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ORIGINS OF THE GREEK RELIGION: MINOAN AND MYCENAEAN CULTURAL CONVERGENCE

Naturally, the convergence of Minoan and Mycenaean ethno-cultures would cause certain changes in religious consciousness. The metamorphosis in religion and mentality are hard to explain from the present perspective. During this process, the orientation of Minoan religion might have totally changed (the "victorious gods" of Achaeans might have eclipsed the older ones of Minoans).¹ On the other hand, the evidence of religious syncretism should by no means be ignored. Thus, based on the materials available, we may lead our investigation in the following directions: 1. While identifying Minoan religious concepts and cults, we should operate with: a) scenes depicted on artifacts; b) antique written sources and mythopoeitics, which have preserved certain information on Minoan religious concepts and rituals.² 2. To identify gods of the Mycenaean period, we use linear B texts and artifacts. It is evident that the Mycenaean period has the group of gods that are directly related to Minoan world, and on the other hand, the group of gods that is unknown to pre-Hellenic religious tradition. And, finally, 3. We identify another group of gods that reveal their syncretic nature already in the Mycenaean period.

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Minoan cult rituals were tightly linked to nature. Cave dwellings, mountains and grottos were the charismatic spaces where the rituals were held.³ One of such grottos near Candia was related to the name of Minoan goddess Eileithyia.⁴ Homer also mentions Eileithyia. The goddess was believed to protect pregnant women and women in childbirth.⁵ Also, there might have been another sacred place, the top of a hill – Dikte, which was associated with Minoan goddess Diktunna (Dikte – "Sacred Mountain").⁶ Later in Greek mythology, the goddess assimilated to Artemis ("huntress") (Solinus II. 8. Hesychius S.V). An image of a woman on the top of a hill, sometimes accompanied with beasts⁷, often occurs in glyptic seals found in Knossos. In the shrine of Knossos, there is a fresco of a goddess proudly ascending the peak of a mountain. She is represented between rampant lions. Opposite the goddess, there is a figure of a man.

This goddess is the "Mistress of the Great Mother Nature". Her epithet might have been Britomartis – the "Sweet Virgin".⁸ Both Diktunna and Britomartis later assimilated to Greek Artemis the "huntress".⁹ It is noteworthy that Britomartis – the "Sweet Virgin" – appears in eastern Crete, and Diktunna –

¹ Religious concepts, especially the pantheon, often reflects historical reality, when the "victorious" gods of younger generation eclipse the older ones; e.g. Zeus eclipsed and tarnished Kronos and Uranus, his supreme predecessors. Cf. C. H. Gordon, Ugarit and Minoan Crete, New York, 1967, 21.

² For pre-Hellenic and Greek religious believes and concepts, see: L.R. Farnell, The Cults of Greek States, III, Oxford, 1907, B. Rutkowski, Cult Places in the Aegean World, Warsaw, 1972; F. Schachermeyr, Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean in Ancient History and Prehistory, Berlin/New York, 1977.

³ P. Nilsson, The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion, Lund, 1927, 449-451.

⁴ G.R. Levy, The Gate of Horn, London, 1946, 214.

⁵ Nilsson, 1927, 449.

⁶ J. Chadwick, The Mycenaean World, translated into Georgian, Tbilisi, 1989, 70b. See also: Nilsson, 1927, 439-440, Levy, 1946, 223.

⁷ For the links between the goddess and the symbols of a hill and a throne, see: E. Neumann, The Great Mother, Translated by R. Manheim, Princeton University Press, 1974, 96-98.

⁸ Hesychius, βριτύ γλυκύ Κρήτες. See also: Y. Bonnefoy, Greek and Egyptian Mythologies. Crete and Mycenae: Problems of Mythology and religious History, the University of Chicago, Chicago, 1992, 2.

⁹ Cf. Hesychius, βριτόμαρτις ἐν Κρήτῃ ἢ Ἄρτεμις. About Diktunna see: Euripides, Hippolytus, V, 145, Iph. Taur, V, 127, ὦ παῖ τᾶς Λατοῦς, Δίκτυνν' οὐρεία.

the "Sacred Mountain" – is found in western Crete and its shrines.¹⁰ The Great Mother Goddess of Nature and Earth was usually represented with a pillar, a double ax, and horns.¹¹ As it is commonly accepted, in the Minoan iconography, a double ax is always an attribute of a goddess or her priestess, but by no means of a male figure. A double ax and horns may denote the power over nature and animals.¹² The partner of the goddess represented on Haghia Triada seals is a hunter with a pointed hood on his head. The second scene is an image of a male figure with horns in his hands.¹³ On one of the seals there is a triple emblem, possibly her bow.¹⁴ The image of a bow later linked to the goddess of nature and animals in the Greek Pantheon.

The protector of vegetation and fertility of earth appears to be a Minoan goddess who is depicted in several similar scenes:¹⁵ a) Summertime scene with blooming valley; the goddess is surrounded with women and men that perform an orgiastic dance; ¹⁶ b) The depicted goddess herself performs the orgiastic dance; here also are a pillar, a butterfly and a male partner;¹⁷ c) A cylinder bears a scene of a dancing goddess and a young male, who is descending from the sky;¹⁸ d) The goddess is represented in the company of a young naked girl. Later, the Hellenic cult of Demeter, the goddess of fertility of earth, linked to Minoan Earth Mother.¹⁹

Another Minoan goddess, unknown to us, might be associated with navigation. A naked goddess sits in a boat and a plant grows on the altar in front of her (gold seal from Mochlos).²⁰ On the other seal, the goddess wearing a flounced robe leads a boat.²¹ In one of the frescos from Thera that represents Theran festival, one can also see boats that have a sculpture of a goddess in the front. The goddess appears to be their protector.²²

Minoan plastic and glyptic patterns often represent a goddess with bare breasts who holds snakes in her hand. The same goddess often appears in Mycenaean period.²³ The goddess may be associated with the nether world. Direct links can be drawn between the cult of the death and the goddess depicted in Haghia Triada sarcophagi. She seems to protect a dead man and drive him to the nether world in the company of two griffins.²⁴ The same scene has the images of horns and double axes.²⁵ It also presents a burial ceremony, a sacrifice ritual of a bull and a funeral procession of women.

According to the above presented materials, we may draw several conclusions: 1. The leading role in the Minoan religion belongs to goddesses or a goddess. By their position in the religion, they definitely dominate over male gods. Their superiority is testified by numerous functions and aspects of worship that belong solely to goddesses. 2. It is difficult to argue whether the Minoan pantheon was polytheistic or monotheistic. Genotheism is also a point for consideration. We can not be confident that the Minoans worshipped only one, supreme goddess – the Great Mother Goddess, who had plenty of functions and aspects of worship. We find it more reasonable to conclude that the Minoans had a lot of goddesses with respective functions. However, the pantheon was headed by the supreme, universal Great Mother Goddess, whose power and positions exceeded those of others. It is common knowledge that the archetype of the primordial Great Mother Goddess is present in the Neolithic era.²⁶ The image developed and acquired new emotional aspects. By II millennium, the "goddesses of the new generation" had already adopted the

¹⁰ Bonnefoy, 1992, 32.

¹¹ For the symbols of a double ax and horns, see: B. Dietrich, A Minoan Symbol of Renewal, *Journal of Prehistoric Religion*, III, Gotenborg, 1988, 12-24.

¹² W. Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*, Cambridge, Ancient History, 1970 (3rd ed.), 125-127. Double axes appear in Crete in about 2400 BC in phase EM II. Earlier patterns belong to phase EM I (Mochlos burials). Cf. Evans, 1921-36, I, fig. 70.

¹³ A. Evans, *The Palace of Minos at Knossos*, II, London, 1921-36, 467, fig. 392.

¹⁴ Cf. Levy, 1946, 224, fig. 102.

¹⁵ Nilsson, 1927, fig. 94.

¹⁶ Levy, 1946, fig. 92, 93.

¹⁷ Levy, 1946, fig. 110.

¹⁸ Levy, 1946, fig. 95. See also: Nilsson, 1927, chapter XVI so called Divine Child.

¹⁹ Chadwick, 1989, 63, about Demeter see also: *The World of the Greek Mythology*, Great Celestial Gods, Tbilisi, 1998, 115, also cf. *Demeter in The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford, 1961, 263.

²⁰ Levy, 1946, fig. 115.

²¹ Levy, 1946, fig. 116.7

²² N. Marinatos, *Art and Religion in Thera. Reconstructing a Bronze Age Society*, Athens, 1985, 54.

²³ Evans, IV, 1921-36, 179-180. See also: C. Davaras, *Knossos and the Herakleion Museum*, (Brief Illustrated Archaeological Guide), Athens, 1998, 72, fig. 62. See also: A. Evans, *Report of Excavations 1902-1903*, London, 1904, 92, fig. 63.

²⁴ A. Evans, *The Tomb of Double Axes*. *Archaeologia*, 65, London, 1914, 279.

²⁵ A. Paribeni, *Il Sarcophago Dipinto di Haghia Triada*, *Mon., Antiquity*, XIX, 1963, 5-6.

²⁶ D. Cameron, *Symbols of Birth and of Death in the Neolithic Era*, London, 1981.

functions and aspects of the Great Mother Goddess. Correspondingly, their protective power spread over different aspects of life that had before been incorporated in the functions of the Great Mother Goddess.²⁷ Lack of knowledge and information prevents us from identifying the names of these goddesses. The exact epithet of the Great Mother Goddess is also impossible to determine (perhaps, this will be possible after linear A texts are deciphered). 2. Male god (or gods) also appear in the Minoan pantheon. They are always accompanied with a goddess. Minoan glyptic patterns chiefly bear an image of an adult male figure and also an image of a comparatively young male. This leads us to the idea of distinguishing two different gods. The older one might be the partner, consort of a goddess, and the younger male may be their son, the successor (?!). Greek and Roman authors of classical times offer the genealogy of gods, demigods and heroes. Below, we present the list of some gods, which Greek and Roman authors associated with the Minoan-Mycenaean pantheon about 2200-1450 BC.²⁸

Male gods:

1. Atymnius – according to the tradition, the god appeared at sunset in the mountains of the Gortyn region (the respective god in the classical Greek period is unknown!).
2. The three Curetes (or Corubantes) – were related to a certain supreme god. They are at once magicians, healers, protectors of craftsmen, civilizing heroes and brilliant bronze workers. In Greek, “Curetes” means “the young”. According to the Greek tradition, they protected young Zeus on the Ida mountain.²⁹ Another version says that Zeus ordered Curetes to protect Dionysus Zagreus against Hera’s malicious tricks. This cult of gods is related to the orgiastic cult of Rheacybele, which appeared later in Asia Minor.³⁰
3. The ten Dactyls – lived in Crete (or Frigia) and are associated with Ida mountain. Iasion, the lover of Demeter, is among them. In Frigia, their mother is believed to be Cybele, and in Crete, they are Rhea- Anchiale’s advisors.³¹
4. Hyacinthus (*inthos* – Cretan suffix) is a young god that dies and is reborn; is related to vegetation (Greek version of Apollo and Hyacinthus).
5. Kronos – the son of the Sky and the Earth, the King of Titans and father of Olympian gods, Rhea’s husband. It is believed that Kronos was the god of harvest in pre-Hellenic world. The Greek tradition is ambiguous on the point. On one hand, he is a ruthless, cruel father, and on the other, his “reign” was so called “golden age”.³²
6. Talon or Talos – winged genius associated with Hephaestus. He assimilated sometimes to the Sun and sometimes to a sort of bronze Minotaur, who defended the island of Crete from invasions. In the Hellenic period, his name became one of the epithets of Zeus “Zeus Talaius” and was related to the Tallaioi mountains. Presumably, the name belonged to a Minoan god or was one of the titles of Minotaur. The name could also have been related to the “calf of the Sun”.³³
7. Welkhanos – assimilated sometimes to Zeus and sometimes to Apollo. The god was represented as a bull and was worshipped in Haghia Triada. Presumably, he gave his name to Canea and Pelekania mountains.³⁴

Goddesses:

1. Ia – was believed to be a Nereid.
2. Ino (or Inachus) – became *Laucothea* – “the White Goddess”. In Greek version, she nursed and brought up Dionysus (Apollodorus I. 80. Ov. Met. 4.416); was persecuted by Hera.
3. Hellotis – At Gortyn assimilated to Europe. According to the tradition, she is the mother of king Minos. Her name is connected with the festival Hellotia. She should have been one of Cretan Goddesses.³⁵

²⁷ About “Magna Mater” cf. Farnell, 1907, 294-296.

²⁸ Cf. Bonnefoy, 1992, 35. Remark: We use the Latin term the way it is stated in the original and give our comments.

²⁹ Bonnefoy, 1992, 35. See also: The World of Greek Mythology, Sea and Nether World, Minor Gods, Tbilisi, 1998, 154.

³⁰ The World of Greek Mythology, Sea and Nether World, Minor Gods, Tbilisi, 1998, 168-169.

³¹ Bonnefoy, 1992, 35.

³² Cf. The World of Greek Mythology, From Chaos to Cosmos, Tbilisi, 1997,65. See also: A. Lang, Myth, Ritual and Religion, London, 1887,10.

³³ Bonnefoy, 1992, 35. Images of “sunny calves” see: П. Фемелис, Микены, Памятники и Находки, Краткий Иллюстративный и Археологический Путеводитель, Hannibal, Афины, 1997,50,fig.31.

The calves have the images of “rosettes” on their heads.

³⁴ Bonnefoy, 1992, 35-36.

³⁵ Europe is connected with the Eastern Mediterranean world, cf. Gordon,1967, 31-32. The tradition says that she is the Tyrean

4. Karme or Karma – Diktunna's ("the White Mountain") mother.
5. Lato, Phytia of Phaestos – presided over the initiations of youth.³⁶
6. (W)Nupi or Nopina – nymphs. Acacallis, the Great Mother, was among them. The latter was the wife of several gods and mother of heroes as well as of founders of Milatos, Cydonia, Thera, Elyros.³⁷
7. Rhea – Kronos' wife, mother of Olympians. In classical times, she was worshipped in Knossos, Phaestos, Lyktos and Lebena. Presumably, her name is mentioned on the disc of Phaestos (1580 BC)³⁸.
8. Thetis – may be translated as "the Good Mother" or "Great Protective Sister" (in the Cretan dialect). Later, in Greek period, she was transformed into the marine goddess. Her name also appears on Cretan seals.
9. Diktunna or Britomartis – "Mistress of the Sacred Mountain" and "the Sweet Virgin", goddess of Cretan origin. According to Eteocretan tradition, young Zeus grew up on Creta, Dikte Mountain (Zeus Diktaeus). In the hymn addressed to Zeus, Palaikastro calls him Kouros – the Youth.³⁹

There is a big temptation to identify the young male figure descending from the sky (in Minoan glyptic scenes) with "Kouros". Although Zeus was the god of the Indo-European Greek, his "youth aspect" may have originated from the prototype of a young Minoan god who descends from the sky into the domain of Diktunna and grows up there. We may suppose that this god was replaced by Zeus, who became so called Zeus Diktaeus(?!).

Britomartis cult spread to Aegina island and assimilated to the local goddess Aphaia, whose Dorian shrine still has the symbolic image of "horns".⁴⁰

Linear B texts, part of which were found in Mycenae, Crete and Pylos, make it possible to reconstruct Mycenaean religious ideas and pantheon.

One of the most honored members of the Mycenaean pantheon is Zeus.⁴¹ He is the only god of the Greek whose name is definitely of Indo-European origin. According to Homeric Iliad, in Mycenaean period Zeus was the supreme god of the pantheon. To our mind, it was in the Mycenaean period that Zeus eclipsed the Great Mother Goddess as a referent of adoration, and adopted her functions of the supreme deity⁴² as well as respective epithets. Among Zeus' epithets and titles are "Diktean" and "Zagreus".⁴³ Later, Zeus acquired another title; Plutarchus (Plut. Quaest. Graec. 45) mentions the Karian sculpture of Zeus Labrandeus, which represents Zeus with the attribute of Minoan Great Mother Goddess – a double ax, so called *labrys*.⁴⁴ Despite Zeus' superiority, the cult of the Great Mother Goddess by no means tarnishes. Mycenaean, Pilloan and Amyklean ivory sculptures still represent the images of goddesses.⁴⁵ A gold ring found in Mycenae bears an image of a goddess at the altar. On another ring, there is an image of a goddess with three poppies.⁴⁶

Besides Zeus, linear B texts also mention another male god Poseidaon. In the Greek Mythology, the god is associated with the element of water, sea and earthquakes.

His epithets "Ενοσιχθων" – "earth-shaker" and "γαίηχος" – "spouse of Earth" indicate that in remote past he was Earth's partner.⁴⁷ The festival of "laying a nuptial bed" in Mycenaean period is connected with Poseidaon. For example, during the festival in Pyllos (mentioned in Pilloan texts) a nuptial bed was mounted in honor of Poseidaon as a symbol of the sacred marriage. Later the festival was

princess and the sister of Cadmus, the founder of Thebes.

³⁶ Bonnefoy, 1992, 35-36.

³⁷ Bonnefoy, 1992, 35-36. The nymphs are preceded with the term "Wanakana".

³⁸ Bonnefoy, 1992, 35. Rhea's children were Hera, Zeus and Hades (Hom., II., 15, 187). However, according to Hesoid, Hestia and Demeter are her daughters (Theog., 453).

³⁹ Bonnefoy, 1992, 36.

⁴⁰ About the similarities of Aphaia and Britomartis see: Farnell, 1967, 305.

⁴¹ About Zeus see: A. Cook, Zeus, Cambridge, 1914, 40.

⁴² About Minoan Great Mother Goddess as the supreme deity see: Ю. Андреев, Мinoisкий Матриархат, ВДИ, 2, 1992, 3-14.

⁴³ Cf. Farnell, 1907, 305-306, Bonnefoy, 1992, 35.

⁴⁴ Dietrich, 1988, 14.

⁴⁵ Т. Благовская, Греческое Общество Второго Тысячелетия до Новой Эры и Его Культура, Москва, 1976, 24.

⁴⁶ The images of goddesses in the Mycenaean period see: Sp. Marinatos; M. Himer, Kreta und das Mykenische Hellas, Munchen, 1959, 206-207. See also: Фемилис, 1997, 38, fig. 19; 46, fig. 26; 47, fig. 28.

⁴⁷ Chadwick, 1989, 63, cf. The World of Greek Mythology, Sea and Netherland, 1998, 125.

called *Lectisternium* in Latin.⁴⁸

Texts of the Mycenaean period also mention a goddess referred to as Atana Potnia. "Potnia" means "goddess, mistress". The suffix "na" is of non-Greek origin.⁴⁹ It is believed that the goddess was the protector of the Minoan palace, and later of the polis. Athena is also associated with a war; she is a warrior. In the shrine of Mycenae (which should have been built in honor of Athena), there is an image of a "goddess in a helmet". To our mind, her belligerent aspect is revealed in the Mycenaean period.

Mycenaean texts have the term "Potnia" in plural (the term "wa-na-so-i" is used in double dative).⁵⁰ Scholars believe that the two goddesses should be identified with goddess Demeter and her daughter. We may link her to the scene on Minoan glyptic pattern which represents a richly dressed mistress and a young naked girl.⁵¹ Two female figures with a young man are also depicted on an ivory sculpture of the Mycenaean period.⁵² The mentioned ivory sculpture was placed in a shrine (to the north of Mycenae, stepped entrance) which had two alters. Texts in the ancient Pilloan shrine tell about a festival called *Thronoeleteriois* in Greek version, which was held in honor of "two goddesses-queens".⁵³ Minoan and Mycenaean texts also have the names of gods that later appear in the Greek pantheon: Dionysus, Apollo – Paiawon, Ares – Enuwarijo (Enualiso – Enyalios)⁵⁴ However, names of some gods are hard to identify, e.g. Pais ("divine child"), Tris Heros, Dapuritojo Potinija may be translated as "the supreme goddess of the labyrinth"(?!).⁵⁵

Certain gods are completely eclipsed in the Mycenaean period. The daughters of Minos – Phaedra, Ariadne, Acalle, Xenodice recede to a secondary position. Daedalus, the protector of craftsmen and "technology", also loses his position.⁵⁶

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As shown above, a large number of Minoan gods and goddesses remained in the Mycenaean pantheon, though most of them lost their previous glory and receded to a secondary position. The functional assimilation of gods of pre-Hellenic and Greek pantheon testifies to the syncretism of gods. However, great number of Minoan traditions and rituals that the Greek could not understand were doomed to oblivion.

Scholars believe that among the 12 Olympic gods were the ones that occupied a significant position in the mythology of pre-Hellenic tribes. In fact, none of the Olympians' names but Zeus have Greek, or generally Indo-European etymology.⁵⁷ And still, the complexity of Minoan-Mycenaean cultural "convergence" is caused by the fact that "actants" of the convergence were the religious systems of two different ethno-cultural groups. It is evident that Mycenaean period brought changes in both Minoan religious orientation and social structure. Minoan Great Mother Goddess was tarnished by supreme male god.

This seemingly trifling moment causes a change in religious orientation in favor of Mycenaean "androcentric" pantheon. Naturally, the "hierarchical reshuffle" in the spiritual sphere would influence the social structure of the Mycenaean society. As it is known, the social status of women in the Mycenaean society was radically different. Unlike the Minoan society, the woman in Mycenae was considered the property of her father or husband. In Mycenaean texts, women's names are preceded by a man's name in the genitive form.⁵⁸ Later, the same occurs in Greece.⁵⁹ The religious orientation and social structure of the Mycenaean period were based on patriarchal cultural pattern, the supreme deity of which was a "male god". Correspondingly, the Mycenaean "aggressive-masculine" ideology, which was totally different from the peaceful policy of "Pax Minoica", was spread in Aegean society.⁶⁰

⁴⁸ Bonnefoy, 1992, 33.

⁴⁹ Cf. The World of the Greek Mythology, Great Celestial Gods, 1998, 124; Chadwick, 1989, 46; Bonnefoy, 1992, 32.

⁵⁰ Bonnefoy, 1992, 32.

⁵¹ Sitopotinija - "Corn goddess" should be associated with this female deity. Later she was called Περσέφασσα or Κόρη. The suffix -ss- is non-Greek is connected to the pre-Hellenic period. Cf. "Persephassa" in The Oxford Classical Dictionary, 666.

⁵² Cf. Фелемис, 1997, 47, fig. 28.

⁵³ Bonnefoy, 1992, 33.

⁵⁴ Chadwick, 1989, 64.

⁵⁵ Bonnefoy, 1992, 32.

⁵⁶ About the cult of Daedalus see: L. Palemer, The Interpretations of Mycenaean Greek Texts, Oxford, 1963. also see: Bonnefoy, 1992, 32.

⁵⁷ The World of the Greek Mythology, From Chaos to Cosmos, Tbilisi, 1997, 76-77.

⁵⁸ Chadwick, 1989, 42.

⁵⁹ Chadwick, 1989, 42.

⁶⁰ Some scholars believe that the Minoans controlled neighboring regions by means of a peaceful policy i.e. through religious and ideological expansion. See: Marinatos, 1985, 28.