

The Temple at Ayia Irini: Mythology and Archaeology

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THE RECENT archaeological discoveries at Ayia Irini, situated on a promontory on Keos, agree quite closely with the ancient literary tradition of the island. After making preliminary soundings in 1960 an expedition of the University of Cincinnati, headed by John Caskey, in 1961 began excavations there, which are still going on.¹ Connections with Crete became clear even during the first year's digging. Pots that were certainly imported from Crete included jars with double-axe and grass patterns, a stirrup jar with a typical Minoan triple handle, and a sprinkler decorated with figure-of-eight shields. Other pieces were clearly in imitation of Cretan styles. Among the buildings at Ayia Irini a temple that still existed in late Mycenaean times was partly excavated, and terracotta fragments of several large female figures were found in the debris, along with a fine little terracotta dolphin and a fragment of a bronze ship.²

The excavations were resumed in 1963, with startling results: "The interior of the temple was wholly excavated, yielding a remarkable array of terracotta statues and indications that this building was used continuously for religious purposes from the fifteenth century to Hellenistic times."³ This is especially impressive since Keos, unlike

¹ See "Excavations in Keos, 1960-1961," "... 1963," and "... 1964-1965," *Hesperia* 31 (1962) 263; 33 (1964) 314; 35 (1966) 363 (hereafter CASKEY, with date of publication). See also Caskey, "Investigations in Keos, Part I," *Hesperia* 40 (1971) 359-96. Other details of the excavations have appeared in the "News Letter from Greece" in *AJA*, "Chronika" in *Deltion*, "Archaeological Reports" in *JHS*, and "Chronique des Fouilles" in *BCH*. Caskey will eventually publish a full and final report of the excavations and, with his wife Miriam Ervin Caskey, who is currently working on the terracottas, a volume on the temple. I am happy to thank Professor Caskey for reading this paper and offering many helpful suggestions and clarifications, and for his hospitality on Keos in July 1971. I owe much to T. B. L. Webster for his help and encouragement on this paper and the dissertation (Stanford 1971) it is a part of.

² Caskey 1962, 272, 279-80, pls. 99d, e, f and 101e. E. Vermeule on the other hand claims (*Greece in the Bronze Age* [Chicago 1964] 120) that the Keans imported Minoan ware, but never imitated it: "The local pottery is plain red and dull."

³ Caskey 1964, 317.

Eleusis or the few other sites where great continuity of a cult is likely, had little political or religious significance on an international level, at least in historic times. Caskey says: "The stratification of deposits within the rooms and many evidences of successive reconstructions make it clear that the building had a very long history, beginning not later than the fifteenth century B.C. and continuing with little if any interruption down to Graeco-Roman times."⁴ In 1964 it was learned that the temple had certainly been in use even earlier.

Room XI, on the west corner of the temple, was apparently the most sacred of the rooms, the *adyton*. Most of the sculpture was found on its floor, near the rear wall; there may have been a sacred repository in the room above Room XI, from which the sculpture fell. Nearby in Room VII were found the fragment of a bronze boat and a small bronze of "a youth saluting in the Minoan fashion," broken off at the waist. It must have been imported from Crete. This and the corresponding pottery are LM IB and LH II at the latest. Many of these pieces were probably votive offerings.⁵ The terracotta statues are from the same period or a bit earlier. They were broken and scattered at an early stage of the temple, probably in an earthquake (see the chart below). A pig-tail braid from Room XII joined a head from Room V. Caskey suggests that this head may have been salvaged from the debris and preserved as an object of reverence in later Mycenaean times and thereafter. The statues are all female, standing erect or bent slightly forward; they wear flaring skirts to the ground, with wide bands around their narrow waists; they have broad shoulders and large breasts; they wear either a short jacket open at the front, but with a tight collar, or else they are naked from the waist up, except for a long, heavy garland, though a thin garment may have been painted on; they hold their arms downward with hands on hips; their hair is gathered behind and on some hangs down the back in a long braid. Some of the faces are smiling, some grave. In 1966 they were estimated to number between nineteen and twenty-four. Both the modeling of the faces and the technical ability required to make and fire such large terracottas indicate a well-established craft.⁶

Statue K3.611 is the most interesting: "The head of this statue is very badly worn and much smaller than when it was made. It was

⁴ *ibid.* 326.

⁵ *ibid.* 327–28, pl. 56a, b.

⁶ *ibid.* 328–30.

found by us not with the other fragments, on the floor of Room XI, but nearly a meter higher, on another floor which had been installed in the same space at a very much later date, probably in the eighth century B.C. Furthermore, it is quite certain that it came there not altogether by accident, for when found it was set up in a specially made ring base of terracotta and surrounded by flat stones."⁷ Several points are obvious from this. Between the time it was made and the time it was finally abandoned seven centuries elapsed. Either it was handed down from generation to generation for the entire period; or else it was at first lost in the debris from the catastrophe that shattered all the terracottas, then found at some unknown time during this period, recognized as something holy from the past that still had religious significance for the present, and set up with due reverence. In any case, it never left the temple site.

We must try to explain the function of these statues. They are too numerous all to be the Goddess herself. Were they cult statues or dedications? Caskey says: "One or more of the statues—presumably the largest, which are attested by fragments only—may have been cult images. The others are so numerous we must take them to represent attendants or votaries of the divinity."⁸ Vermeule suggests they may be official portraits of successive priestesses, done as each took office.⁹ Perhaps the largest ones are cult images of the Goddess, and the others were dedicated either by the successive priestesses or by rich townspeople for the usual practical reasons or by both, and these votive statues were then set up around one central great statue to serve as her votaries. Persson's Ring No.8, from the small tomb at Isopata, shows us what the scene may have looked like: attendants dancing around the Goddess in a meadow filled with spring flowers.¹⁰ Webster suggests that these dancing votaries of the Goddess were the ancestors of the maenads.¹¹ It should be noted that the hands-on-hips posture of the Keos terracottas is a dancing posture.

⁷ *ibid.* 330, pls. 60e, f, g and 61a, b, c.

⁸ *ibid.* 331.

⁹ Vermeule, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.2) 286.

¹⁰ Axel Persson, *The Religion of Greece in Prehistoric Times* (Berkeley 1942) 47–50, Ring 8 (hereafter *RGPT*).

¹¹ T. B. L. Webster, *From Mycenae to Homer*² (London 1964) 50, says: "The Lady of the Labyrinth is the goddess Ariadne, for whom Daidalos (himself a god, I think, in Crete) made a dancing place [*Il.* 18.590]; she was the bride of Dionysos, who was stolen by Theseus and killed by Artemis on the representation of Dionysos [*Od.* 11.324] . . . The canonical

Though the temple and the sculpture are primarily local, it is worth noting the foreign connections. The long, flared skirt, the thick bands about the waist, and bare breasts either with or without the open treader jacket were common in Minoan Crete and were adopted on the mainland. This dancing posture is also Minoan.¹² The bronze youth saluting is of the well-known Minoan 'adorant' type, showing respect for the deity of the temple. Moreover, certain larger houses of the town contained well executed frescoes in the Minoan fashion, one of dolphins.¹³ A graffito in Linear A script was discovered on a jar of moderately coarse ware.¹⁴

Terracotta statues similar to the Keos ones were discovered in 1968 or 1969 in Wace's Citadel House at Mycenae. Sixteen figures, nearly all female and standing as high as .6 m., as well as two coiled snakes and fragments of at least four more, were discovered in the storeroom, which was sealed up sometime before the destruction in LH IIIb. A shrine adjoined the storeroom.¹⁵

Graffiti were found on votive cups in the later levels of Room XI of the temple on Keos, proving that it was a shrine of Dionysos during at least the sixth to the fourth century B.C. Clearly the site was never used for any but religious purposes. The question that now poses itself is: if this was a shrine of the Goddess during the Bronze Age, and if it had become a shrine of Dionysos by the sixth century, then what deity possessed the temple in the eighth century when the head of the fifteenth-century Goddess was still revered? The youth, dolphin and ship found among the few objects in association with the statues may indicate that the rituals practiced in the temple were similar to those represented in Persson's Rings Nos. 25 and 26, which show the Goddess or a priestess being led by her consort on board a ship that is escorted by dolphins, and which have been interpreted as Theseus and Ariadne

story of Theseus and the daughter of Minos would then be a later version, which tended to depress Ariadne from the divine to the heroic level and leave Dionysos alone as the god of maenads and wine . . . The ecstatic dances on many Minoan-Mycenaean rings [Webster's fig.13 for the Isopata ring] will then be the ancestors of the dances of maenads . . ." And again, p.62: "The Minoan goddess of wild dances and her consort became the Greek Ariadne and Dionysos."

¹² See also on Ring 4, *RGPT*.

¹³ Caskey 1964, 322-23.

¹⁴ *ibid.* 325.

¹⁵ P. M. Fraser, "Archaeological Reports 1968-1969," 11-12 (*JHS*); and Miriam Ervin, "News Letter from Greece," *AJA* 73 (1969) 346-47.

or Dionysos and Ariadne scenes.¹⁶ We know Dionysos was a god in Minoan-Mycenaean times;¹⁷ we can see him prefigured on certain seal rings as the consort of the Goddess, who was presumably reduced in stature by the Greeks to the mythological heroine Ariadne, while the consort was raised to a god; we have good reason to see him prefigured in the 'adorant' youth, since we find a shrine of Dionysos directly descended from a shrine of the Goddess and preserving a pious memorial to her.

A late literary reference, which may go back to an early source, connects Ariadne with Keos. The scholiast to Theocritus, in commenting on the passage where Theseus is said to have abandoned Ariadne on Dia (2.45/46 b, p.280 Wendel) (as opposed to the version where she is abandoned on Naxos), says that many islands are called Dia and names six, among which is the peninsula of Keos: ἡ τῆς Κέω χερρόνησος. It seems likely that a cult of Ariadne was once strong on the islands and that she was identified with the Minoan-Mycenaean goddess Dia whom we find named on the Linear B tablets.¹⁸ Those islands where the cult was particularly strong preserved the name Dia in later times. The peninsula of Keos was one of these; Ayia Irini and its Bronze Age temple are situated on a peninsula in the northwest corner of the island. Even today the whole island is popularly known as Dia or Tsia.

These Keos statues do not represent the figure we think of as Ariadne. They are obviously religious, not mythological, and Ariadne is a mythological character. The function of the Keos Goddess cannot be as narrowly specified as can Ariadne's. Nevertheless, the conjunction here of a Dionysos and a female figure handed down directly from the Bronze Age Goddess and her consort and the great likelihood of the identification of the temple area with the location of

¹⁶ RGPT 80–82; Webster, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.11) 52 and 62; also my dissertation 37–43. Since the male figure who is leading the goddess from her sanctuary on Ring 26 is ithyphallic, I presume he is meant to be the springtime fertility spirit who has awakened her and is leading her back home, i.e. that he is a Dionysos rather than a Theseus figure. He may not be ithyphallic after all, but be wearing a 'penis-sheath' of the kind common to adorant figures; it may amount to the same as being ithyphallic.

¹⁷ The name Dionysos occurs on two Pylos tablets, Xa 102 and Xb 1419 (on the latter it is associated with the word for wine), and one Knossos tablet, X 1501. This must mean that Dionysos was a god then, even if the name on the tablets does not refer to the deity. If it was a common proper name, then its use as such would follow on its use as a divine name, not precede it.

¹⁸ At least on Pylos tablets Kn 02 and An 42 and the Knossos tablet X 97.

Ariadne's abandonment suggest that the mythological figure Ariadne is descended from the religious figure of the Goddess and that in the Bronze Age a fertility cult of her abandonment, sleep and rescue by the new year-god was practiced on Keos.

Later excavations have shown that the site was prosperous and heavily populated in the Early Bronze Age. In LH IIIA there was probably an earthquake that caused a considerable change in the sea-level. In any event the water supply was spoiled, and the site was abandoned for habitation. Only the site of the Bronze Age temple continued in use.¹⁹ Again we have religious continuity affirmed. The site must have been peculiarly sacred for the temple to have been kept in use when all the other buildings had to be abandoned.

The literary tradition about Keos preserves an unusually vivid recollection of Minoan times.²⁰ Pindar in *Paean* 4, for the Keans to sing at Delos, and commissioned from him probably because Bacchylides was then in exile,²¹ tells the story of King Euxantios of Keos, who we know was the son of Minos and Dexithea (lines 32–53). The men of Crete wanted Euxantios to come there to rule or to take a seventh share of the island's hundred cities along with the sons of Pasiphaë. He refused, telling them how he feared Poseidon and war with Zeus, for they had once struck with trident and thunderbolt and sent the land and its people down to Tartarus. They had left unharmed, however, his mother and her house. He therefore refused to leave his little piece of land, because on it he would have no share of sorrows or strife.

Bacchylides in *Ode* 1, for Argeios of Keos, the victor in the boy's boxing match at the Isthmus, told the story of Dexithea. It appears in the first decipherable section of the poem (112–27). Minos and his company of Cretans came to Keos in fifty ships. He wedded Dexithea,

¹⁹ John Caskey and Mary Eliot, "Excavations at Ayia Irini in Keos," *AJA* 74 (1970) 190–91.

²⁰ The whole question of references to Minoans found in authors from Homer to late antiquity is discussed by G. L. Huxley, *Minoans in Greek Sources* (Belfast 1968). It may be objected that it is not valid to use literary evidence from the fifth and third centuries B.C. and the first, fourth and fifth centuries after Christ to interpret archaeological evidence from the Bronze Age. But surely the correspondences are there in the matter itself; I shall merely point them out. Xenomedes had local chronicles, oral tradition and poetry to rely on. Bacchylides must have known quite a lot about his island. His sources were earlier by several generations than those of Xenomedes. He could also rely on his uncle, the poet Simonides of Keos, for instruction. Pindar apparently made it his business to know all that Bacchylides did, and he may actually have visited Keos (see *infra* n.21).

²¹ George Huxley, "Xenomedes of Keos," *GRBS* 6 (1965) 235ff, esp. 238 n.29.

left her half his men, distributing them across the land, and sailed home to Knossos. In nine months time Dexithea gave birth to Euxantios.

. . .]ς· τριτάτα μετ[ὰ κείναν]
 [ἀμ]έρα Μίνως ἀρήϊος
 ἤλυθεν αἰολοπρύμνοις
 ναυσὶ πεντήκοντα σὺν Κρητῶν ὀμίλῳ·
 στρ. 5' Διὸς Εὐκλείου δὲ ἕκα-
 τι βαθύζωνον κόραν
 Δεξιθέαν δάμασεν·
 καὶ οἱ λίπεν ἡμῖν λαῶν
 ἄνδρας ἀρηϊφίλους,
 τοῖσιν πολύκρημον χθόνα
 νείμας, ἀποπλέων ὄχετ' ἐς
 Κνωσὸν ἡμερτὰν πόλιν
 ἀντ. 5' βασιλεὺς Εὐρωπιάδας.
 δεκάτω δ' Εὐξάντιον
 μηνὶ τέκ' εὐπλόκαμος
 [νύμφα φερ]εκυδέ[ι νάσω]

The earlier part of the *Ode* is much damaged, but in line 73 Bacchylides mentions Makelo, who we know was the mother of Dexithea.

One of the *Aetia* of Callimachus is the story of Akontios and Kydippe (frs. 67–75). Akontios came from Iulis on Keos and was of the line of Euxantios (67.5–7); and Kydippe was from Naxos, and no other who looked more like the dawn set her delicate foot in the dance of sleeping Ariēdē, i.e. Ariadne (67.5 and 11–14). At the end of the story Callimachus gives his source (75.53–55):

Κεῖε, τεὸν δ' ἡμεῖς ἡμερον ἐκλύομεν
 τόνδε παρ' ἀρχαίου Ξενομήδεος, ὃς ποτε πᾶσαν
 νῆσον ἐνὶ μνήμη κάθθετο μυθολόγῳ, . . .

One of the tales (75.64–69) was of

ἐν δ' ὕβριν θάνατόν τε κεραύνιον, ἐν δὲ γόητας
 Τελχίνας μακάρων τ' οὐκ ἀλέγοντα θεῶν
 ἤλεα Δημόνακτα γέρων ἐνεθήκατο δέλτ[οις]
 καὶ γρηῦν Μακελώ, μητέρα Δεξιθέης,
 ἄς μούνας, ὅτε νῆσον ἀνέτρεπον εἶνεκ' ἀλ[ι]τ[ρ]ῆς]
 ὕβριος, ἀσκηθεῖς ἔλλιπον ἀθάνατοι·

Servius, using Euphorion as his source, describes (*ad Verg. Aen.* 6.618) how Poseidon struck that part of the island that the wizards held: *Phlegyae . . . secundum Euphorionem populi insulani fuerunt, satis in deos impii et sacrilegi; unde iratus Neptunus percussit tridenti eam partem insulae quam Phlegyae tenebant et omnes obruit.*

Ovid (*Ibis* 475) alludes to Makelo and her husband being struck down by flames. Nonnos also names the wizards who held part of the island Phlegyae. He tells (*Dionys.* 18.35,35a–38) how Makelo entertained Zeus and Apollo at the same table and was saved (presumably along with Dexithea) when Poseidon caused an earthquake.

Ζῆνα καὶ Ἀπόλλωνα μῆ ξείνισσε <τραπέζῃ>
 Μακελλώ·
 καὶ Φλεγύας ὅτε πάντας ἀνερρίζωσε θαλάσσης
 νῆσον ὄλην τριόδοντι διαρρήξας Ἐνοσίχθων,
 ἀμφοτέρας ἐφύλαξε καὶ οὐ πρήνιξε τριαίνῃ.

These passages show that fifth-century Greece and even much later antiquity preserved the memory of an earthquake that destroyed much of Keos. We cannot know with certainty if this was the earthquake that shattered our terracottas, or the one that spoiled Ayia Irini for general habitation in LH IIIA, or some other. Nor do we know with certainty if the LH IIIA disaster at Keos was the massive one that was also partly responsible for the final destruction of Knossos in LM IIIA, though it seems possible that they were one and the same and that this was the earthquake mentioned by later authors. But certain elements of the puzzle do fit neatly together. Callimachus says that Xenomedes told about Demonax, who was destroyed for impiety along with the wizards (75.66). The scholia to the *Ibis* 475 say that Demonax was the husband of Makelo. The piety of Makelo, and presumably of her daughter Dexithea as well, their entertaining Zeus and Apollo at one table, could indicate they were priestesses of the temple at Ayia Irini. The name Dexithea suggests a meaning ‘she who receives the gods’—possibly a Greek translation of a pre-Greek name or office. Perhaps the office of priestess was handed down from mother to daughter. In that case literary tradition would fit perfectly with the archaeological evidence: the priestesses alone were saved from the earthquake, and alone of all the buildings in the area their temple remained in use after the earthquake.

We are left with a problem of chronology. Did Minos come before the destruction, and was Euxantios born after it? (One might ask also if Minos was the old year-god and Euxantios the new.) We do not know, for Dexithea's story is preserved in fragments, and we do not get all of it from any one author. From what we do have it sounds as though Minos saw an intact Keos. We do know that Euxantios sired a line; so either he was born before the earthquake and the legend is for some reason silent about his survival, or else it was a pregnant Dexithea whom the gods spared.

Was this Minos Minoan or Mycenaean, *i.e.* a Greek king at Knossos? The answer depends on when Ayia Irini was spoiled for habitation and how much earlier the visit of Minos took place. Though the town had been walled in by the early part of the Middle Bronze Age, a new and larger wall was built in MM III, and Caskey links this with increased Minoan connections at the time of the Minoan thalassocracy.²² Since we find some mainland pottery on Keos, as well as Minoan pottery, we can speculate that this new wall was designed to strengthen a Kean alliance with Crete while protecting Keos from the growing power of Mycenae. The mythology has probably telescoped the actual events, whose archaeological remains we find strung out in their proper order. A Minos or his merchants must have visited the island well before the Mycenaeans were ever established as rulers at Knossos, by at least MM IIA,²³ when the Kamares ware found on Keos was being made. A later Minos must have visited the island in MM III to make his influence felt when the new wall was being built. This may have been the Minos of Thucydides 1.4, who was the first *οἰκιστής* (here 'colonizer' or simply 'settler') of most of the Cyclades and who established his sons as their *ἡγεμόνας* ('governors').²⁴ The Minos of the Thucydides passage sounds like the Minos of other authors, who visited Keos and left half his men there. But the visit of this Minos and his marriage to Dexithea barely preceded the destruction of the whole island or whole site, except for the temple. Caskey accepts a date of about 1450 B.C., LM IB, for widespread destruction from Keos to Crete, due probably to the eruption of Thera though possibly to some other event, which then provided an opportunity for a Greek invasion

²² John Caskey, "Crises in the Minoan-Mycenaean World," *ProcAmPhilosSoc* 113 (1969) 433-49, esp. 438.

²³ *ibid.* 436.

²⁴ *ibid.* 438.

of Crete. Greek power at Knossos lasted until early in the fourteenth century.²⁵

A tentative scheme for evidence on the early history of Keos works out like this:

<i>Date</i>	<i>Archaeology</i>	<i>Literature</i>
MM IIA (or earlier)	First Minoan contacts.	
MM III	New wall. Strong Minoan influence.	According to Caskey, perhaps the thalassocracy of Thucydides 1.4.
LM IB (1450 B.C.)	Caskey's date for possible eruption of Thera and definite widespread destruction from Keos to Crete.	Possibly the visit of Minos.
LM IIIA (LH IIA) (1380 B.C.)	Earthquake that caused abandonment of Ayia Irini, except for the temple, and destruction of the water supply.	Probably the visit of Minos as mentioned in Bacchylides <i>et al.</i> , which seems to coincide with Thucydides 1.4.

Minos must have visited just before whichever earthquake we settle on. Provided Bacchylides and the other sources are not greatly telescoping the interval between the visit and the destruction, if we accept the date 1380 B.C., we have a Mycenaean Minos (late fifteenth to early fourteenth century) for the father of Euxantios. Diodorus Siculus certainly thought the Minos who established the thalassocracy was Greek (4.60). If we choose 1450 B.C. as the date of the destruction, Minos probably becomes Minoan again. Such a scheme is necessarily tentative until new evidence comes to light and the old is sorted out, when we may hope to put the parentage of Euxantios in a clearer historical context.

The evidence is confused about goddess- and god-worship on Keos. First the Goddess, then Dionysos, now Zeus, Poseidon and Apollo. It is

²⁵ *ibid.* 440–42. See also D. L. Page, *The Santorini Volcano and the Destruction of Minoan Crete* (Soc.Prom.Hell.Stud. suppl.12, London 1970) esp. p.30. For a different view see L. Pomerance, *The Final Collapse of Santorini (Thera): 1400 B.C. or 1200 B.C.? (Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology 26, Göteborg 1970)*; summarized in *AJA* 73 (1969) 244.

clear that the Goddess and a consort were there originally; the consort took over as a full-fledged Dionysos, probably, by at least the eighth century, though the Goddess remained important. But Zeus, Poseidon and Apollo? We know from the Linear B tablets that they were Mycenaean gods and perhaps rivals of the pre-Greek Goddess. The temple folk were likely to be the only people of the town with sense enough to honor these gods newly-come to the island, though already established on the mainland and even on Crete. One wonders if it was a Mycenaean Minos who introduced them to Keos; this would connect the piety of Dexithea and Makelo, Dexithea's consorting with Minos, and the entertainment of Zeus and Apollo: Dexithea's affair with Minos was a pious act because he was the earthly representative of the Greek gods. Some compromise was made here. Zeus and Apollo dined at the same table, were waited on by Makelo, but were actually guests of the Goddess and Dionysos.

The legend of Minos, Dexithea and Euxantios could be the record of an actual Minoan colonization. More likely there was a trading visit with some religious and political overtones. In any case, we now have double proof that later Greece preserved a memory of Minoan-Mycenaean times, when Ariadne was a goddess, Dionysos a consort, and the gods, as Alcinous says in the *Odyssey* (7.201-03), feasted sitting among men, and rewarded the piety of their hosts.