

THE CTHULHU PRAYER SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

The Providence H.P. Lovecraft Friends' Group Honors "Day of the Gorgon" July 14

JULY 14, 2002 — The local "Friends of Lovecraft," also known as the Cthulhu Prayer Society, met on July 14th at Union Station Brewery to honor mythology's least-celebrated monsters, the three Gorgons — Medusa, Euryale and Stheno. Once again, the merry crew of artists, writers, musicians and others who love the dark, the strange and the wonderful gathered under the mysterious ale and beer vats to enjoy brunch before heading off to Rutherford's domain for an afternoon of Gorgon lore.

Prayer Society founder Brett Rutherford devised an informal program covering the Greek Cyclades islands, from which the Gorgon legends originate, the origin of Medusa (a maiden changed into a monster by none other than Athena, the goddess of wisdom), the art and imagery of Medusa in architecture and painting; and, finally, excerpts from the two films featuring Gorgons, the Hammer film *The Gorgon* (with Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee and Patrick Troughton) and *Clash of the Titans*, the last great Ray Harryhausen special effects epic.

Although the Brewery usually observes our "no mirrors" request for Cthulhu gatherings, out of consideration for the vampiric, the house mirrors were put back in, lest we gaze directly into the eyes of any visiting Gorgons. (In the myth, the hero Perseus kills Medusa by looking at her reflection in his polished brass shield, using that to guide his hand as he cuts off her head. A direct glance means being turned to stone on the spot.)

Attendees shared fond memories of the highly successful June outing to Mt. Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, hosted by Judith Askey, and the "Franks and Beans and Titus Andronicus" picnic and film showing hosted by Hal Hamilton and Brett Rutherford.



Day of the Gorgon: In Search of the Snake- Haired Sisters of Death

by BRETT RUTHERFORD

MY EARLIEST "STORY" NIGHTMARES were about the Gorgon Medusa and her two sisters, Euryale and Stheno. In an extended dream I had when I was fifteen, I was the protagonist of a complicated narrative in which I was pursued from a strange Greek island all the way to the canals and bridges of Venice by a dark, beautiful woman with aviator sunglasses whom I *knew* to be one of the Gorgons. As a guest on her private island in the far-flung Cyclades, I had witnessed her transformation into the dreaded Gorgon, and the instant petrification of a young man who stood facing her.

She was Euryale, the sister the of slain Gorgon Medusa, and she plied the Greek islands in a antique trireme, rowed by young men who were — or who had been — her love slaves. Those whom she completely tired of, were turned into the statues that littered her gardens, while her victims' lost souls floated about in the moonlight like will o' the wisps.

All of this I dreamt. My Gorgon was not the permanent monsters of Greek lore, with snaky hair, serpent scales, wings, and bird talons. Mine looked like Maria Callas in her prime, a classic Greek beauty who could turn, at will, into the dreaded monster. So she was a little of Circe, enslaving men to her will, as well as the Gorgon.

The legends of the Gorgons, and of Perseus, the hero who slayed Medusa, run deep in the Cyclades, the far-flung islands at the very end of Greece. From some of these islands, the shores of Turkey are visible. I had a hunch — a guess, really, by letting my hand go where it wanted on a Mediterranean map — that the island of Thera (now called Santorini) was intimately involved in the whole Medusa story. Only after I picked the island "at random," did I discover that Perseus was raised nearby and that there were good reasons to place old myths here.

It turns out that Thera, whose harbor is the actual, flattened volcano, was home to a Minoan/Mycenaean city called Akrotiri, which was destroyed in 1500 BCE, when the cone of the volcano exploded. The ruins of Akrotiri were excavated starting in the 1970s, and what came to light was a marvel — magnificently painted wall murals, beautiful pottery, and refined architecture. Akrotiri was a beautiful place, well-established in trade with Crete and other islands. This city may have been the basis for the legend of Atlantis.

The infant Perseus, cast adrift, was discovered near the island of Serifos, one of the Cyclades. When Perseus vows to cut off the head of Medusa, the goddess Athena takes Perseus to the island of Samos, where images of all three Gorgons were displayed. She taught him how to distinguish Medusa from her two sisters, and counseled him that he would have to look only at Medusa's reflection in his shield as he approached her.



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Perseus finds Medusa in her hiding place in Hyperborea, surrounded by the petrified ruins of all the men who had tried to approach her.

Perseus returns to Serifos and accosts his enemies, displaying the Gorgon's head while he looks away. They are all turned to stone, and Robert Graves tell us, "The circle of boulders is still shown" there.

Finally, Perseus gives the head of Medusa to Athena, who affixes it to her shield. Athena is always shown with the Gorgon's head as her aegis.

In earlier Greek architectural and ceramic representations, the Gorgon is a more comical figure, a flat-faced mask with stylized snakes, and a protruding tongue. In later art, the Gorgon becomes a figure of



genuine horror — not only horrible in itself, but often depicted as a tormented face self-aware of the horror of its own condition.

Although there are many theories about the origin of the Medusa myth, most are pure speculation. We know what the Greeks themselves said about Medusa, although even from them there are multiple story lines. The "orthodox" version puts Medusa squarely into the influence of the Olympians: Athena catches her uncle Poseidon (the sea-god) having sex with the beautiful maiden Medusa inside the confines of one of her temples. Outraged, she turns Medusa into the monster we know and dread.

This origin tale, however, does not account for Medusa's two sisters, Euryale and Stheno. Perhaps it would tar Athena with cruelty to claim she also converted two innocent sisters into monsters. But as we have it, Medusa-Euryale-Stheno are a trio, matching the fairy-tale qualities of many nymphs, maidens, Furies, Fates and other minor figures who always come in threes. I think we can just leave the myth as it is, and let imagination fill in the details of how the sisters joined Medusa in her cursed state. (My version — the sisters rushed forward and pleaded with Athena — words were spoken — and all three women were turned into monsters.)

In my new poem, "Athena and Medusa," I review the whole sorry Athena-Medusa feud, but I omit the sisters for simplicity's sake. In the classic poem by Barbara Holland at right, the self-aware and entirely solitary Medusa comes to us in all her horror.



THREE GORGON POEMS

[This poem was first published in *South Carolina Review* and in *May Eve: A Festival of Supernatural Poetry*, Grim Reaper Books, 1975. This is probably the most penetrating psychological portrait of Medusa ever written — a powerful Romantic evocation of outsider/monster.]

MEDUSA

by Barbara A. Holland

Spray. Thick and heavy dawn. A day,
clouded, soaked, sunken swirled.
Exploded. Pouring back into the sea.
The hiss of serpents rising from my head
as mist in streamers wriggling
across this rock. The night
with horrors riding on the wind,
flung by the breakers at my feet,
their jaws gnashing; tentacles,
half-hidden in the beards of weed,
hanging above the down-pulled anger,
the recoil and massing force.
Even those golden wings
and iron talons are little help
against the full attack, constantly
made, withdrawn, and reasserted against
this rotting molar in the sea.

If you could watch the quiet
centered in the eddy of my eyes;
if you could peel away the roughened
hoods of granite, shrouding your own;
if you could bear to see, as I,
my hideous companions, the desolation
of the night, far from the promise
of Hesperides, my madness,
my sallow and emaciated face.
framing these desperate eyes,
would make you see my inner nightmare
as so much greater than
the nightmare that I am.

Mercy spares you,
turns you to stone, that you
may not see me, see that beauty
in a face, mortal,
yet more than human, calls
forth no love, that any love of mine
is walled around
with igneous hardness,
or torn from me, blown away
in shreds of icy spume.

Kill me. Life waters
at the eyes. Swing back your sword.
Look elsewhere lest your arm
remain upraised forever.

I must resign myself
in death to a similar condition,
to darker places, caves loathsome,
crawling with sluggish
saurians, cold in the deep
recesses of the cess-pits of the gods.

[The following poem is reprinted from *Whippoorwill Road: The Supernatural Poems of Brett Rutherford*, Grim Reaper Books, 1998, still available from amazon.com. In this poem, the poet refers to the little-known sister of Medusa, Euryale, who shares her snaky locks and petrifying power.]

GORGON AT THE WEDDING

by BRETT RUTHERFORD

Some wedding, our daughter's!
the garden's a shambles
the groom in a state of
the bride hysterical
and all because of those Greeks
on Mother's side.
I said the wedding list
was dangerous—
too many *ioses*
and *opouloses*,
too many guests
without extending it
into the mythical.

For an Episcopal affair
you dredged up every uncle,
every conceivable cousin,
till trunk lines swelled
with reservations.
They might have come in chariots,
sky cars and dragonback
if I hadn't finally
cried *enough!*

Then Auntie Eu arrived:
frail bird of a woman,
a shipping magnate's widow
rowed into Newport harbor
on some antique trireme.
She stood in the tent,
her chiton flapping,
pecking at hors d'oeuvres,
bony at elbow and ankle
in that unthinkable turban.

Auntie Eu! you shrieked,
presenting the groom and bride
Auntie Eu—Evelyn
Auntie Eu—Jack
You chattered on
about her home in Greece,
her hobby
those charming little
marble animals
frozen as if in life.
They're all the rage
at the shops in the Agora.

How like an aging movie star
she seemed then,
her green black aviators
like eyes on a praying mantis,
Casino waiters fawning,
all eyes upon her jewelry,
vast crowds crashing
the mansion party
to say they'd been

If only poor Jack,
just seeking a toilet,
had but the sense to knock
before he stumbled in
to where poor Auntie Eu
at bathroom mirror
was tucking her snakes
into her turban folds—

if only his sense
had told him to run
instead of to freeze,
that startled instant
before she turned
just might have saved him.

He cried out "Snay—! Snay—!"
She turned. She gave him
her best hard glance.

So now the wedding's off,
for how does Evelyn
confess to poor Jack
our curious lineage.
She can't—
he's petrified.

2002 LOVECRAFT FRIENDS EVENTS

Here it is, with all meetings except those starred with double asterisks commencing at 11:30 am at the Union Station Brewery.

SUNDAY JULY 14.

Day of the Gorgons.

All are invited to share art, stories, film, and anecdotes related to Medusa, the mysterious Cyclades islands, and the Gorgons.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 11.

HPL Birthday Weekend at Swan Point Cemetery.
Poetry readings, offerings, tributes.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 15th.

Program to be announced.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 13th

Poe and Mrs. Whitman.

Premiering the second edition of Rutherford's book on the doomed romance of two important poets and dreamers.

**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 31.

Samhain (Halloween). A grand celebration, place to be announced.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15th.

Decorating the Baba Yaga tree at Rutherford's place. Bring mystery presents to be unwrapped on Russian Christmas, January 6th 2003

That's it for the year. Your ideas and suggestions will be welcome.

Among the "unscheduled" events will be viewings of DVDs and videos, including the last portion of Gormenghast (BBC); a double feature of "Dead Alive" and "Meet the Feebles" by Peter Jackson (director of "Lord of the Rings"), and other surprises.

An outdoor reading of Algernon Blackwood's "The Willows" is also planned in Roger Williams Park -- as a picnic under weeping willow trees.



[The following new poem is based on the mythology of Medusa. She was transformed into the Gorgon by Athena, who was outraged that Medusa and Poseidon used her temple as a trysting place. Later, after banishing Medusa to a hidden island, Athena helps the hero Perseus to cut off Medusa's head. The immortal head, still capable of turning men to stone at a glance, is affixed to Athena's shield.]

ATHENA AND MEDUSA

by Brett Rutherford

She may be wise, that owl-eyed
Athena, but she's Greek
and steeped in spite. Her wrath
against Medusa just has no end.

It's not enough to have
the Gorgon's never-dying head
(thank you, brave Perseus!)
stuck to her shield,

not enough to make her watch
(she who so adores male beauty)
as handsome warriors petrify
on seeing her serpent-
wreathed visage

not enough
that her parched lips thirst,
her black tongue
aches for nourishment,
while wine and victuals
pass through her mouth
into a sodden heap
at neck-base

not enough that the name
Gorgon
makes women shudder
and men avert their eyes
lest the thing they crave,
hard upon soft,
becomes the stillness
of rigor mortis,
an eternity of marble

not enough that mind
should suffer:
she's shipped Medusa's body,
pure as alabaster,
no hint of monster about her

to a brothel in Smyrna
where drunken sailors,
for a few spare drachmas
pile into a dark room
to hump a headless maiden

not enough that midwives
come annually
to deliver up her monsters —
winged things with Turkish
eyebrows, egg-shell
objects that only Harpies
would dare to hatch

Oh! not enough! and all for spite.
That day she found Poseidon,
long-limbed and sleek
entwined in the Gorgona's arms,
in the dark confines
of Athena's temple —
buttocks and legs and bellies
spread on her very altar!

(Is there no place the gods will not go
to have their way with a woman?)
She could not punish
her father's brother-god,
but she seized Medusa,
twisted her golden, braided hair
into a gnarl of hissing serpents,
cursed her with the petrifying glare,
wild eyed, leering, black-tongued

her body goddess-fair by night,
by day a winged monstrosity,
rough skinned with
overlapping scales,
arms ending in razor talons.

*Go to some island unknown to me,
Athena cursed her,
Go hide your shame and
pray I forget you.
Conceal yourself in sea caves,
or sink-hole chasms where sunlight
will not reveal you to men or gods.*

For this, her wounded vanity,
five thousand years at least
Medusa pays, her debt
to Wisdom's dark side,
implacable and cruel.

—July 2002

THE MYSTERIES OF AKROTIRI: ATLANTIS BENEATH THE ASHES?

Dispatches from the Internet About Thera (Santorini) and the Lost City of Akrotiri. Pardon the occasional broken English — some of this comes from Greek web sites.

Santorini is one of the southernmost islands of the Cyclades. An underground volcano whose edge is in the sea surface formed Santorini. It was named Santorini after Saint Irene (Santa Irene) the saint whose grace protects the island; while in more ancient times the island was called Kallisti and Strogili. In the ancient years after 2000 BC a very important civilization similar to the Minoan civilization that developed in Crete, flourished. The island's great prosperity was violently halted in 1500 BC after the explosion of the volcano when the central part of the island was hurried beneath the sea. The tidal waves that were formed, reached Crete, destroying the coastal flourishing civilizations of the island. The continual explosions during the 2nd and 3d century BC were the cause for the creation of the small island of Therasia and also forced the islet Palea Kammeni to emerge from the sea in 197 BC. The Rhodians who, by that time, occupied Santorini, named the island Iera (Holy) and built an altar that was dedicated to Asphalios Posidon (Neptune who grants safety). Later, in 46 BC Nea Kammeni emerged from the sea. The Saracens raided the island constantly; it had been for a great amount of time a part of the Duchy of Naxos. Barbarossa conquered it and it suffered major destructions by the Russians during the Orlov conflict.

Many content that Santorini corresponds more than anything else to the legends of the fallen continent-island of Atlantis. The excavations of the lost Minoan city by professor Marinatos near Akrotiri bring unshakeable proofs of the existence and value of the civilization of Santorini.

Indeed, Akrotiri is one of the most important prehistoric settlements of the Aegean. The first habitation at the site dates from the Late Neolithic times (at least the 4th millenium B.C.E.). During the Early Bronze Age (3rd millenium B.C.E.), a sizeable settlement was founded and in the Middle and early Late Bronze Age (ca. 20th-17th centuries B.C.E.) it was extended and gradually developed into one of the main urban centres and ports of the Aegean.

The large extent of the settlement (ca. 20 hectares), the elaborate drainage system, the sophisticated multi-storeyed buildings with the magnificent wall-paintings, furniture and vessels, show its great development and prosperity. The various imported objects found in the buildings indicate the wide network of its external relations.

Akrotiri was in contact with Crete but also communicated with the Greek Mainland, the Dodecanese, Cyprus, Syria and Egypt. The town's life came to an abrupt end when the inhabitants were obliged to abandon it as a result of severe earthquakes. The eruption followed. The volcanic materials covered the entire island and the town itself. These materials, however, have protected the buildings and their contents, just as in Pompei.

Evidence of habitation at Akrotiri first came to light in the second half of the 19th century. However, systematic excavations were begun much later, in 1967, by Professor Spyridon Marinatos under the auspices of the Archaeological Society at Athens. He decided to excavate at Akrotiri in the hope of



verifying an old theory of his, published in the 1930's, that the eruption of the Thera volcano was responsible for the collapse of the Minoan civilization. Since his death in 1974, the excavations have been continued under the direction of Professor Christos Doumas. No interventions are made on the uncovered monuments unless it is necessary for their consolidation or for the preservation of any kind of evidence, mostly

information concerning the destruction of the settlement.

The most important buildings of the site are:

Xeste 3: Large edifice, at least two-storeys high, with fourteen rooms on each floor. Some of rooms were connected by multiple doors and decorated with magnificent wall-paintings. In one of them there was a "Lustral basin", which is considered a sacred area. The most interesting of the frescoes are the ones of the Altar and of the Saffron Gatherers. The former depicts three women in a field with bloomed crocuses and an altar, and the latter, female figures engaged in collecting crocuses which they offer to a seated goddess, flanked by a blue monkey and a griffin. Judging from the architectural peculiarities of the building and the themes of the frescoes, one may conclude that Xeste 3 was used for the performance of some kind of ritual.

Sector B possibly comprises two separate buildings, the one attached to the other. From the first floor of the western building, came the famous wall paintings of the Antelopes and the Boxing Children. The eastern building yielded the "fresco of the Monkeys", a composition of monkeys climbing on rocks at the side of a river.

The West House is a relatively small, but well-organized building. In the ground floor there are storerooms, workshops, a kitchen and a mill-installation. The first floor is occupied by a spacious chamber used for weaving activities, a room for the storage mainly of clay vessels, a lavatory and two rooms, the one next to the other, embellished with magnificent murals. The first was decorated with the two frescoes of the Fishermen, the fresco of the Young Priest-



ess and the famous Flotilla miniature frieze. The latter ran around all the four walls and depicted a major overseas voyage, in the course of which, the fleet visited several harbours and towns. The rocky landscape, the configuration of the harbour and the multi-storeyed buildings identify the port, which is the fleet's final destination, as the prehistoric settlement at Akrotiri. The walls of the second room were decorated with a single motif which was repeated eight times. This motif is identified as the cabin at the stern of the ships depicted in the miniature frieze.

Complex Delta includes four houses. A room of the eastern building is decorated with the Spring fresco: the artist represented with special sensitivity a rocky landscape, planted with blossoming lilies, between which swallows fly in a variety of positions. Tablets of the Linear A script have recently been found in the same building. All four buildings yielded interesting finds such as abundant imported pottery and precious stone and bronze objects.

House of the Ladies. The large, two-storeyed building was named after the fresco with the Ladies and the Papyruses, which decorated the interior. The most interesting architectural feature of the building is a light-well constructed at its centre.

Xeste 4. It is a magnificent three-storeyed building, the largest excavated up to now. All its facades are revetted with rectangular ashlar blocks of tuff. The fragments of frescoes that have so far come to light belong to a composition which adorned the walls on either side of the staircase at the entrance of the building, depicting life-size male figures ascending the steps in procession. It was in all probability a public building, judging from its unusually large dimensions, the impressive exterior and the decoration of the walls.



More About the Volcanic Eruption

Early in the Late Bronze Age, the volcano at the center of the island of Santorini (or Thera) erupted on a scale which may have had no parallel among eruptions over the past four or five millennia by volcanoes located in or near densely populated areas of the globe. The caldera (or crater) created by this eruption of the Thera volcano is said to have measured as much as 83 square kilometers in area. It presently extends down as much as 480 meters below sea level inside of the wall of cliffs which ring it and which themselves rise up as much as 300 meters above sea level.

There has been an impressive amount of debate during the last twenty-five years in particular over the nature and sequence of the cataclysmic phenomena which led up to and resulted from this enormously impressive volcanic eruption, debate in which both volcanologists and archaeologists have played leading roles. The impact of the eruption on the cultural history both of the smaller Aegean and of the larger eastern Mediterranean worlds has also been extensively discussed, principally by scholars from the same two disciplines. The recon-



struction which follows is that most widely shared as of 1986, a little less than fifty years since Spyridon Marinatos published his landmark article postulating a connection between the Thera eruption and the collapse of Minoan palatial civilization. This theory ultimately led Marinatos in the late 1960's and early 1970's to begin excavation at the site of Akrotiri on the southern tip of Thera, a site which has turned out to be a prehistoric Aegean version of the better known sites of Pompeii and Herculaneum buried in 79 A.D. by the eruption of Vesuvius in the Bay of Naples. Since Marinatos' death in the mid-1970's, the director of the program of excavation, restoration, and publication at Akrotiri has been Christos Doumas.

A major earthquake caused extensive damage to the town of Akrotiri well before the volcanic eruption buried it. Copious evidence for the purposeful demolition by wrecking crews of buildings partially destroyed in the earthquake has been found in the form of piles of rubble and earth debris heaped up in the principal roads leading through the settlement and retained behind roughly built dry-stone walls of rubble. Marinatos' exposure of some houses which had been repaired in a rather makeshift fashion and subsequently re-occupied led him to conclude initially that the site had been permanently abandoned by most of its inhabitants as a result of the earthquake but that parts of it were inhabited before the volcanic eruption by "squatters". According to Marinatos, these "squatters" proceeded to loot the houses of the wealthy and to stockpile whatever wealth they were able to find, although such wealth consisted of little more than agricultural produce since the former inhabitants had evidently had enough time to strip their homes of all but a few of their readily portable valuables. Doumas has correctly denied the existence of such "squatters" in view of the now plentiful evidence at Akrotiri for a systematic program of demolition, levelling of debris, and rebuilding represented throughout the site. This indicates that the settlement's entire population undertook an extensive program of restoration following the earthquake, one which was still in progress when the volcano erupted and buried the town. Particularly striking evidence of the intentional demolition of structures weakened by the earthquake are "demolition balls", very large ellipsoidal ground-stone implements with two grooves around their waists which were no doubt used in very much the same way as are contemporary "wrecking balls" and which have been found in some quantity on top of the levelled debris resulting from the cleaning up of the earthquake damage.

The length of time which elapsed between the earthquake which badly damaged Akrotiri and the volcanic eruption which buried it was initially considered to be a very short one by Marinatos, and Doumas

as recently as 1983 suggested that it might have been a matter of only a few months. However, more detailed comparisons by Marthari of the ceramic material from the heaped up earthquake debris with that from the volcanic destruction horizon reveal significant differences which suggest that years rather than months separated the two events, perhaps as much as two or three decades. The process of rebuilding and restoration begun shortly after the earthquake was nevertheless still in progress when the volcano erupted, as the partially plastered and painted condition of the second-storey bedroom in the West House indicates. Two vessels full of dried plaster and a third containing dried paint show that this room was actually in the process of being decorated when the site was hastily abandoned, this time

for good. As both Marthari and Palyvou have shown, the repairs made necessary by the earlier earthquake were extensive in scale and would have taken an organized and numerous population a good deal of time to effect. Thus the scope of the architectural restorations is in harmony with the evidence of the pottery in requiring a period of years, probably even decades, between earthquake and eruption. Of equal significance is the fact that, while some houses were totally demolished, most were salvaged to some degree, so that the basic settlement plan of Akrotiri as preserved under the pumice of the volcanic explosion is that of the pre-earthquake phase at the site (very early Late Cycladic [=LC] I) rather than a novel creation of mature LC I. In Minoan terms, the final abandonment of Akrotiri took place late in, but not quite at the end of, LM IA; in Mainland Greek terms, the abandonment dates to LH I, some time before the final use of Grave Circle A at Mycenae in LH IIA.

The absence of any bodies and the dearth of metal artifacts or other portable objects of obvious material value in the ruins of Akrotiri clearly indicate that the inhabitants had ample warning of the imminence of the volcanic eruption which buried the island so deeply in ash and other volcanic debris that it became uninhabitable for as much as a century or two. At Akrotiri, the lowest stratum of this volcanic debris consists of a thin layer of pelletal pumice some 3 cms. thick, the top of which was crusted as though water had fallen on it after its deposition. Slight oxidation of this layer suggests that it was exposed to the atmosphere for anywhere between two and twenty-four months before itself being sealed by a subsequent pumice fall. The first layer of pumice, preserved as a significantly deeper stratum in locations on Thera closer to the volcano than Akrotiri and less exposed to erosion, may in fact have been the warning which induced the Therans to flee, since it probably lacked the volume to have caused extensive damage or loss of life. A second stratum of rather larger pumice varying between 0.50 and 1.00 m. thick at Akrotiri but again deeper elsewhere on the island then fell. The final deposition of tephra (volcanic ash) attributable to this eruptive sequence is over five meters thick at Akrotiri but up to fifty meters thick elsewhere on Thera and includes large boulders of basalt in addition to the lighter and smaller bits of pumice which themselves now measure as much as fifteen centimeters across. There is no archaeological evidence for how long the full series of eruptions lasted, but volcanologists have reached a consensus that the process was a fairly rapid, hence short-lived one. The absence of any clear signs of erosion at the preserved tops of the ruins of Akrotiri supports the notion that complete burial of these ruins followed close upon the heels of the events which



produced the ruins in the first place, that is, the initial stages of the eruption.

The distribution of pumice derived from the eruption is quite well known thanks to a series of deep-sea cores recovered from the southern Aegean and some careful sampling of strata exposed by both archaeological excavation and road-cuts on the island of Crete. Not surprisingly, in view of the prevailing wind patterns in the Aegean, most of the pumice from the eruption is found to the southeast of Santorini. The Greek Mainland and western Crete would have been altogether unaffected by the ash fall, but eastern Crete would have been covered by a maximum of ten, and more probably by between one and five, centimeters of fine pumice. Archaeologists eager to establish a correlation between the Theran eruption and the collapse of Neopalatial Crete feel that such a quantity of ash would have had a disastrous effect on agriculture in eastern Crete. However, others point out that such a relatively thin layer of pumice would have been eroded away by wind and rain within a year or two and would in fact enhance rather than detract from the fertility of the soil. A layer of Theran ash was identified in the late 1980's in some lake sediments in western Anatolia, indicating that the wind-borne dispersal of this ash had a much more northern and eastern distribution than previously suspected.

Often associated with the eruptions of insular volcanoes are tsunamis or tidal waves. In the case of Thera, a tidal wave would have been created by the collapse of the magma chamber within the volcano and the creation of a large, deep crater or caldera into which the sea would have rushed. For many of those seeking to connect the Theran eruption with the sudden decline of Minoan Crete in the fifteenth century B.C., the major destructive aspect of the eruption has been not the ash fall but the associated tidal wave. In the middle of the debate in the mid-1970's over the nature of the Theran eruption and its effects, Doumas in fact claimed that the collapse of the magma chamber and hence the appearance of the tidal wave was an event which postdated the volcanic eruption itself by a decade or more, thus explaining how events on Santorini directly caused the collapse of Minoan civilization even though Akrotiri was buried in late LM IA while the wave of destructions of sites throughout Crete which defines the end of the Neopalatial period cannot be dated earlier than LM IB. More recently, the volcanologists have claimed that the Santorini caldera formed quite gradually and that a tidal wave, if indeed there was one at all, would not have been on anything like the scale envisaged by Marinatos and other proponents of the link between the Theran volcano and the sudden decline of Neopalatial Crete.



The Akrotiri Frescoes

Male figures appear to assume greater importance in at least some Theran paintings (e.g. the fishermen, warriors, and captains from Room 5 of the West House; the boxing boys from Room B1) than in most Minoan painting, but the female plays an important and often dominant role in several Theran compositions (Xeste 3; House of the Ladies; "priestess" from the West House) and often appears dressed in a thoroughly Minoan fashion (but note the unusual garb of the "priestess").

Relief frescoes are thus far unknown from Akrotiri, as are large scale griffin compositions and bull-jumping scenes, all of which are particularly characteristic of Knossian *palatial* murals. The compositions of Xeste 3 on both levels may have constituted forms of processional scenes, on the ground floor toward the altar on the east wall and on the upper storey from both directions toward the seated "goddess" on the north wall, compositional schemes paralleled at Knossos both in the Corridor of the Procession and on the Grand Staircase.

In details of dress (including flounced skirts, tight-fitting short-sleeved jackets leaving the breasts exposed, textile patterns, and some forms of jewelry) and in depictions of scenes of nature (e.g. the Blue Monkey and Springtime frescoes), the Theran murals often closely resemble Minoan wall paintings. At least two features common in the frescoes from Akrotiri, however, are not well paralleled on Crete and are unlikely to be patterned after Mainland/Mycenaean models either. The first is the peculiar hairstyle affected by many figures of both sexes in which much of the head is painted blue (probably indicative of a shaved head rather than of a specially designed skullcap of some sort) and only a

few long locks whose positions vary considerably from individual to individual are indicated in black. It is possible that differing hairstyles are indicators of age, as Koehl has argued is the case for similar though seemingly not identical variations in male (but not female!) hairstyles in Neopalatial Crete. The second feature possibly peculiar to Thera is the wearing by females of exceptionally large earrings. Identical earrings from the Shaft Graves of Circle A at Mycenae are better viewed as evidence for the adoption of a Cycladic fashion by wealthy and progressive Mainlanders than as indicating the presence of Mycenaeans on Thera at this time.