511: ‘What has been lost is the unity and wider significance of these frescos. Their primary source is an epic or heroic transformation of historical experience that implies the existence of contemporary poetry. A comparison of visual images with poetic themes, formulae, and episodes makes the miniature frescos and early and important document in the prehistory of the Greek Epic tradition and in the evolution of narrative art.’

512: ‘The houses [the frescos] decorated belong to a prosperous settlement of spacious, multistoried, freestanding structures comparable to smaller Minoan villas’

512: ‘Their architectural features conform closely to Minoan standards and techniques, including ashlar masonry reinforced with wood, pier-and-door arrangements, lustral basins and light wells, and indoor plumbing.’

512: ‘Wall plaster survives as an eloquent as well as elegant evidence of the life and imagination of the inhabitants.’

512: ‘This separation of public and private spheres suggests the segregation of male and female, and casts frescos as decoration suitable for the latter sphere. Wall paintings are primarily found upstairs, and many represent women in activity involving costume, cosmetics and ceremonies. The ‘House of the Ladies’ for example…’ (Previously said that the bottom of the houses open up onto the street for business which is the separation she is talking about.)

512: ‘In the largest and most impressive single dwelling house excavated, Xeste 3, two stories of printings surrounded Thera’s only lustral basin with an elaborate panorama of women gathering saffron and offering it to a goddess, in a ceremony linked to rituals of initiation.’

512: ‘In some cases, the utilitarian contents of a room and its architectural history argue for a more purely decorative purpose of Theran wall paintings as with the Lilies Fresco in Room Delta 2. Delta 2 was one of the few ground-floor rooms decorated with frescos…. The landscape now appears as a deliberate compensation for its small and confined space,’

513: The paintings in the west house ‘as a decorative complex in a private home, without the assumption that it represents a cult centre.’ [N. Marinatos ‘The West House at Akrotiri as Cult Centre’ 1983. 1-19.]

514: N. Marinatos in Art and Religion dubs the young woman figure in the West House Room 5 as a ‘priestess’ since the figure is sprinkling a substance ‘as if to release its fragrance when burned’. Morris however uses context to suggest a more practical explanation; ‘she could be fumigating the lavatory, or applying cosmetics, rather than performing a ceremony. Admitting these rooms their domestic function in the life of Thera allows the ‘priestess’ a more ordinary place in the daily life of the Theran household, in a genre scene related to the home.’ So its purpose according to Murray can be interpreted as a cultic scene but more realistically it’s probably a domestic scene.

516: ‘It can be safely said and is generally accepted that the landscapes of the miniature frescos [south frieze, ‘Ship Fresco’, Room 5, West House, Akrotiri] are informed by a combination of Aegean reality and Minoan artistic conventions.’
‘The iconography, architecture and associated finds suggest that at least some of the painted rooms in domestic buildings were actually shrines, the wall paintings serving as significant backdrops of ritual action.’

‘But, with the unique exception of Thera, preservation is always far from complete.’

23: ‘(The miraculous Thera excluded), one might expect to find between 5-10% of the original paintings, all in tiny pieces, scattered sometimes meaningfully, sometimes randomly.

‘Our perception of these wall paintings is therefore inevitable steeped in the vision of those who recreate ancient imaged for our contemporary eyes.

24: ‘[Minoan] tendency to envelop their spectator in a total environment… the paintings covered entire surfaces of three or four walls, so that the person entering the room was immediately surrounded by the painted world. This was particularly effective in scenes from nature.’

26: ‘Friezes ‘tell a story’ though not in the strict sense of narrative. Their function was surely evocative, transporting the mind to times, places, and situations of significance.’

28-29: [Talking about a scene in Knossos but could also relate to Xeste 3 in Akrotiri] ‘Mark Cameron… proposed that the presence of a great Minoan goddess could be detected throughout the paintings, figures in the procession acting as ‘sign posts# leading to the centre of the ritual action.’

34: [Akrotiri section now] ‘These paintings were first presented to the public in a series of well-illustrated annual preliminary excavation reports by the discoverer of Akrotiri, Spyridon Marinatos between 1968 and 1976.

Doumas took over excavations in 1974 and has been working on it since.

‘The paintings have been studied by Christina Televantou, who has added some new pieces to the scenes.’

‘The importance of Knossos has remained undimmed, but the extraordinary state of preservation of the paintings of Thera has opened up the study of iconography to allow a deeper enquiry into the world of the Aegean Bronze Age, including, significantly, new insights into ideology and belief.’

‘There is no literature, no narrative, and no textual depth which might compliment the visual sophistication of Aegean artists.’

34-36: ‘Theran miniature paintings offer an unparalleled opportunity to investigate Aegean culture and iconography… these lively miniature scenes… present a microcosm of Aegean life, a ritual gathering on a hill, shepherds with their flocks and herds etc.’

36: ‘It is due to the innovative interpretations of Nanno Marinatos in the first instance that discussion on these paintings has concentrated on the ritual sphere.’(Marinatos, 1984a)

37: [Talking about the Spring Fresco of house Delta 2] it is ‘almost certainly a reflection of the religious significance of the natural world and perhaps used as a backdrop for rituals.’
‘Xeste 4 is still being excavated and promises to be the largest and grandest of the buildings uncovered so far.’

42: [Wall paintings and their discoveries] ‘significantly and unexpectedly broaden our horizons’


Talking about a specific set of frescos, she asks and answers the questions: what was the thematic relationship between different frescos in the same room and what was there in the room or building to dictate the choice of subject? Her viewpoint is that ALL wall paintings in Thera can be associated with religious topics.

219: ‘The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that Theran frescos have a direct connection with the rooms or buildings in which they were found. Underlying this assumption is the idea that they were not merely decorative but they fulfilled a definite function. Indeed art in the Bronze Age could not have been decorative but it was a vehicle for the expression of official ideology, political or religious.’

- She says that her analysis of rooms being shrines is not based on one things found, but numerous.

‘In fact, all Theran frescos can be shown to have religious iconology or content.’

Fishermen from the West House

‘Since all nude males in Crete are associated with adoration it is reasonable to postulate nudity as a mark of religious significance.

220: The two figures are both facing the NW corner of the room on opposite sides so if they were to walk, they could meet there. In the NW corner of the room there was found an incomplete offering table on one of the windowsills.

‘The function of these figures, then, is to perpetuate an offering ritual which took place in the room itself.’ (She is saying that the two fishermen are there to *always* bring offerings to the table, in painting form, just as people would do in real life but only at specific times.)

Delta 2 Lilies Fresco

221: ‘The fresco alludes to the coming of the spring as indicated by the courting swallows’ (CF. quote that says that this would more likely be summer/autumn).

- She says that although there is no Goddess present in the scene there was a shrine and the room was probably set aside for cult.

222: ‘The lilies fresco is an appropriate backdrop for a ritual related to a vegetation and harvest festival.’

Xeste 3 Wall Paintings

222: ‘The architectural arrangement of the rooms suggests that the building was divided into two sections: one used for ceremonies and one for utilitarian purposes such a storage.’
after them. The ‘ladies gathering saffron’ decorated the entire walls of the ‘lustral basin’ in Xeste 3. In room Beta 1 openings for doors and windows broke the surface of walls and antelopes were cleverly juxtaposed to fit the space available… the narrower space between the southwest corner of the same room and a door leading into the adjacent room to the south was considered ideal for the ‘boxing children’. Room 5 – wall paintings of a youth holding a bunch of fish. The strips of wall above the windows and niches in Room 5 of the West House – riverscape, flotilla and sea battle. The surfaces above the polythyra in Xeste 3 also seem to have been covered with friezes: one shows blue monkeys performing human activities and another running spiral motif. The window jambs in Room 4 of the West House were each covered by a wall painting of a large pithos in which lilies were depicted. Finally the so called young priestess holding an incense burner seems to have fallen from the jamb of the door connecting Rooms 4 and 5 in the West House.

74: The artists must have had a high degree of freedom in the execution of their works, even if not in the choice of themes, which were perhaps selected or specified by those giving the commissions. As a result the paintings are remarkably conventionalised, full of variety and the breadth of inspiration. This is in marked contrast to the frescos of Crete, which adhere to the rigid conventions imposed by the ruling palaces. At Akrotiri art was not the monopoly of the monarch, as in the palaces of Crete, but was patronised by the more affluent members of a competitive society, who commissioned artists to paint their houses and enhance their surroundings, perhaps to impress their peers and rivals. Competition would have been encouraged among the artists, who each strove to create something innovative and original.

Decoration

74: Whole range of subjects – abstract, geometric, naturalistic or pictorial. Among the geometric motifs used in the wall paintings is the running spiral which occurs as a frieze around another subject, as in the case of the ‘Blue Monkeys’ from room Beta 6, or independently as in the friezes of from Xeste 3. Pictorial motifs used in the Akrotiri wall paintings fall into four main categories: objects, floral, faunal and human. Objects such as ships, buildings or towns (man-made structures).

The wall paintings in which animals and humans are depicted may all be described as ‘narrative’. (?)

75: Young priestess is performing some ritual act, women from the house of the ladies, despite its damaged state, may be described as narrative because of the attitudes of the figures and their gestures. Mountainous landscape in the room of the lilies has been interpreted as depicting the mating time of the swallows which dart and fly joyfully among the blossoming lilies. The scenes in the miniature frescos from the same building in which human figures are involved, surpass all other paintings in their narrative impact since they are truly action packed. The Flotilla tells the story of a voyage from one harbour to another. Whatever the historical or other significance of this event, the artist has successfully ‘told the story’. Room 5 of the west house – artist has managed to convey various aspects of life by superimposing unrelated scenes. Shipwreck, warriors, young woman…

76: Attempts to interpret the paintings. No theory can succeed however without taking into consideration the social context. So far all the paintings have come from
to the rescue, bodies in the water belong to Libyans, warriors are defenders of the colony.
Idea of battle agreed by Benzi – placed within the Aegean.

105: Ships as enemy vessels whilst the Theran ones should be in the missing part of the wall painting.
Mrs Sakellariou – entirely rejects the idea of the scenes being of battle or outside the Aegean. Scene from a sea festival in which armed men ‘could be a guard of honour’ – the bodies in the water are not drowned men or victims of a sea battle but are swimmers in a display of skill.
Room 5 narrow frieze above doors depicts a landscape – banks of a meandering river with wild beasts shown amidst palm trees and other exotic plants – griffin at a flying gallop, panther like feline stalks a group of ducks, galloping deer – all movement is in a left-right direction – Marinatos links this to North Africa, Libya because of the landscape.
Room 5 upper frieze south wall – most impressive and informative painting – general theme is the voyage of a flotilla from one harbour to another, mountainous region – forested and a lion in pursuit of a herd of deer.
Two men clad in animal skins are conversing beside the left branch of the river, while the rest of the population bid the vessels farewell.
Decoration of the other six vessels derives from the animal kingdom, showing lions and serpents in particular. On the largest ship, embellished with garland or bunting, there is a combination of lions and dolphins.
Due to spatial limitations only three vessels have their masts upright.
106: Stern of each ship special structure which looks like a cabin and houses a seated person.
Cabins are identical to the much larger banners which are painted in the adjacent room 4.
Architecture of the town and Minoan characteristics as does the dress of the inhabitants.
Return of a fleet following a successful mission abroad, ceremony of some kind or a visit by friends or allies is a matter of conjecture.
Joyfulness of picture cannot be denied.
Vessels festooned with decorations and the dolphins playing around the ships are indicative iconographic elements.
Marinatos’ proposal that the garlanded vessel was the flagship of the fleet and its captain the admiral and owner of the West House may have had some validity crucial to the interpretation of the frieze.

Xeste 3
Building has produced largest number of wall paintings – total area of seven dozen metres.
Each room seems to have had a different subject.
Lustral basin – northeast corner, several women involved in what is even today an exclusively female task among the Akrotiri villages – the gathering of crocus stamens for saffron. Ladies pick the precious stamens and puts them into a basket.
Large seated female – flanked by a blue monkey on her right and a griffin on her left. Each woman wears a different dress, though coiffure and dresses are all in the Minoan style. The women are adorned with necklaces, earrings, bracelets, and even anklets.
Discovered in lustral basin – suggests religious significance but one can give no