycenaean deposition of such self-hugging figurines in tombs, therefore, not only reflects the earlier and still contemporary Minoan deposition of figurines with gestures of grief in tombs, but also, and most importantly for the present argument, acknowledges their Minoan significance as such expressions of grief.

Summary

The gestures and postures listed here can be interpreted as representations of behaviour and expressions of emotion of which some have served for millennia to depict figures expressing pain and grief over *e.g.* a terrible fate or the death of a person. Others were identified as expressions of worry, insecurity, and emotional distress that are still in use today. In the MM and LM I periods, expressions of grief and emotional distress were displayed towards a deity (or hero) who was considered absent or deceased and presumably resided in the underworld. The existence of a Bronze Age Cretan deity whose death was ritually mourned every year, as proposed by Evans, Persson, and also Nilsson (albeit with a different twist, as noted above), thus becomes a tempting scenario yet again. In Egypt and the Near East, the myths of Osiris and Tammuz illustrate the complex foundations of such religious practices, and there is no reason to believe that Bronze Age Crete was any different in this respect. Although one might argue against following Egyptian parallels too closely in reconstructing Cretan Bronze Age religious myths, it can be countered that the consistent and detailed Minoan representation of gestures corresponding to those common in Egypt – and not just one or two, but a large number of gestures, of which only a selection has been discussed here – during the Middle and early Late Bronze Age suggests a more intensive engagement with the representations (and their contexts and meaning) than merely a stimulation by occasional imported depictions or visits to Egypt. The partly original, partly continued funerary connection in later times points in the same direction. At the same time, the lively, even theatrical style of the LM I representations, as well as elements such as the pithos, the boulder, or the design of the tomb, testify to the specific 'Minoan' character of the Divine Drama cycle and to the fact that Cretan craftspeople had long since adopted the language of gesture to express the ideas that dominated religious life on Crete independently.

The association with the death or absence of a deity may not extend to all figurines that were dedicated in peak sanctuaries, but it does to those figurines with gestures that can clearly be read as expressions of grief, worry, or emotional distress. Other gestures not considered in the present discussion may well have served other purposes within the same cult. However, it is also possible that certain gestures are to be understood under different aspects than previously assumed. For example, the opening of the garment, recently observed by Platon on clay figurines from Piskokephalo and interpreted as "revelation of the breast" (Platon 2014), could instead be an early representation of 'exposing the breasts' in mourning. In any case, the representations of gestures expressing grief in the peak sanctuaries show that such behaviour was an essential element of the cult practised at these sites. Consequently, the figurines were dedicated in the peak sanctuaries to commemorate the death and absence of the deity by expressing their grief, thereby showing the appropriate and respectful behaviour that suited its worship. Such celebrations and their mythological underpinnings could indeed explain the later understanding of Juktas as the burial place of Zeus (see Karetsou 1981, 152–153 with further references).

The development of this cult originated from communal rituals at tombs at the beginning of the Middle Minoan period and led to the establishment of the peak sanctuaries, including an overlapping range of gestures of the figurines that were dedicated in both contexts. In the LM I period, the cult was taken over by palatial or priestly elites, who made it an essential aspect of cult practice in the 'villas' and palaces. Special architectural forms, such as the lustral basin, whose use had gradually developed during the Middle Minoan period (*e.g.* Shaw 2011, 161), now became a standard feature of the 'palatial architectural style'. The continued use of some of the expressions of grief, worry, and emotional distress, and the addition of new ones, in representations on signet-rings and seal-stones, on precious pendants, as well as on bronze figurines and in wall paintings, testify to the persistence in the visual narratives of the LM I period of the same basic idea. The absent or dead deity was now symbolised by his tomb, or by the boulder as another symbolically significant locus of mourning and lamentation.

After the end of the LM I period, which also marked the end of the palatial/priestly elite officially practicing the cult across the island, not all these gestures were abandoned. On the contrary, some of the gestures continued to characterise figurines given to the deceased in accordance with their understanding as respectful expressions of sadness and grief, thereby ensuring the eternal mourning of the dead in this world and the dead person's well-being in the afterlife.

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