The Painted Plaster Reliefs from Pseira

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Some ninety years have passed since the 1907 discovery of the painted plaster reliefs from Pseira. Since then, they have been the subject of numerous studies and, in their restored form as two separate panels (henceforth referred to as Panels A and B), they have been objects of admiration for generations of visitors to the Archaeological Museum in Herakleion where they have been displayed for almost nine decades (Color Pls. A-B). Seager's 1910 publication of these exceptional products of Minoan art unfortunately leaves much to be desired, both in the reporting of their context and in terms of a proper pictorial record. Information on the stratigraphic context is unfortunately lost forever, as are other details of find spots from his excavations. There are several good reasons for a reconsideration of the reliefs.

Foremost, perhaps, is the need to sort out fact from restoration and to convey a fairer impression of the degree of preservation for these paintings (albeit within the limitations of working with material that has deteriorated over time and which is mostly embedded in a gypsum plaster backing). The early restorations have been taken for granted for too long, both in overall composition and in details. It is hoped that new photographs and drawings will provide a more accurate record of extant pieces and provoke new insights. Renewed study also holds the promise of providing a firmer date for the reliefs. This is now possible because of the enhanced understanding of the chronology of the Pseira site resulting from current excavations, and through the availability of a greater body of comparanda owing to further excavations of Aegean sites, especially Akrotiri on Thera with its well-preserved frescoes. Last, but not least, one can profit from a recapitulation of the opinions of scholars expressed over the years, for no exclusive study of the reliefs has been undertaken since their summary publication by Seager.

History of Discovery, Restoration, and Study

Thanks to a letter by Richard Seager addressed to Edith Hall from Pseira on June 28, 1907, we can now narrow down the period when the reliefs were discovered to between the date of this letter and the preceding month, May, when the excavation season began. There had been only minor testing of the site in the previous year, and no frescoes were mentioned in connection with that short visit. Official publication followed three years later, in the small volume that sums up the results of the excavations at Pseira (Seager 1910). The plaster reliefs were commented on sporadically (Seager 1910:11, 15, 32-34), and they were described as coming from "a small but well built house" (now called Building AC). They
were illustrated in a drawing restoring them as the arms and body of a seated woman whose head and other parts were missing (here Pl. 20A).

The artist that Seager employed is not acknowledged in the publication, but in the letter of June 28 the intention is expressed "to have Bagge in July for the drawings," that is, just after the excavation season was over. Halvor Bagge had previously worked for Harriet Boyd Hawes when she excavated Gournia, and his fine watercolors of pottery adorn the publication of her book *Gournia, Vasiliki and Other Prehistoric Sites on the Isthmus of Hierapetra, Crete* (Hawes et al. 1908).

It is likely that Bagge is also the painter of some unpublished watercolors of fragments of painted reliefs from Pseira, illustrated here for the first time (Color Pl. C). These paintings were all on one sheet of paper that was found in a copy of the Gournia volume belonging to Arthur Richter, a book dealer. Professor J. W. Graham, of the University of Toronto, purchased the color "plate" separately sometime in the 1960s. According to Richter, the volume itself had been purchased in Europe. The watercolors remained in Graham's possession until his retirement, whereupon, wishing to have them deposited in Philadelphia, the city that had sponsored Seager's excavation, he contacted archaeologists first at the University of Pennsylvania, and then at Temple University. After the former institution declined the offer, the watercolors went to the latter, where they are now stored in the Rare Book Room of Paley Library.

The watercolors depict parts of two feet, arms, and patterns from dresses, some of which are recognizable as fragments incorporated in the restored panels in the Herakleion Museum. That Bagge was the artist is suggested by the repetition of a mistake in one of the dress patterns that also occurs in the restored drawing published by Seager (Pl. 20A). One also notices an affinity in the painting style with that of Bagge's watercolors in the Gournia publication. The handwritten notation "wohl von Gürtel," probably penned by the artist, suggests that he spoke German.

Another letter of Seager's mentioning plasters from Pseira, also addressed to Hall, almost certainly confirms that Bagge was the artist responsible for the watercolors of the fragments (Seager 1907b). The letter makes reference to "the gesso duro relief" with "a very elaborately patterned" dress and to the plan for Bagge "to make two color plates of her showing the detail but not attempting to restore." Quite possibly, the two plates referred to are the watercolors, which for whatever reason were never included in Seager's publication, plus the plate Seager actually published (here Pl. 20A), presumably executed in color but reproduced only in black and white. The date of the letter, September 8, 1907, gives the *terminus post quem* for the watercolors. For the sake of convenience, and because there is little doubt about the attribution, the watercolor reproductions of the loose fragments will henceforth be referred to as "Bagge's watercolors."

Seager was not insensitive to the quality and the social and historical implications of the reliefs. He wrote that "the work is very delicate and the smallest details are drawn with a care that even now must excite admiration" (Seager 1910:32). The presence of such an ambitious form of mural decoration suggested a general prosperity, apparent elsewhere in the LM I settlement at Pseira. It also suggested evidence for close associations with Knossos. The date he proposed for them was late LM IB, a date he regarded as contemporary with what some scholars were then calling LM II. The presence of examples of what he described as "Palace Style" pottery in LM I contexts at Pseira suggested to him that the LM I style continued longer there than at Knossos (Seager 1910:11).

A final note on Seager's role in the history of the study of the plasters is an intriguing remark he made in the earlier (June 28, 1907) of the two letters to Hall. In it, he stated that, in addition to the discovery of the "queen" or "goddess" in plaster relief (here Pl. 20A), there was "part of another from another house." This writer is inclined to think that the additional painting is not among the illustrations he published. Perhaps the reference was to some poorly preserved fragment(s), possibly among those ultimately relegated to the storeroom of the museum, or since lost.

The next major step in restoration and interpretation was played by one of the Gillikrons, *père et fils*, artists who had worked for a long time for Sir Arthur Evans. There is some ambiguity as to which of the two was mainly responsible. In an article published in 1923-1924, G. Rodenwaldt referred to Émile Gilliérón *père* working in 1914 on a new restoration of the reliefs from Pseira. Apparently the artist undertook this task on his own initiative, executing it in his free time while working under Evans' direction on restorations of frescoes at Knossos (Rodenwaldt 1923-1924:268). Rodenwaldt wrote the article as a token of appreciation for Gilliérón's work, but also as an analytical commentary on the restoration. The two photographs which Rodenwaldt published and for which he thanked Gilliérón fils illustrate the new scheme. In it, two ladies were shown seated on rocks, an idea supported by the inclusion of fragments omitted in Bagge's earlier drawing (Rodenwaldt 1923-1924:268, 271-272, figs. 1 and 2, here reproduced as Pl. 208-B). These reconstructions are very similar, though not identical, to Panels A and B exhibited in the museum today.

The published photos in Rodenwaldt's article show that the reconstruction incorporated most of the
preserved relief fragments and that an attempt was made by the restorer, although inconsistently, to distinguish between preserved and restored areas. The distinction is clearer in Panel B, in which restored parts are painted on a flat surface. In Panel A, the entire figure is restored in relief. In both panels, the rocks are rendered in relief, although there was no indication of such a setting on any of the preserved pieces. Neither panel displays a background.

Although it appears from Rodenwaldt’s article that Gilliéron père was the actual restorer, a reference made by Evans in 1930, in his Palace of Minos, somewhat confuses the issue, or perhaps provides a sequel to the story. Evans mentions the “revived restoration of the fresco by M. Gilliéron fils in the Museum at Candia” and illustrates a line drawing of the restored figure in Panel B, which we must assume is that of the younger restorer (1921-1935: III, 38, n. 1 and 28, fig. 15A, here Pl. 21A). Perhaps Gilliéron père had died by then, and the son continued his work. The drawing reproduced by Evans (Pl. 21A) matches the restoration in Rodenwaldt’s photo (Pl. 21C). Whether changes were also made to Panel A before the murals were exhibited in the museum is not known.

The first archaeological museum in Herakleion, to which Evans was referring, has been described in some detail by N. Platon in his Guide to the Museum (1955:11-14). The building seems to have been completed in 1912, and was in use to 1937, when it was demolished to make room for a new one with provision against the earthquakes that had proved to be quite damaging to the artifacts over the years. A Museum Guide written in 1921, by then Ephor Stephanos Xanthoudides, makes it clear that the panels were already on display (Xanthoudides 1921; 1927). They were situated in “The Great Minoan Hall” mounted in wooden frames and suspended on the wall. Four large, elaborately painted vessels from Pseira stood below them (Platon 1955:34).

To continue with the peripatetic story of the panels, we learn from Platon’s Guide to the Museum that they were exhibited in the new building in what is presently the large Gallery XIV (then Room K), on the north wall and on either side of the door that led to what is presently Gallery XV (then Room M) to the north (Platon 1955:128; 1962:135-136). In other words, they were where the Procession Fresco from the Palace of Knossos and the Griffin Fresco from the Throne Room at Knossos are displayed today (1992). They were moved to their present position in the smaller Gallery XVI, when the addition of a new wing to the museum led to a rearrangement of many of the exhibits (Alexiou 1968:106).

It should be noted that sometime between their installation in the new museum and the present day, the panels underwent changes once again. For instance, in Panel A the woman’s right restored hand was either removed intentionally or broken off accidentally. In Panel B only the torso was outlined, without indicating the textile patterns seen in the Gilliéron restoration published by Rodenwaldt (cf. Pls. 20B-C, and compare Color Pls. A-B).

After Rodenwaldt’s study, many years passed before the ladies of Pseira were again singled out for special consideration. The next serious examination of the fragments was in the context of Bernd Kaiser’s dissertation on Minoan relief-work for the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität at Bonn. Kaiser’s chapter on Pseira (1976a:299-302) included a consideration of twenty unpublished pieces (in addition to a few more that were amorphous). These pieces had been mounted on a gypsum plaster backing and kept in a tray (“Pseira” Case 124, S VIII) in the north magazine in the basement storerooms of the Herakleion Museum. Kaiser’s Catalog provided measurements for all the pieces and special comments on the better-preserved fragments. Unfortunately, no photographs were provided, and the drawings are sketchy (Kaiser 1976a: pl. 24A). The illustrations included three photographic plates of the exhibited panels in the museum, and a detail of the preserved sleeve of the lady in Panel B (Kaiser 1976a: fig. 469A-C). Using the fragments, Kaiser offered a new restoration in which he identified the two women as goddesses sitting antithetically and facing each other, engaged in “sacra conversazione” (Kaiser 1976a:302 and pl. 24B, here Pl. 21B).

This brings us to the present reconsideration, which commences with a Catalog of all plasters preserved from Building AC, including pieces from the new excavations.

**Catalog of the Painted Plaster Reliefs**

The Catalog consists of four parts. Part I deals with fragments incorporated in the two panels on display in the Archaeological Museum in Herakleion, in Gallery XVI; Part II with the fragments stored in the basement of the museum; Part III with recently discovered fragments; Part IV with a selection of fragments illustrated in the hitherto unpublished watercolor. Capital letters A-E are assigned to the
parts of the Catalog, of which Part I uses A and B as labels for the two panels on display, respectively. The letters are followed by arabic numerals denoting the individual fragments. The labels used in the Catalog for the preserved fragments are marked in the photos of the two panels reproduced here (Color Pls. A-B). Measurements indicate maximum dimensions and, where measurable, the height of the relief. Because a special section analyses the specific textile motifs in detail, such motifs are only briefly described in the Catalog itself.

PART I: PANELS A AND B

It should be made clear at the outset that aspects of the descriptions of the two restored panels remain ambiguous due both to the poor state of preservation of the plasters and to the limiting conditions of study. Such limitations include the partial concealment of the pieces, which were incorporated within a gypsum backing, and the limited viewing angle, as the panels remained suspended.

One rather important question that remains undetermined is whether the murals had been exposed to fire from an ancient conflagration. Fragments displayed in the panels are quite dark, but whether from exposure to fire or to the application of discoloring modern preservatives is impossible to determine. For whatever bearing it may have on this question, the loose fragments in the storeroom of the museum bear no traces of fire.

For some of the reasons mentioned above, and the fact that relief has been converted into flat drawing, the accompanying illustrations are marked by a degree of distortion. The drawings were executed by combining many devices: direct tracings where possible, tracings from life-size photographic prints of details, and copies of projected images from slides.

PANEL A (PLS. 22-25A).

Panel A contains six fragments of the original relief of a woman: part of the torso (A1), parts from the skirt (A2-A4), and two nonjoining fragments of a foot (A5). Everything else appearing in the restored panel, including the woman's seat and the background, is completely hypothetical.

A few measurements were taken of the figure as restored:

- distance from neck to waist: ca. 29 cm
- distance from shoulder to base of breast: 23 cm
- width of arm below shoulder: 9 cm
- width of arm at junction with elbow: 6.5-7 cm
- thickness of arm near elbow: 7 cm
- length of upper arm: 8.5 cm
- length of lower arm, as preserved: 5 cm
- distance from knee to back of hip: 5.5 cm
- total figure, from foot to shoulder: ca. 93 cm

Fragment A1 (PLs. 22-24, Color Pl. A): 31.5 cm x 16 cm. This piece preserves the right shoulder, upper arm, part of the lower arm, and part of the torso. The elbow is missing.

The slip on the surface of the plaster carrying the color has in places flaked off, or is worn, as on much of the sleeve whose lower border is missing. Where the color of the skin is preserved, it is white, the conventional Minoan color for female skin. The surface over the breast and in the nipple area is worn. In some reliefs with better preservation from other sites, nipples were modeled and painted (Evans 1921-1935: III, 509, figs. 354A-B). They were indicated in color in paintings of women (Cameron 1971:37, photo of fresco of Lady in Red from Knossos, here Pl. 40A).

Many of the designs on the dress and much of the rich jewelry are preserved. The decoration, as seen on the sleeve, consists of a surface pattern of rosettes (Pattern 1), with single rosettes forming a border preserved along the outer side of the sleeve (Pattern 2). The hem of the wide opening of the jacket, which leaves the bosom bare, carried another decoration. Given the poorly preserved state of the plaster in this area, the exact motifs comprising this decoration, whether a combination of circles and semicircles, or wavy bands (Pattern 3a or 3b), is unclear.

There are some ambiguities about the shape of the necklace as well. Both because of the cracks in a crucial area of the plaster surface, and the fact that there seems to be a tiny misguided fragment of plaster in the restored panel, the impression one gets today is that the lowest strand made of blue beads consists of scallops attached to the next strand up, also in the form of scallops, but now of yellow beads. Similarly in Bagge's restoration, the strands in question are shown linked, though the blue one is simple, without scallops. In contrast to this information, Seager's description seems to imply separate strands, for he refers to "two necklaces," of which "the upper one, from its yellow color, must have been of large gold beads, with festoons of smaller beads hanging from a string of crescent-shaped gold bars. The second necklace, which hangs much lower on the bosom, is blue, and no doubt is intended to represent a string of blue porcelain beads" (Seager 1910:54). While yellow seems to be the right identification for gold, blue seems also to be a Minoan convention for silver. It should be noted that here, as in other Minoan representations, necklaces are partly hidden by the jacket and are visible only over the exposed torso. Generally, such necklaces are closer to the neck and do not hang as low as they do here.
Fragment A2 (Color Pl. A): 16 cm x 16.5 cm. This fragment is apparently part of the hip and possibly the buttocks area.

Because the plaster surface is completely worn, one does not know whether the skirt was once decorated with painted patterns or whether it was plain, as currently restored. The curvature of the relief and the curving edge which forms a kind of ledge suggest that, as shown in the panel, the fragment belongs where the bodice ends, probably with a belt or girdle rendered in relief. On the other hand, there is no reason why the fragment may not have belonged farther to the left, opening the way for alternative interpretations with respect to the posture and direction of the figure.

Fragment A3 (Color Pl. A): 10.2 cm x 7.5 cm, part of a flounce.

Because the plaster surface is worn, whether the flounce was painted or plain is not clear.

Fragment A4 (Color Pl. A): 8 cm x 5.3 cm, part of a flounce.

Fragment A5 (Pl. 25A, Color Pl. A): two nonjoining fragments, one from the heel and the other from the toe part of a foot turning right, with the toe tip missing.

The restored length of the foot in the museum panel is 17 cm. The surface is worn, but it preserves in places a whitish slip with traces of red color forming bands, a vertical one down the back of the heel and a horizontal one along the sole.

PANEL B (PLS. 25B-30, COLOR PL. B)

Parts of a sleeve (Fragment B1) and of a skirt (Fragments B2-B4) have been attributed to a figure restored as seated and turning left, from the viewer’s point of view. The restored panel is 76 cm high.

Fragment B1 (Pl. 25B-27, Color Pl. B): 17 cm x 10 cm, part of a left sleeve.

The identification of the side of the body is almost certain, thanks to the preservation of the band on the outer left side of the sleeve and of the interior edge of the jacket border on the opposite side. The side of the sleeve is decorated with a spiraliform pattern set in a white band edged by blue borders (Pattern 7). What survives from the hem of the jacket is a solid blue band narrowing toward the direction of the armpit and edged on the right by a blue/black line. On the sleeve itself is a surface pattern of rows of lozenges enclosing dotted spirals and other filling patterns (Patterns 4-7).

Fragment B2 (Pls. 28-29, Color Pl. B): 24 cm x 22.5 cm, part of a skirt in relief, with a very worn surface.

Where some of the top layer of the relief is missing, one can see part of a lower layer which was intentionally scarred so that the upper layer of plaster might better adhere to it. The piece preserves a curved edge at the top forming a ledge, as in the case of Fragment A1. A separately modeled belt or girdle, would likely have been added on top of the ledge which is 2.5 cm. wide. Solid blue triangles are restored as a border pattern along the lower part of the edge, but original traces could not be discerned on the exhibited panel. The skirt itself is painted in rich colors, with an elaborate network of lozenges and filling spiraliform and zigzag patterns (Patterns 8-11).

Fragment B3 (Pl. 30A, Color Pl. B): 5.1 cm x 4.6 cm, part of a skirt.

This fragment has the same decoration as Fragment B2, and, like the latter, it preserves part of a rim, which, however, includes none of the blue triangles that have been restored on B2.

Fragment B4 (Pl. 30B-C, Color Pl. B): 7.2 cm x 5.4 cm, part of a skirt.

This small but interesting piece preserves part of the overall pattern of the skirt (as described for Fragment B2), intercepted by a series of oblique bands, decorated variously with ivy motifs (Pattern 11) and disks.

PART II: FRAGMENTS IN STORAGE IN THE HERAKLEION MUSEUM (PLS. 31-36)

As was noted above, the fragments described in this section have been published by Kaiser (1976a:299-302, figs. 24A). The fragments are partly embedded in a gypsum plaster backing, a procedure which probably occurred after the restorations of the panels were complete. It is possible that most of these fragments were already worn at the time of the excavation. Some of them are recognizable among the pieces illustrated in Bagge’s watercolor. They are republished in this study because more accurate drawings and photographs are needed to help scrutinize details of their features. The 1:1 scale of the drawings made in the museum also allows for double-checking on how these fragments may relate to the women in the panels.

The numbering system used here follows the order in which the pieces were set into the gypsum plaster backing. Kaiser’s Catalog follows a different order. His numbers will be cited in parentheses preceded by the letter K. Fragments K3, K10, K14, K15, and K18
have not been included because the fragments deteriorated and are now mostly tiny blobs of plaster with no surface. This must have been more or less their condition when Kaiser wrote his Catalog (as he only gives their measurements in his descriptions). Kaiser's opinions, referred to occasionally below, derive from pages 299-302 in his publication.

Fragment C1, K4 (Pl. 31): 14.3 cm x 7.8 cm; h 4.5 cm.

Two joining fragments are from a woman's lower arm, broken off near the wrist and elbow. Edges are not preserved fully enough to determine whether the arm is left or right, or what its gesture may have been. Its depiction here as horizontal is only one of a number of possible positions.

The larger of the fragments preserves both a lower and an upper edge. The small fragment preserves only part of the lower edge. The larger piece preserves an area of the surface slip that is white, the conventional color for female skin. The slip was applied on a ca. 1.0-1.5-cm-thick layer of plaster, which is attached to a lower layer. The lower layer of plaster is marked by parallel grooves and facets, so that the upper layer would adhere to it. Its size is very close to that of the preserved right arm of the woman in Panel A, and if hers it could be her left arm. Kaiser also suggests this to be a left arm, but attributes it to the figure in Panel B in his restoration (Pl. 21B).

Fragment C2, K7 (Pl. 32): 6.6 cm x 5.6 cm; h 2.3 cm.

The fragment preserves none of the surface slip, and it is damaged at several places in depth. Kaiser identifies it as part of a dress; perhaps its surface was better preserved at the time of his study.

Fragment C3, K12 (Pl. 32): 5.4 cm x 4.6 cm; h 1.6 cm, probably part of a dress.

A tiny area preserves the surface slip of this small piece with a slightly curving surface, on which Kaiser noticed traces of turquoise blue. The presence of grooves, once again, may illustrate a technique used in building up layers to create the plaster relief.

Fragment C4, K16 (Pl. 32): 7.0 cm x 4.4 cm; h 1.6 cm.

The surface slip is essentially missing, but where it is preserved it is white. An unexplainable hole, 9 mm wide, appears where the top layer of plaster has broken off. The fragment may be part of a limb, possibly from a lower arm.

Fragment C5, K22 (Pl. 33): 3.8 cm x 3.2 cm; h 1.0 cm.

This fragment is a small piece with a slight curve and no surface slip preserved. It shows faceting, as in Fragment C1.

Fragment C6, K11 (Pl. 33): 5.1 cm x 3.8 cm; h 1.4 cm.

This small fragment with a very slight curve preserves part of the painted surface. There is a white area with faint traces of red dots, possibly forming spirals, and next to it a blue band separated from it by a thin black line. At the other side of the band are white curvilinear patterns on a black ground. It is reproduced in Bagge's watercolor, where the red dots are omitted and the black band has a row of circles. Kaiser interpreted the latter as an arcade pattern (Kaiser 1976a:301) and attributed the fragment to the hem of the bodice of the figure in Panel B. To my eye the motifs on the black band look more like the hooked spirals appearing on the band of the sleeve of the lady in Panel B (Pattern 7), rendered in a slightly larger scale, and as such they may well belong to the decoration of the hem of her jacket.

Fragment C7, K23 (Pl. 33): 5.5 cm x 5.4 cm; h 1.9 cm.

This small fragment has become detached from the gypsum plaster backing. It has a flat back and two surfaces that meet more or less at right angles. No color is preserved on the worn surface, and the fragment may simply be part of the background where the plaster revetment of the wall abutted against timber, or it may come from a room's corner.

Fragment C8, K19 (Pl. 33): 3.8 cm x 2.7 cm; h 1.2 cm.

This piece is a small white fragment with a slight curve, probably part of a woman's skin. Kaiser noted the presence of a roundish hole on the edge, but it is not clear whether this was functional or accidental. The hole is much smaller than the hole in Fragment C4.

Fragment C9, K2 (Pl. 33): 7.3 cm x 6.0 cm; h 1.0 cm.

This small piece is not diagnostic as only the lower of the two layers of plaster that make up the relief is preserved.

Fragment C10, K6 (Pl. 34): 10.8 cm x 6.2 cm; h 2.8 cm.

The surface appears to be white, suggesting that it is part of female skin. Kaiser noted some traces of gray-blue paint that are not visible today. Only one edge is preserved, but the relief suggests that the break across is not far from an edge. If so, this slim form might be part of a lower arm.

Fragment C11, K21 (Pl. 34): 10.1 cm x 4.2 cm; h 1.4 cm, front part of a foot turning right.

The original surface, which is preserved extensively, shows a horizontal red band (ca. 1 cm wide) painted alongside the sole. The relief renders the area of the band with a vertical face, while the upper
part of the foot is more rounded. The difference in modeling may imply two different materials, a stiff one at the bottom and a softer one at the top. Perhaps the shoe was made of a leather bottom and a socklike top, unless it is a sandal, but then there is no trace of painted straps (compare the sandal of an ivory figurine, Evans 1921-1935: II, 727, fig. 455a-c). The foot is similar in proportion and painted details to that incorporated in Panel A.

**Fragment C12**, K1 (Pl. 35): 9.3 cm x 8.4 cm; h 2.1 cm, almost certainly part of a woman’s arm.

The piece has a high curvature. Where the surface slip is preserved, it is white. Kaiser noted two parallel, depressed lines which he interpreted as muscles. He attributed the piece to the right lower arm of the lady in Panel B, but this fragment could as easily belong to another area and to either of the two women in the relief.

**Fragment C13**, K5 (Pl. 35): 6.5 cm x 4.4 cm; h 1.3 cm.

This small fragment preserves one edge and parts of the original surface, which is white except for some traces of blue at one end. Kaiser’s interpretation of this piece as part of an arm with a blue band around the wrist is attractive, but extremely hypothetical.

**Fragment C14**, K8 (Pl. 36): 2.7 cm x 2.2 cm; h 0.5 cm.

This piece is a small fragment with traces of red and blue (probably part of a dress) visible in two small areas where the original plaster surface is preserved.

**Fragment C15**, K13 (Pl. 36): 6.6 cm x 4.4 cm; h 0.7 cm.

This fragment has two original surfaces that meet at an angle. The broader surface is flat and painted with red, oblique lines on a white ground (Pattern 13). The narrow surface (ranging in width from 12 to 18 mm) is slightly curved and bears traces of red and possibly dark blue or black paint. Kaiser suggested that the fragment may be part of the furniture, perhaps the seat for one of the figures. Cameron saw it as part of a dado, with the lines simulating the veining of wood (Cameron 1975:222), but the problem with such an identification is the somewhat curving edge of the piece, where the two surfaces meet. A third suggestion is that implied by a handwritten note appearing next to the copy of this fragment in Bagge’s watercolor: “wohl von guertel.” In support of this idea, we note that, in Panel B, what has been interpreted as a girdle with multiple coils is decorated with a painted pattern (blue scallops, in that case) (Color Pl. B).

**Fragment C16**, K17 (Pl. 36): 5.2 cm x 3.3 cm; h 1.2 cm.

A small and rather flat fragment preserves a white surface. Kaiser noted red and blue traces of color that are not visible today.

**Fragment C17**, K20 (Pl. 36): 4.2 cm x 3.3 cm; h 1.1 cm.

A small curving fragment has possible traces of blue color on one spot on the white surface.

**Fragment C18**, K9 (Pl. 36): 2.0 cm x 1.8 cm; h 1.2 cm.

A tiny, flat piece preserves the plaster surface, which has white and blue areas separated by a black line. It could represent part of the edge of dress (blue) next to the skin (white).

**PART III: FRAGMENTS FOUND IN THE MODERN EXCAVATIONS**

When cleaning operations and small-scale excavations were conducted in Building AC in 1985 and 1986, fragments of plaster were discovered in two contexts, Room AC 1 and Room AC 2. None of the pieces had preserved surfaces. The plaster is similar in appearance to that found at several other locations in the Minoan town, and it is also similar to the plaster found by Seager. The fragments are cataloged here with the prefix D to distinguish them from the other plasters discussed in this study.

**Fragments D1**, from Room AC 1, unit AC 1-2 (Pl. 37): over 50 tiny bits, all under 2 cm.

The plaster is fine and rather soft, like that of **Fragments D2** and **D3** described below. None of the original surfaces are preserved.

When work began in 1985, Room AC 1 was covered with grass and other vegetation. The floor was at the level left by the excavations of 1907. In the cleaning of its surface, disturbed modern soil and vegetation was removed as unit AC 1-1. This operation revealed a surface that was partly at the level of the room’s final floor, with several stone slabs in place, and partly below that original level. A sounding was excavated in the southern part of the room, into the floor packing that was visible in this area. All the plaster came from the upper part of the sounding, at and near the modern surface, in the unit called AC 1-2. Most of the small plaster bits were retrieved in the sieving process.

It is possible that the plaster was not originally a part of this stratum but was left scattered about the room by the excavations of Seager, to be found immediately under the dried grass and leaves from the vegetation that had grown in the room in the twen-
tieth century, or it is possible that it was originally a part of the floor packing under the room's final floor. The former conclusion is strongly suggested by the circumstances of discovery. The stratum was excavated all the way to bedrock, ca. 25 cm below the modern surface. Soil was removed in three arbitrary passes, each about 8 cm high, numbered AC 1-2, AC 1-3, and AC 1-4. The finds from the passes were kept separate. Pottery in the level is from LM IA. The stratum here was a uniform fill, except that no plaster at all lay in any unit below the disturbed unit AC 1-2. This suggests that the plaster was probably left by Seager, and there is no guarantee that it came originally from this room.

**Fragment D2**, from Room AC 2, unit AC 2-1 (Pl. 37): 6.9 cm x 3.1 cm; h 1.7 cm.

None of the original surface is preserved on this small fragment of plaster. The fragment is slightly concave on one side and slightly convex on the other. Shallow irregular incised striations are on the convex side. The plaster is quite soft, fine, and slightly off-white (Munsell: 10YR, white 8/2). The fragment was found in the cleaning of the LM IB surface as left by the earlier excavations in Room AC 2.

**Fragment D3**, from Room AC 2, unit AC 2-1 (Pl. 37): 5.3 cm x 2.9 cm; h 1.7 cm.

This small piece of plaster preserves none of its original surface and has no traces of paint. Its plaster is similar to that of **Fragment D2** and like it has slightly convex and concave sides. It was found in the cleaning of the room's modern surface, as left by the Seager excavations.

**PART IV: FRAGMENTS IN BAGGE'S WATERCOLOR**

The six illustrated items are labeled E1-E6, starting with the item at the upper left of the painting (Color Pl. C).

**Fragment E1.** The watercolor depicts a restored foot turning left incorporating two unjoined fragments, one from the toe, the other from the heel area. This item has been described above as **Fragment A5**, since it is part of the restoration of the figure in Panel A as displayed in the museum. What varies in the two versions is the restored length of the foot. The one in the watercolor is 23.4 cm, that in the panel 16.5 cm. If proportions were true to nature in the composition and given the size of the individual represented (a little less than 5 feet tall, or 150 cm), a length of ca. 20-21 cm would be a more realistic dimension for the foot. The watercolor helps confirm information not clearly visible on the fragments today, specifically the presence of red and black paint in certain areas. The anklet in the watercolor has been restored after the example of the Procession Fresco from the Palace of Knossos (Evans 1921-1935: II, 726, fig. 454), but because the leg is not preserved, its presence is completely hypothetical (and rather unlikely).

**Fragment E2.** This painting reproduces **Fragment B4**, described above as part of the restoration of the figure in Panel B. The watercolor copy is vastly incorrect as comparison with the description of Patterns 8-11 below demonstrates. Note, for instance, that the pattern of zigzags within the blue lozenges of the overall pattern has here been replaced by an interlocked motif that is a complete fiction of the restorer's imagination. Details on the flounce, such as the white ivy leaves, are omitted altogether. Gilliéron's later restoration corrected all these mistakes, but not before the unfortunate reproduction of the mistaken patterns by Evans, who went so far as to provide comparanda for them from among Middle Kingdom scarab designs (Evans 1921-1935: II, 731 and 732, fig. 458; here Pl. 38A).

**Fragment E3.** This painting reproduces **Fragment C11**, the front part of a foot turning right, found among the loose fragments in the museum storeroom. Its scale seems identical to the foot described as **Fragment A5** (E1 in the watercolor), and, like it, it is painted with a red band along the sole.

**Fragment E4.** This remains a mysterious pattern, unmatched by any on the known stucco pieces. Perhaps it was on a fragment that was misplaced or lost after the watercolor was made, or it may have been stored separately, particularly if it is the one piece in plaster relief from the "other house" mentioned by Seager in a letter to Hall (Seager 1907a). The pattern shows a large dotted spiral next to a narrow blue band, beyond which are two rows of circles with red cores. The scale of the spiral does not match the only other example of a red-dotted spiral, namely that on the sleeve in Panel B.

**Fragment E5.** This piece is the same as **Fragment C13**. In the watercolor it displays more vivid colors and clarity of pattern than are evident today on the actual fragment. Below it are the handwritten words: "wohl von gürtel."

**Fragment E6.** The painting depicts **Fragment C6**. One of the fragments kept in the museum storeroom. It omits the red dots in the white area that may represent a spiral. The circles, as discussed for **Fragment C6** above, could be otherwise interpreted as part of a spiraliform pattern.

The patterns represented in the Pseira reliefs have
the decoration is labeled Pattern 3a.

Closer examination of the pattern suggests that the semicircles may in fact be undulating lines. The other details remain the same, except that the white circles are closer to being ovals. This revised pattern, which is more commonly used in the depiction of Aegean dress than Pattern 3a, is the preferred version in the present study, and is labeled Pattern 3b.

PATTERNS IN PANEL B

Pattern 4. From the sleeve (part of surface Pattern 4-6): blue zigzags on a white ground in horizontal antithetical pairs forming lozenges separated by zigzag spaces.

Consecutive circles in black outlines decorate the zigzag bands. The white areas between zigzags and within the lozenges are filled with two varieties of spirals (Patterns 5-6).

Pattern 5. From the sleeve (part of surface Pattern 4-6): running spirals in reddish yellow dots with a larger solid red-dot core, placed along the zigzag spaces separating the lozenges of Pattern 4. There is some uncertainty as to the number of spirals per zigzag segment, but the restoration suggests one at each downward-pointing corner, one at the peak, and one in between these on each side of the zigzag. The presence of the central spiral is not obvious today.

Pattern 6. From the sleeve (part of surface Pattern 4-6): quadruple spirals in reddish yellow dots with a blue core, enclosing a central blue lozenge with incurved sides outlined by black lines. This design is part of Pattern 4.

Pattern 7. On hem of sleeve: white band edged on either side by a blue band with black outlines. The central band is decorated with hooked spirals that have red petaloid cores.

Pattern 8. On the skirt (part of surface Pattern 8-10): a net of lozenges with tricurved outlines rendered as black bands with white disks set against a yellow ground.

A yellow multipetaled rosette set within a circle
appears at the junctions between lozenges. Circle and petals are outlined by fine black lines. The lozenges are painted alternately blue and ocher yellow in the successive horizontal rows. The blue lozenges contain Pattern 9, the yellow ones Pattern 10.

Pattern 9. On the skirt (part of surface Pattern 8-10): vertical rows of zigzags and lozenges in black lines on a blue ground.

The pattern shows affinities with Pattern 6 on the sleeve of the same figure.

Pattern 10. On the skirt (part of surface Pattern 8-10): rendered on a yellow ocher ground; white quadruple spirals in black outline with a blue core enclose a lozenge-shaped ocher space.

This pattern recalls the quadruple spirals of Pattern 6 on the figure’s sleeve.


Each leaf has a short stem alternately pointing right and left or up and down, depending on how the garment is reconstructed. The ivy leaf band is edged by ocher bands outlined in black and filled with white disks.

Pattern 12. On skirt: solid blue scallops forming a border at the upper edge of the skirt.

Pattern 13. (Fragment in storeroom): red oblique bands and lines on a white ground. See also Fragments C15 and E5.

General Comments on Technique and Style

The reliefs from Pseira are among the masterpieces of Aegean art both technically and artistically. The plaster is very fine (see the study by Myer, Chapter 13); the surface is polished, and, as in the best of Minoan frescoes, it is covered with a fine slip (ca. 2 mm thick) upon which the pigments were applied. Some of the colors on the displayed panels still retain their brilliance, such as the sky blue, or the bright yellow ocher that in places assumes warm red tones. Black and white complete the palette, which, despite its limited range, achieves surprisingly polychromatic effects through a rich interplay and varied juxtaposition between the few colors. Fine black lines are frequently used for delineation, outline, and emphasis in patterns, while dots and disks in different colors (red, black, white) and in light-on-dark and dark-on-light schemes produce luxurious decorative effects. There is meticulous attention to detail and craftsmanship even in the smallest scale, as also noted by Seager, whose words of appreciation have already been quoted.

Most interesting is the use of a grid in Panel A to ensure the correct replication of the individual motifs (rosettes) that make up the textile pattern on the sleeve. The grid was impressed on the curving surface of the arm by use of a taut string that was allowed merely to touch the still-damp plaster. Its lines did not follow the curvature of the body, as they might have, had they been incised by hand. They are vertical and horizontal, and they almost disappear where the relief recedes. The grid is one of the finest preserved in Minoan painting, made up of tiny (7 mm wide) squares. Grids used to render textile patterns in other Minoan frescoes are occasionally set obliquely, either because they reflect the movement of the part of the human body that the cloth covers, or because of the particular configuration of the surface pattern, usually one that combines different repeated motifs. Examples of the obliquely placed grid can be seen in the dress of the “goddess” in the fresco at Aghia Triada (Rodenwaldt 1919:104, fig. 11); the Lady in Red and the Ladies in Blue at Knossos (Pl. 40A-B); the kists of the men in the Procession Fresco at Knossos (Sapouna-Sakellaraki 1971: color pl. B); and a fresco at Chania (Kaiser 1976a: pl. 25).

The rosettes in the Pseiran relief are set one per grid square and are surrounded by a black circle. The circles were probably drawn with the help of a stencil. Where the paint is worn there is evidence underneath of delicate red lines, part of the preliminary sketch. Plate 23 illustrates the stages involved in producing the textile pattern, and one wonders at the need for such a painstaking process, especially as several dozens of rosettes were needed to fill the bodice. Whether the skirt had the same or a similar pattern will never be known, because the original surface slip carrying the color has entirely disappeared.

No grid is apparent on the other figure at Pseira, a puzzling matter in view of the elaborate patterns on both sleeve and skirt. One reason for such an omission may be that the chevrons on the sleeve intrinsically dictate their own ordering and eliminate the need for a grid. In the case of the network of undulating lozenges on the skirt, it is not clear how this may have been worked out. One possibility is that a
grid was used, but was drawn rather than impressed, and is now covered by the painting. An impressed grid may have been avoided to prevent it from marring the final design. To my knowledge no grid, impressed or drawn, has been detected in the very similar pattern with lozenges enclosing rosettes from Thera (Color Pl. G). It is to be noted that the latter design also uses black for the outline and details of the patterns. Black outlining, then, need not be taken as a sign of a later date at Pseira.

The technique of the relief at Pseira is not unlike that from Knossos, there represented more by examples of male rather than female figures (Evans 1921-1935: III, 497f.). The fragments from Pseira in the museum storeroom reveal superposed layers of plaster (two, where exposed) to build up the high relief. Scarring and grooved lines facilitated the adherence of successive layers of plaster to one another. Scarring is also visible in Panel B, at the upper right part of the skirt where the top layer of the plaster has broken off. Measurements of the better-preserved bits of the restored panels suggest 5 cm as the maximum height of the relief (as at the projection of the breast). Limbs, probably all from lower and upper arms (rather than legs, which were covered by the long skirts), show an occasional subtle rippling on the surface, but none displays the prominent modeling of muscles and even of veins common in the rendition of men in Minoan relief.

The skirt is also distinctly modeled, with its upper-curving edge projecting some 2 cm (as measured in Panel B) and forming a narrow ledge. A belt or girdle, probably also in high relief, may have been modeled separately and added above that edge. Such emphasis on the belt would not be surprising, judging from the prominence given to it in Minoan clay and bronze female figurines and in the faience plaques representing skirts, dresses, and girdles found in the Temple Repositories in the Palace of Knossos (Evans 1921-1935: I, 506, fig. 506; Foster 1979:87-89).

How much of the composition at Pseira was in relief and whether parts were rendered only through painting are not known. In the relatively better-preserved example of the Bull Relief from the North Entrance to the Palace at Knossos, even parts of the background seem to be in shallow relief, while the head of the bull, his limbs, and the limbs of possible toreadors are in high relief (Evans 1921-1935: III, 167-176). Unfortunately, neither here nor in other reliefs are any of the human heads preserved, and one wonders if, as Seager thought (1910:32), human heads were executed in paint alone. On the other hand, what little is preserved of the head of the "Priest King" relief from Knossos (i.e., part of the ear and of the forehead) suggests that at least some shallow relief was used to render the face (Evans 1921-1935: II, 776, fig. 504 B).

No fragments survive from the paintings from Pseira to indicate what form (flat or in relief) the background took.

The Architectural, Stratigraphic, and Ceramic Contexts

Seager's publication of the site remains our best source for the provenance of the plasters (Seager 1910:15). The basis of the discussion that follows is a combination of what we can glean from his very summary report and any light that recent excavations at Pseira have shed on the matter of context for the reliefs. Particularly important is the detailed description of Building AC and the interpretation of its construction phases by John McEnroe (see Chapter 2). The original publication did not provide a serious study of the architecture at Pseira.

According to Seager, the stucco fragments incorporated in Bagge's restoration were found in the small, narrow space (Space AC 6) that he determined to be a portico in "a small but well built house" (Seager 1910:11, 15, and pl. 1), that is, Building AC. He made no explicit reference either to the exact location within that space or to the stratigraphic context and level. Incidental remarks he made, on the other hand, allow us to make certain inferences. Two such remarks were: "Because of the shallow soil at this point the surviving fragments were very rotten"; and "they had evidently fallen from an upper floor" (Seager 1910:15). One is led to deduce that the fragments were unearthed at a high level in the fill, possibly just below the modern surface, rather than under the room's floor. Similarly, the relatively late date Seager assigns to the reliefs when he notes that they were found with potsherds that "belong to the Late Minoan I period, which lingered on here after the Late Minoan II Palace style" (Seager 1910:15), implies that, in his estimation, the mural composition had stayed on the wall(s) until the site went out of use. The discovery of the reliefs over or on the floor must explain in part why Seager excavated with a vengeance under the floor in Space AC 6, going all the way down to bedrock, while he showed more restraint in the excavation of the remaining rooms.

Illuminating in a different respect is Seager's re-
mark that “the house was a singularly empty one, probably because it was more carefully plundered than its neighbors” (Seager 1910:15). This indicates that the plaster reliefs were likewise not associated with any significant finds in Space AC 6. Seager’s observation has since been taken to support the idea that the house contained a shrine, an attribution based also on the discovery of the ambitious stucco reliefs, and the belief that there was a bench in AC 2, the room near where the reliefs were found. Thus Betancourt has remarked recently on the applicability to Building AC of the idea that shrines typically have few finds (Betancourt and Davaras 1988a:215 and n. 10). This is presumably because the valuables were either taken away by the owners themselves when they abandoned the building, or because at least those objects that were precious were simply stolen. This would have been at the time when the town was invaded, or somehow pillaged. On the other hand, the idea that Building AC contained a bench shrine must now be carefully reconsidered in the light of McEnroe’s observation that the wall taken to be a bench may have originally been a full height wall (McEnroe, supra, p. 12).

As to the date of the plasters, Seager’s belief that the reliefs belonged to LM IB/LM II has been discussed above (Seager 1910:11, 15). Although such a date has not found wide acceptance, his suggestion that the reliefs indicate connections with Knossos has been reiterated in the writings of his contemporaries and later scholars (e.g., Müller 1915:273; Rodenwaldt 1923-1924:270-274; Hood 1978:77; all three scholars cited disagree with Seager’s date).

The LM IB/II date for the reliefs at Pseira was challenged mainly by Evans, and not just on stylistic grounds, but because, according to him, they had been found in a LM IA ceramic context (Evans 1921-1935: II, 731). Indeed, Evans suggested a date at the end of MM III, which he regarded as a time of rebuilding at Pseira (1921-1935: III, 38). He obviously assumed that the reliefs must belong to the initial phase of the building and that MM III was its date.

Evans’ assumption makes sense in principle, for ambitious mural compositions are likely to belong to an initial architectural phase when there is major planning; but such a condition cannot always be taken for granted. In Building AC we cannot ignore the reality of many architectural phases, as defined in McEnroe’s architectural study. More pertinent here, the construction of the large Room AC 1, adjacent to the space where the frescoes were found, is assigned to the penultimate architectural phase. Recent soundings under the few previously unexcavated areas of the floor have suggested that this room was built after the Theran volcanic eruption. The evidence is based on a scientific analysis of wind blown ash and pumice found under the floor in association with LM IA sherds (C.J. and D.B. Vitaliano, supra, pp. 45-46). AC 1 and AC 6 seem to have had a floor at the same level, unlike the eastern and earlier part of the house, which was built on a lower terrace. The two rooms seem to have been partially partitioned by a wall probably built with mud bricks set on stone foundations (McEnroe: p. 12). Chances are that their floors were made in the same architectural phase and that there was communication between them.

As to which phase we should assign the reliefs, it cannot have been before Room AC 1 was built, since Space AC 6 would then have been an exterior area outside the old part of the house. In this option, the Theran explosion would provide a date post quem for the reliefs, if they belong to the newly created west part of the house. The excavators place the construction of Room AC 1 in the range of late LM IA to early in LM IB (Betancourt and Davaras 1988a:217).

As to the location of the mural decoration, there are many possibilities. To start with the least likely one, the plasters may have been brought from a nearby house. Here, the problem is that the plasters were by no means insubstantial, as one might expect them to be, had they been brought from some distance and thrown here, for they would have become even more fragmented in the process. The patterns are also too homogeneous in style or scale to have been collected from diverse locations. They clearly belong to a single composition. Moreover, dumping is normally associated with leveling operations, undertaken at times of rebuilding and repairs. Dumping would have been an entirely unnecessary activity, since Building AC was obviously abandoned when the site came to an end in LM IB (Betancourt and Davaras 1988a:210). Finally, dumps tend to be rich in finds, which is contrary to the paucity of discoveries in this house.

Another option as to where the plasters originally belonged is an upper story, from which the plasters collapsed down below, as entertained by Seager. This remains a theoretical possibility, since McEnroe does not exclude the possibility that a second story existed. A possible space where the reliefs were placed might have been a wall directly above Room AC 3.

If the reliefs were installed on the ground floor in Space AC 6, another possibility to be considered is the northern part of the room, which was wider than the south end. Here, however, the problem is that the north wall of this end is believed by McEnroe to have been re-built, crudely it seems, in the very last phase, even after the construction of Room AC 1 (McEnroe: p. 10). I would hesitate to assign the reliefs to such a phase marked with crude remodelings.

Of the remaining walls of Space AC 6, there remains the west one to be discussed. This seems to have been partly overbuilt by the added north wall just discussed. It is also my belief that at least part of
Comparative Analysis and Stylistic Dating

The comparative analysis that follows aims to arrive at a more specific date within the range of LM IA-LM IB provided by the archaeological data. Large-scale murals with women in painted relief or in plain painting, as well as textile or dress patterns, constitute the major materials of research.

Because of the artistic affinity that scholars, starting with Seager himself (1910:11), have felt exists between the Pseiran reliefs and depictions of women at Knossos, it makes sense to turn first in that direction. Strictly speaking, in terms of relief, there are only a few very poorly preserved examples from Knossos that depict women (for a study of Minoan reliefs and related bibliography see Kaiser 1976a; Hood 1978:58, 71-76). Most reliefs consist of fragments attributable to bull-grappling/leaping scenes involving men, bulls, and landscapes. The series that Evans assigned to the Great East Hall depicts male athletes, but includes one or two women. All that is preserved from the latter are two breasts in stucco in high relief. The woman may have been a spectator of the games, or a participant as a toreador (Evans 1921-1935: III, 508-509, fig. 354A), though two scholars have recently cast doubt on the idea that women performed in such games (Indelicato 1988; N. Marinatos 1989). Cameron hypothesized the existence of a female toreador in relief in his interpretation of plaster fragments from the North Fresco Heap at the Palace of Knossos (Hood 1978:58 and 247 n. 69).

Two other examples of reliefs from the Palace at Knossos are probably closer to the ladies from Pseira in appearance, if not in theme. One composition is represented by a small fragment containing a white area, presumably female skin, with a necklace touched by male fingers in relief. Evans called it the Jewel Composition (1921-1935: I, 525-526; 1967: pl. 13, no. 2). The elaborate necklace suggests a richly attired woman, but unfortunately nothing else remains of this composition, which was also in a large scale. Evans assigned it to a shrine above the Pillar Crypt. The second example is reproduced here (Pl. 39A; see Evans 1921-1935: III, 45, fig. 27). It is one of the compositions whose restoration was influenced by a carved ivory relief plaque from Mycenae, which served as a model for the restoration of the ladies from Pseira as well (Pl. 38). The fragment depicts the
upper part of a skirt, possibly including the belt, divided in successive curving bands with stripes, solid triangles, and scallops as textile decoration. The triangles might be compared to Pattern 12 on the skirt of the Pseiran lady in Panel B.

Aside from Knossos, two other "palatial" contexts have been claimed as locations for plaster reliefs, namely Gournia and Phaistos (Hood 1978:77). There are, however, problems with both of these proposals. In her discussion of molds at Gournia, H. B. Hawes mentioned plaster reliefs depicting little birds and perhaps a figure-eight shield. These molds, she believed, were used for casting items like faience plaques, which could be suspended and used as wall decoration (Hawes 1978:35). It is clear from this description that her reference is to minor ornaments that do not belong either technically or artistically to the medium of major mural reliefs.

In the case of Phaistos, nothing in the description of either the plasters in relief or paintings proper from that site (Pernier and Banti 1951:293-295) suggests a figurative scene, as has been claimed by Banti, Caratelli, and Levi (1963:58), unless "una scena figurata" loosely means "nonabstract" or "representational." There seem to be neither animals nor human figures among these works. Some plaster fragments found in protopalatial levels (Phase II) from Kouloura III, outside the palace of Phaistos, show fragments in low relief in black against red, but the curving motifs seem to be floral, not figurative (Levi 1976:354ff., pl. 86B, nos. 6709a-6710c).

There are three last examples of reliefs, all from settlements. Two of these, from Palaikastro and Chania, have been published (Kaiser 1976a: 303, 305). The third, from Prasa, near Knossos, apparently depicting a woman, is noted by Cameron in his dissertation (1975: pl. 33). N. Platon, the excavator of Prasa, interpreted the building with the relief as a house containing a shrine, above which was apparently the room with the mural decoration (Platon 1952:246-253; 1954:448-449).

The relief from the old excavations at Palaikastro had for many years remained partially unstudied and unpublished, largely because of a mix-up with fresco material from Knossos stored in the Herakleon Museum. This situation was fortunately cleared up fairly recently thanks to work done by M. A. S. Cameron and R. Jones (1976). The fragments from Palaikastro came from Room 18, Block E. Only one piece was reported in the original publication as being in relief: a nearly life-sized flexed arm found along with flat fragments of painted plaster, one depicting crocus blossoms within frames. Of these pieces, only the fragment with the crocus was illustrated in the publication (Bosanquet and Dawkins 1923:148 and fig. 130; Cameron and Jones 1976:15-19). The arm was subsequently studied and published by Kaiser (1976a:303, pl. 470). This fragment and other parts that may belong to human figures were apparently left white, implying a female figure. Cameron suggested that the "upraised arm" (probably referring to the one mentioned above) may have belonged to a goddess (Cameron and Jones 1976:18, n. 18). The building at Palaikastro where the painting was found is small and simple. It was entered directly from one of the town's main streets. Though its plan is not similar to that of Building AC at Pseira, it is conceivable that its function may have been.

The fragment from Chania, unfortunately, comes from an unclear context, in a secondary deposition from a partially excavated area at Kastelli. The mixed LM I-LM IIIA level was stratified under one of LM IIIB date, and it, in turn, was under the floor of a LM IIIC building (Tzedakis 1973:466). A good-sized fragment must belong to a woman's skirt decorated with a scale pattern of tricurved arches executed with the help of an impressed grid. It was discussed and illustrated by Kaiser, who, probably correctly, dated it stylistically to the LM I period (Kaiser 1976a:305).

Interestingly, outside of Knossos the only plaster reliefs with human representations from Crete seem to come from nonpalatial contexts. Obviously, houses with such extravagant decoration were very special, particularly when contrasted with the situation in Minoan palaces (Knossos excepted), which seem to have neither plaster reliefs nor frescoes with human representations. It makes one wonder if rooms in houses with such reliefs (or frescoes) may not have had a special relationship with the Palace at Knossos. If so, the relationship or connection is likely to have been of a religious and theocratic nature.

Outside of Crete, figurative relief fresco is rare. Some fragments from the Argolid in the Nauplion Museum, almost certainly from a woman's skirt, were recorded by Kaiser, but he could not be certain whether they came from Mycenae or Tiryns (Kaiser 1976a:306, fig. 473b). Earlier, Rodenwaldt had reported a fragment of a relief with patterns that he assumed to have come from Schliemann's excavations at Mycenae (Rodenwaldt 1923-1924:276, fig. 3). It would not be surprising if women in plaster relief were found in future excavations at Thera, for the technique itself is known there. To date, however, the only known Theran subjects executed in relief (or partial relief) are a network pattern from Xeste 3 (Doumas 1983:74, 108, and pl. 5, here Color Pl. G) and scenes with animals, interestingly in life size (Christina Televantou, personal communication, May 23, 1990). Scale and theme clearly link such works with reliefs of animals from Knossos, and in particular with the life-sized bull from the North Entrance of the palace. The combination of relief and a life-sized scale, both in Crete and elsewhere in the Aegean, certainly bespeaks a strong desire to reproduce a lifelike appearance. The large clay
statues of women from the Temple at Kea (Caskey 1986), some of which are coated with plaster, derive from a similar impulse. Perhaps they represent a development from an earlier practice of modeling women full size in plaster relief.

Next to women in relief, paintings of women in large scale on a flat surface provide the best parallels for the Pseiran panels. Compositions like the famous Ladies in Blue from Knossos (Evans 1921-1935: I, 544-547, here Pl. 40B) or the comparable figure published by Cameron as the Lady in Red (Cameron 1971, here Pl. 40A) immediately come to mind. Their scale, stature, and richness of dress are matched by the "goddess" and her female companion in the LM I wall painting from a room in the villa at Aghia Triada (Halbherr 1903: pl. 10). There are also unrestored and nonrestorable figures of women known only through fragments from Knossos and other sites (e.g., Phylakopi), but these compositions are much smaller than life size (Hood 1978:56, 58, 62-63). More complete, and in a variety of sizes, although all under life size, are women from wall paintings in the LC I houses at Thera (Marinatos 1968-1976: V, pls. F-H, J, and K; VII, pls. A-L and 58-66). Finally, there are the miniature frescoes, rather cursory in detail but important for the narrative information they convey.

We now turn to an analysis of the textile patterns on the dresses of the Pseiran ladies, taking the companion in the LM I wall painting from a room in the villa at Aghia Triada (Halbherr 1903: pl. 10). There are also unrestored and nonrestorable figures of women known only through fragments from Knossos and other sites (e.g., Phylakopi), but these compositions are much smaller than life size (Hood 1978:56, 58, 62-63). More complete, and in a variety of sizes, although all under life size, are women from wall paintings in the LC I houses at Thera (Marinatos 1968-1976: V, pls. F-H, J, and K; VII, pls. A-L and 58-66). Finally, there are the miniature frescoes, rather cursory in detail but important for the narrative information they convey.

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As for ceramic classes for comparison purposes, apart from Minoan, include LB I Island/Cycladic and early LH, that is, from Mainland sites. Mountjoy ascribes a Minoan (and Kytheran) inspiration to Mycenaean vases of LH I date, which is contemporary with LM IA (Mountjoy 1986:9). Similarly, she considers the motifs of the "palatial class" of LH IIA to be derived from contemporary LM IB pottery (Mountjoy 1986:17), specifically from what Betancourt defines as the "Special Palatial Tradition" (Betancourt 1985:140-148).

Once ceramic patterns have been brought in as possible analogues for the textile motifs on the Pseira reliefs, discussion will focus on the patterns encountered in frescoes bracketed by destructions, such as the LC IA frescoes from Thera and the LM IA:IB frescoes from sites like Aghia Triada. Dresses and their patterns in the frescoes at Thera have recently been the subject of a study by Christina Televantou (1984). Among other recent studies, Niemeier's analysis of the Knossian Palace Style pottery and the predecessors of its patterns in frescoes and other media has proved particularly useful for our purposes here (Niemeier 1985).

Perhaps the most outstanding characteristic in the Pseiran repertoire of patterns is the predilection for straight and wavy bands decorated with white dots or disks, as shown in Panel B. Dotted bands have a long history in Minoan pottery. The MM color scheme composed of white disks on a dark ground approximates the effect of similar motifs on the painted reliefs (Evans 1921-1935: IV, fig. 108: a MM II/IIIA bridge-spouted jug found at Abydos). Light dots on dark bands is a scheme that continued to be used in later pottery. A noteworthy example is the network pattern of interlinked spirals on a large pithos from Pseira, which Betancourt dates to the LM IA period (Betancourt 1985: pl. 18, H). The same vase is decorated with rosettes, the combination of motifs showing a general affinity with Patterns 8-10 on the skirt of the figure in Panel B. In LM IA pottery, dots occur in both light-on-dark and dark-on-light combinations (Betancourt 1985: fig. 100, B; pl. 17, G and F). From Akrotiri on Thera, a special class of polychrome vases combines swallows and bands with white dots in its decoration (Marinatos 1968-1976: II, pl. A). On the other hand, the use of dots specifically in association with lozenges and zigzags appears to be more typical of LM IB pottery, with the dots on vessels of this date primarily being dark-on-light (Betancourt 1985: pl. 22, D, H).

Dots, instead of lines, sometimes define lozenge nets in Theran frescoes depicting dress patterns (Televantou 1984:151, fig. 7, nos. 3-4). In one case, white dots against a blue background enclose a central white lozenge (Marinatos 1968-1976: VII, pl. F), the color scheme and filling pattern having obvious affinities with the decoration of the sleeve of the woman in Panel B. At Pseira, the use of bands with dots rather than dots alone might be due to the much larger scale of the woman, which allowed for such detail. Or it might have been a matter of preference, for simple dots define the scale pattern of the dress of one of the two women in the LM I fresco from Aghia Triada (Evans 1921-1935: 1, 538, fig. 391). In addition to their occurrence on dresses, a network of red dots with blue lozenges at their junctions appears in a fresco in the House of the Ladies at Thera. The position of this particular network pattern suggests that it represents a canopy or a wall hanging, possibly made of fabric (Marinatos 1968-1976: V, pls. F and G-H).

In Crete, a great number of plaster fragments, including some in relief, with decoration in which dotted bands, zigzags, and other similar designs predominate, were found in an unstratified context in the North West Fresco Heap at the Palace at Knossos. The patterns, which also include animal
figures in miniature scale, were identified by Evans as embroideries on dresses (1921-1935: III, 37-45). A few have been illustrated in color in a study of the Minoan kilt (Sapouna-Sakellaraki 1971:160-164, fig. 67c and pls. C-D), for some apparently belonged to toreadors, one female (Hood 1978:247, n. 69). The beaded chevrons among them are closer to the ones from Pseira than the lozenge net from Thera.

Patterns 5 and 6, spirals rendered by dots rather than lines, have been regarded by Kaiser as an indication of a LM IB date for the reliefs from Pseira (Kaiser 1976a:302). A more specific argument is required, however, for there seem to be no exact parallels for such spirals either in LM IA or in LM IB vase painting. For the LM IA period, a related pattern appears on a Minoan imported bridge-spouted jar found at Thera, in which the dark coils of a spirafiform ivy in a frieze arrangement were decorated with white disks (Marinatos 1968-1976: VI, pl. 12d). Dots running parallel to the coils of spirals, another related version of the motif, occur in LM IB pottery (Betancourt 1985:137, fig. 103 and pl. 18H), but this motif has antecedents in the LM IA/LC IA period, as can be seen from a Theran fresco, where a spiral in black outline is edged on one side by red dots (Marinatos 1968-1976: III, 42, fig. 24 and pl. B). Nonetheless, spirals rendered entirely in dots occur in the decoration of Palace Style vases from Knossos (Niemeier 1985:102 and 103, fig. 43, no. 18), which means there is simply a missing link. Thus, dotted spirals may have existed in LM IB pottery (as suggested by Kaiser), but they must have had antecedents already in major art in an earlier period. In Minoan fresco, the closest parallels for the spirals in the relief from Pseira are found among the fragments in the North West Fresco Heap deposit. There, the white-dotted spirals are shown alternately against blue and deep red backgrounds in association with lozenges and chevrons (Evans 1921-1935: III, 37, fig. 20).

The ceramic counterpart of the net pattern (Pattern 8) on the skirt of the woman in Panel B is a design classified by Furumark as a variation of the tricurved arches (Furumark 1941:143-144, no. 62). The variation is a special development in LM IB, used on vases of the Marine Style to depict the sea (Furumark 1941:62, no. 8; Niemeier 1985:99, fig. 41, 5-7). This LM IB version is graphically different from other tricurved arches in that the units of the net are true lozenges created by pairs of opposing tricurved arches, whereas in the former version the arches had the same direction. Indeed, the pattern on the LM IB pots seems to be an elaboration of the plain net (Furumark’s “diaper net,” motif 57, or Niemeier’s “lozenge net,” 1985:100, fig. 42, nos. 5-6). In the LM IB version, it has become curvilinear, perhaps by borrowing elements from the tricurved arch. Both versions, nevertheless, seem to have been used interchangeably as symbols of the sea and as textile patterns.

Of these variations, the tricurved net motif was the more popular, appearing frequently both in Minoan painting, as in the Ladies in Blue (Evans 1921-1935: I, 544, fig. 397) and in Mycenaean frescoes (Reusch 1956: pl. 13, fragment no. 40).

Pattern 8 at Pseira is unique in its elaboration. The use of two different fillers in alternate rows is paralleled in a plaque in the shape of a girdle from the Temple Repositories at Knossos, where the net is made of circular units and filled with stars and solid lozenges in alternate rows (Foster 1979:89, fig. 20). Another parallel, with a curvilinear but simple net, appears in a fresco from Tiryns on the dress of a woman (Rodenwaldt 1912:76, fig. 31). The closest analogue to Pseira Pattern 8 is a fresco from Xeste 3 at Thera where linked lozenges with tricurved sides form a broad border with a white background adjacent to an area painted solid brown. The bands of these lozenges are in relief (Marinatos 1968-1976: VII, pl. 41; Doumas 1983: color pl. V, here Color Pl. G). This Theran relief painting may also depict a canopy or a wallhanging (albeit of a different sort from that mentioned above from the House of the Ladies). Oval objects clasp together what looks like fabric gathered at regular intervals. The clasps occupy the same location as the rosettes marking the junctions of the lozenges at Pseira. The lozenges are outlined by bands in both cases, and there are correspondences in the two filling motifs used: four rosettes at Thera, and quadruple spirals at Pseira. One difference is that in the Theran example there is no alternation of background color in the successive rows, as there is at Pseira.

Little can be said about the remaining few motifs. They are not particularly instructive, being too general or too poorly preserved to be certain of diagnostic details. Rosettes are used both as a subsidiary (Pattern 1) and as an overall pattern (Pattern 2). A familiar example of the former is the use of rosettes to decorate the hems of dresses and the belts of men in the Procession Fresco from Knossos (Evans 1921-1935: II, suppl. pls. 25 and 27). The employment of rosettes as dress patterns continues into Mycenaean times (Rodenwaldt 1912:96, fig. 39, and pl. 8). Rosettes are also used as framing devices in painted compositions from various periods, as in Knossian building facades (Evans 1921-1935: I, 443 with note 3) and on the sarcophagus from Aghia Triada (Hood 1978:70, fig. 53). The type at Pseira with the lines of the petals not quite reaching the center most resembles the rosettes in bands on a fresco in the miniature technique from the North West Fresco Heap at Knossos (Evans 1921-1935: III, 40, fig. 25d). The setting of the rosette within a circle goes back to LM IA, when a rosette sometimes occupies the center of medallion spirals (Niemeier 1985:84, 85, fig. 29, no.
The motif was also used independently of spirals in LM IB pottery, and conceivably a model existed earlier in fresco painting (see Niemeier 1985:84, no. 488).

The hook spiral (Pattern 7) is known from at least LM IA times (Furumark 1941:394 and motif 63, no. 2; Niemeier 1985:105, fig. 45), and it continues later. It is common as a band on dresses in frescoes from Knossos (Evans 1921-1935: II, 731, fig. 457a) and at Aghia Triada (Evans 1921-1935: II, 733, fig. 459a). The motif does not occur on dresses at Thera, but it is found there as a decoration on the hull of one of the ships in the miniature fresco from the West House (Marinatos 1968-1976: VI, fig. 5; Morgan 1988: figs. 67 and 77).

Ivy motifs with their leaves facing in alternating directions are common in LM I (Niemeier 1985:68, fig. 22, no. 1) and in the derivative LH I pottery. In the Thera fresco of the Boxing Boys, the upper frame is also marked by ivies (Marinatos 1968-1976: IV, 48, fig. 3, and pl. D). These ivy leaves are arranged on either side of a wavy horizontal stalk, in a way similar to MM III and LM IA foliate bands, in that all leaves point in the same direction (Betancourt 1985:11, fig. 85). Closer to the Pseiran Pattern 11 is an arrangement of loose lily blossoms with short stems alternately pointing in opposite directions on a fresco frieze from Phylakopi (Atkinson 1994:76, fig. 64). Moreover, the use of outline in fine black lines in paintings from this site provides a technical parallel for the same practice in the frescoes at Pseira (Renfrew 1985:338-339). The context of the wall paintings from Phylakopi now appears to be LM IB, rather than MM III-LM IA, as previously believed (Hood 1978:53). Black outline, on the other hand, is already used to define patterns in frescoes at Thera, as was noted earlier.

Finally, there is the uncertain motif on the hem of the jacket in Panel A. The motif, restored as connected semicircles (Pattern 3a), is very rare (Furumark 1941:337, no. 42), and this writer has been unable to match it with relevant examples. The alternative pattern proposed here (Pattern 3b), with undulating bands instead of semicircles, but still with circular to oval central fillers, has two parallels in Thera frescoes: one on the belt of a woman from Xeste 3 (Marinatos 1968-1976: VII, pls. I, J); the other as decoration on the shaft of a column in the shrine with the monkeys (Marinatos 1968-1976: II, 53, fig. 43). Pattern 3b is nicknamed the "yo-yo" motif in an excellent recent publication on ancient textiles by E. Barber. Barber finds the pattern to be very common, both in the simple form it takes here and in more elaborate variations, as, for example, in the network of lozenges on the skirt in Panel B (Pattern 8). All versions of the yo-yo motif are apparently amenable to reproduction in weaving (Barber 1991:317-318).

The last remarks pertain to the overall character of the decoration, and specifically to the use of surface patterns in the Pseira reliefs. Once again, we can resort to comparative analysis using vase painting decoration. In this respect, some comments made by Furumark on the character of such decoration in the LM IB period are particularly relevant and illuminating. Furumark noted that while in LM IA pottery the ordering of pattern was basically zonal, in LM IB it became "facial" and "circumcurrent," a syntax that strangely repeated one typical earlier, in the MM period (Furumark 1941:161-162). For our purposes, it is the "circumcurrent" type of syntax that is important and, in particular, its use of "rapport compositions" (Furumark 1941:163-164). These designs are created by a systematic and rhythmic replication of selected motifs, resulting in a tapestry of theoretically infinite dimensions, extending beyond the confines of the surface of a pot. The motifs and their arrangement are clearly derivative in pottery, and their source of inspiration may be decoration on textiles and related fabrics, for which examples in frescoes have been quoted above. Among these, particularly interesting are those paintings in which, as at Pseira, special care was taken to guarantee the production of an accurate and orderly overall pattern by using the technique of an impressed grid.

The use of grids has already been discussed, but we focus now on the range of their date as a drafting device. The examples cited have shown that the technique was used in sites destroyed in LM IB, establishing a terminus ante quem for their introduction, and continuing into LM II, as in the Procession Fresco from Knossos. Though the ladies in Mycenaean frescoes wear elaborately ornamented dresses, impressed grids for the correct rendering of the decorative patterns are rare. To this writer's knowledge, there is only one case, a stucco fragment from the early palace at Thebes, where a dress pattern is rendered with the help of an impressed grid (Rodenwaldt 1919:99, no. 2; Reusch 1956:46, pl. 13, no. 40). Impressed guiding lines are occasionally used for rendering borders on dresses or in defining architecture, both in Thera and in Mycenaean frescoes (Lang 1969:10 and pl. 31). The division of Mycenaean painted floors in a grid pattern is a different matter, because the incised outlines separate panels with different patterns, rather than being intended as a guide for the correct execution of the patterns themselves. If the above situation is not an accident of preservation, it suggests that the grid device was used between LM I and the early part of the Mycenaean period. At the other end of the spectrum, no grids have so far been encountered in the published examples of frescoes at Thera, though impressed and occasionally incised guidelines were utilized (Asimenos 1978:575-576, pls. 2 and 3). It is not clear whether this lack of grids in the case of
surface patterns is due to the simplicity of the patterns themselves, which often have a gridlike structure (Televantou 1984:134, fig. 8, nos. 8-12), or to deliberate choice not to use grids. Alternatively, the reason could be that the Theran works antedate the introduction of the technique on Crete, where it may have been introduced in later LM IA or early LM IB.

To recapitulate, there are affinities between the patterns on the Pseiran panels and the paintings at Thera, but the most definite parallels are to be found in the arts of a slightly later period. Iconographically and stylistically, the closest connections with fresco work are the fragments from the North West Fresco Heap, which is unfortunately from an unstratified context. Hood has recently pointed to stylistic connections of that material with frescoes from the Royal Road, also at Knossos, destroyed in LM IB (Hood 1978:58). The fresco with the two women from the Aghia Triada villa is probably contemporary, even if the choice of textile ornament happens to be different. The scale pattern of the kneeling woman, rendered in dots, closely resembles that on a plaster fragment found under the pavement of the Corridor at the West Entrance of the Palace of Knossos. The pattern on the Knossos fragment was executed with the help of a fine grid of impressed lines, and it could be from a similar date (Evans 1921-1935: II, 680, fig. 430e). It should be remembered that in all these cases LM IB offers only a terminus ante quem for the above frescoes. Some of them may have been made in LM IA.

Next in line in the comparisons, but perhaps not by far, are the Ladies in Blue (Pl. 40B). Hood has recently observed that the patterns on this painting are not unlike those on the dresses and kilts in the Procession Fresco (Hood 1978:58). The grid used in the former, however, is smaller and finer, in comparison to the larger, more crude one on the kilts. Perhaps such rendering can serve as a criterion for a difference in date.

A date late in LM IA or very early in LM IB seems to be the range to be offered by the present evidence for the reliefs from Pseira. This conclusion is in accord with the belief that the volcanic destruction of Thera occurred before the end of LM IA (Warren 1990-1991: 30).

Theme and Reconstruction

AN EVALUATION OF EARLIER RECONSTRUCTIONS

This section comments on the three main restorations made prior to the present study. Aspects of the restorations already discussed in some detail above, particularly those relating to textile patterns, are summarily treated here.

Starting with Bagge’s restoration, it was noted that the artist incorporated fragments belonging to two women in a drawing of a single female figure. Despite the mistake, which was already obvious to Seager, the illustration was included in the final publication (Seager 1910:32 and pl. 5, here Pl. 1). There are uncertainties with respect to the exact shape of the necklace, and some of the patterns were rendered incorrectly (Patterns 8-10). Strangely, neither of the two preserved feet was incorporated in the restoration, and no opinion was offered (perhaps rightly, in this case) as to the stance of the “woman.” Other fragments, namely those presently in the storerooms of the Herakleion Museum, were not published, though a few appear in the unpainted watercolor.

The restorations by the Gilliéron artists were a great improvement, recognizing the presence of two women and rendering the dress patterns quite accurately, although there is room for debate about some details. Facsimiles published by Rodenwaldt (Pl. 20B-C) and a drawing by Evans (Pl. 21A) luckily provide a pictorial record of the Gilliéron restorations, which are very close to the ones currently on display in the Herakleion Museum (Color Pls. A-B). In the same article, Rodenwaldt recommended a few minor changes to the reconstructions, one being that the large fragment of the skirt in Panel B should be shifted slightly to allow the network pattern to be horizontal. Examination by the present author of other pertinent Minoan frescoes has made it clear that this need not be the case, for the direction of textile patterns often becomes oblique or slanted to reflect a person’s particular stance and gesture. It is surprising that Rodenwaldt did not object to the incorporation of scenic elements, like the rocks on which the women sit or the blue background, as there is evidence for neither among the preserved fragments. The model for the posture and setting, as Rodenwaldt explained (1923-1924:270), was the carving of a woman seated on a rock in an ivory plaque from Mycenae mentioned earlier (Pl. 38). From that restoration, the image of the two Pseiran ladies leisurely sitting on rocks under the blue Mediterranean sky has become deeply entrenched in people’s minds. Finally, there is something about
which Rodenwaldt may not have known, namely that the restorations by the Gilliérons, like those exhibited in the Museum today, ignore the foot, which shows that the two women in the relief faced each other, and they were not turning in the same direction.

For his part, Kaiser made good use of the hitherto unpublished fragments in the storeroom of the Herakleion Museum. Kaiser was also the first to draw the evident conclusion that one of the two ladies must have been turning right, thus accounting for the fragment of a right-turning foot ignored in previous restorations. In his restoration Kaiser decided to attribute the foot to the lady of Panel B, whom he interpreted as turning right (Pl. 21B). Kaiser's justification for changing the direction of this figure was that the large skirt piece (Fragment B2) need not be part of the buttocks, of which the outline suggested a left-turning profile, but could be shifted to a more central part of her lower body, so that it no longer determined direction. He also reallocated smaller, non-joining fragments to match them with this new idea. Finally, he suggested that the woman sat on a wooden seat shaped after the style of the throne in the Throne Room at Knossos. Fragment C15, which displays painted red lines (wood veining?) set obliquely to a slightly curved edge, was his evidence for such a seat. His lady of Panel B was now ready, and was illustrated by him in a sketchy restoration that incorporated some fragments from the museum storeroom.6

We have here indicated the particular fragments Kaiser used in his reconstruction by the numbers assigned to them in our Catalog (Pl. 21B).

Kaiser's restoration paid little attention to the other lady, who is only faintly shown as sitting antithetically (Kaiser 1976a: pl. 24B). This lack of interest reflected Kaiser's view that she was the inferior of the two women, smaller in scale and less luxurious in her dress (Kaiser 1976a:301, 465, n. 921).

Kaiser's restoration is largely correct, even if one disagrees with arbitrary attributions of fragments to his favorite lady of Panel B, since they could as easily belong to the other figure. One can also think of other stances for the figures, besides sitting. The objectionable idea in Kaiser's interpretation, however, is that the women were differentiated by size and artistic elaboration, as the evidence for such a claim is not certain. The only basis for comparison between the two figures in the matter of size is provided by the sleeves, which reflect the dimensions of the arms. Close scrutiny of the actual pieces shows that part of the outer hem on the left side of the sleeve in Panel A sank slightly when it was set in the wet gypsum at the time of the restoration, while at the same time the restored outline of the sleeve of the other figure was drawn farther out than the preserved design justifies my drawings of the two sleeves, made on the basis of direct tracings and the restorations based on them, show the two ladies to have been essentially equal in size. This impression is corroborated by the similarity in size of the two feet now given to the women. As for the argument of preferential elaboration, the overwhelming richness of the dress in Panel B may be misleading, for we are ignorant about patterns on the skirt of the other figure since that area is so badly eroded, and any color that may have existed is now lost. The painstaking technique used for the rendition of the rosettes on the sleeve in Panel A is sign enough that the second woman could be equally important.

A CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVE RESTORATIONS

The aim of this section is to offer a number of alternative restorations that may enable us to shed long-standing assumptions with respect to the composition of the reliefs at Pseira. Comparanda, especially scenes with women, provide us with possibilities and limitations. Women occur in large scale both in relief, as here, and in straight painting (e.g., the Ladies in Blue from Knossos, here Pl. 40B). They also appear in miniature scale in frescoes and on seals and rings. Foremost, in this consideration, one might think, should be miniature frescoes, which, with their crowds of men and women, tend to be more informative than poorly preserved large-scale compositions. Upon closer scrutiny, however, miniature frescoes are more likely to serve as models for what the relief composition was not, rather than what it was. Relief, with its typically large figures, requires a composition that is sparse and laconic, containing only a few figures. Though there are stucco reliefs involving action, like the Bull Relief from Knossos, one gets the impression that at Pseira the composition was rather static, and most likely limited to two figures. The intended visual impact must have been very different in the two artistic idioms. Large-scale compositions are less able to detail human activities and scenic settings, which are thus left to the imagination of the viewer. The style cannot be as fluent and spontaneous. Relief results in more inert images compared with the vivid renditions possible in brushwork. The intimacy and casualness of overlapping figures, such as the ladies occupied in animated conversation in the miniature frescoes at Knossos (Pl. 39B), must stand in strong contrast to what seem to have been stately and formal women, set physically apart, in the relief at Pseira.

A better source for analogies may, indeed, be the figurative scenes on seals and sealings. This is partly because a glyptic, rather than a painterly, technique has been used in both, but mainly because of the
limited number of figures, which is imposed by the small pictorial field these artifacts offer. In glyptic art this condition leads to compact compositions and heightened symbolism. Posture, stance, and gesture become particularly important in this idiom, and, as in the case of the large reliefs, they are intentionally controlled rather than spontaneous, to match their formal message.

Only the lady in Panel A preserves any form of gesture; her right arm is bent and held horizontally over the chest, below the level of the breasts. This obviously neutral or noncommittal pose is common in various representations, and it is normally compensated for by an active arm conveying varied communication: address, blessing, adoration. As scrutiny of examples both in painting and in glyptic show, it is in the direction of the communicating arm that the face normally turns (see, e.g., illustrations in Niemeier 1989: fig. 2, nos. 1, 2, 4, 6; fig. 4, no. 1). Exceptions are figures in orgiastic dance, or those suddenly apprehensive of danger, where contorted postures better convey uncontrollable action and reaction (again, see Niemeier 1989: fig. 5, no. 1). By the above tokens, the head of the woman in Panel A should be facing toward the right (her left), and, unless a sense of alertness or urgency had to be conveyed—an unlikely possibility as the scene could not be of a narrative nature—her lower body should be turning right like her head to avoid a puppetlike contortion. This figure, then, is the one to acquire the foot that turns right, rather than the left-turning one she has been given in the museum restoration. This proposal requires a reversal of Kaiser’s scheme where the Lady of Panel A faces right and the Lady of Panel B left.

Additional comments can be made in support of the new proposal. Kaiser’s view that the large fragment of the skirt in Panel B (Fragment B2) could be shifted to allow the figure to turn right, rather than left as restored in the museum, is one I cannot support. The fragment’s curvature suggests that it belongs where it was restored in the museum. In contrast, Fragment A2, restored as part of the hip and buttocks in Panel A, is smaller, rather flat, and undiagnostic as to the direction of the woman. One is perhaps more justified in slightly shifting the piece that belongs to Panel A to accommodate the idea proposed here that the figure turns right. Finally, it should be made clear that, though there is no physical joining between the fragments of torsos and skirts in either woman, we can be quite confident that at least in the case of Panel B, the two parts belong together. The same textile motifs repeat themselves throughout the dress in variant but related forms: chevrons; lozenges (rectilinear or undulating); and spirals, simple and quadruple. There is a predilection for dots to render particular motifs, especially spirals, and for disks, dark-on-light and light-on-dark, as subsidiary ornament on bands outlining patterns. All these distinctions together with the absence of a grid (at least an impressed one) in Panel B may even suggest that the two women were executed by different artists.

Given the above considerations, and the equal size of the two women at Pseira, it is impossible to determine their relative status. There is no identifying textile pattern of the sort that has been taken to suggest divinity or hierarchy in certain frescoes from Knossos and Pylos, for example. In these cases, the design in question was an architectonic pattern with half-rosettes, which occurs on the hem of the woman in the Procession Fresco from Knossos (Evans 1921-1935: II, suppl. pls. 25-27) and also on the dress of the so-called White Goddess from the palace at Pylos (Lang 1969: pl. D, 49a H nws and 50 H nws). The skirt in Panel A is unfortunately too worn to allow us to detect such a pattern, if it ever existed.

Four alternative drawings are offered here as possible restorations for the reliefs at Pseira (Pls. 41-44). That only two women appear in these reconstructions reflects the author’s view that there is no compelling reason to assume more figures, at least on the evidence of the preserved fragments. Known facts in designing these restorations are that, from all appearances, the two women were the same size, possibly equally luxurious in their outfits, and that they were antithetically placed. There is also a hunch, not unjustified by the remains, that the composition was laconic, formal, and symbolic. The stance of each woman is unknown, for on pictorial grounds there is nothing to prevent one or both women from being shown standing rather than seated, even if the latter has so far been the universal assumption. Finally, in my restorations the women are rendered in a vacuum in order to reflect our ignorance as to setting and background. Details of dress and of most gestures are necessarily arbitrary, because the evidence is missing.

Composition, and to a lesser degree gesture, in the options offered in these restorations are based on models in glyptic. Most useful in this respect has been a study by Niemeier (1989) in which he categorizes types of religious scenes on rings and seals in terms of the roles of the participants: adorants, priestesses, and divinities. The present alternative restorations, labeled options, are discussed in terms of their pictorial and thematic implications in an order of increased probability. Option 4, which represents my most favored solution, has formed the basis of the admirable watercolor rendition executed by Giuliana Bianco (Color Pl. H).

In Option 1 the women are antithetical and sitting in a rather symmetrical fashion (Pl. 41). This comes close to Kaiser’s restoration and though a conceivable one, it has no parallels in glyptic or in wall paintings until a later period. Examples are the Campstool Fresco from Knossos (Evans 1921-1935,
IV: 389, fig. 323) and two later frescoes from the Palace at Pylos, one with a banquet scene, the other with two women engaged in conversation (Lang 1969: pl. M, 1-2 H2). Women sit antithetically in the miniature frescoes from Knossos as well, but never apart and symmetrically. Rather, their bodies overlap to convey the idea that they are part of a crowd (cf. the Grand Stand fresco, Evans 1921-1935: III, color pls. 16-17; here Pl. 39B). The heraldic arrangement of this option for Pseira is known from Mycenaean ivories, often handles of mirrors where decorative symmetry is appropriate for the object. In the ivories, such a compositional scheme is thought to have had its origins in the Orient (Poursat 1977:49-51 and 234-235).

In Option 2 the two women are antithetical and both standing (Pl. 42). In glyptic, the most common arrangement is for the women to be standing on either side of a structure or a plant that they protect or worship (Niemeier 1989: fig. 1, no. 7; fig. 3, nos. 6-8). In wall painting there is no parallel, except, remotely, in the case of the two fishermen from the West House at Akrotiri, who are antithetical and advancing toward each other, the difference here being that these figures are male and are set at some distance from each other (N. Marinatos 1984: fold-out fig. 17, opposite p. 32). Closer, but of a later period, are two antithetical women in a Mycenaean fresco, both of whom N. Marinatos has recently interpreted as goddesses (1988:247). There is no obvious evidence for confronting standing goddesses in the iconography of the Minoan period. The women in the relief at Pseira might well have been mortal, possibly priestesses marking the sacredness of the place by their presence, or, as Cameron might have put it, acting like "signposts" marking the place where the divinity was worshipped.4

In Options 3 and 4 the women are antithetical, but differentiated by their postures: one is shown standing, the other seated (Pls. 43-44). The difference between the two options is the reversal of seated and standing figure.

The general scheme finds many parallels in glyptic and painting. The most recently discovered example is a fresco in Xeste 3 in Thera, where a priestess or goddess is perched on an elevated seat and approached from the left by a monkey and a woman (N. Marinatos 1984:62, fig. 40). On seals and rings the seated woman, obviously a being of higher status, a goddess or one of her earthly representatives, is approached by a man or woman and sometimes by an additional person (Niemeier 1989: fig. 3, nos. 3-4; fig. 4, nos. 1, 4, 7-12, 14). Significant gestures and objects are usually exchanged between the parties.

In these depictions the most important individual sits on the right (Niemeier 1989:173), when scenes are read from glyptic impressions, rather than directly from the carved object itself.5 It is this arrangement which is depicted in our Option 4, and though it cannot be proven, it is more likely to reflect the original composition at Pseira for the various reasons given above. It is of interest that it is the woman Kaiser viewed as being of greater importance who has been restored here as sitting on the right, albeit selected in our case on the basis of very different criteria, and restored in a position unlike that chosen by Kaiser. Only later does the scale become a criterion of status in Aegean representation, as in the Campstool fresco from the Palace at Knossos, where a woman was restored by Cameron as spanning the height of two registers, each of which bears other figures in a smaller scale (Cameron 1964:47-53).

As in a locking mechanism, there is a seemingly endless series of solutions to the puzzle posed by the plaster reliefs from Pseira. And the ambiguity evident in the phrase Seager used to describe the hybrid woman his artist concocted — "a Minoan queen or goddess?" — remains, even if we replace the now less fashionable term queen by attendant or priestess (Seager 1910:15), or even goddess.
Endnotes

1. The dissertation was published posthumously in 1976, two years after Kaiser's tragic and untimely death in an accident in Iran that also claimed the lives of other people (see N. Himmelman in Kaiser 1976a: iii). While doing research, Kaiser came to know Mark Cameron and this writer; all three of us students working on aspects of Minoan mural decoration in a spirit of scholarly comraderie and friendship.

2. Cameron, in his dissertation, asserts that the reliefs were "heavily discoloured by burning" (p. 29). Kaiser does not raise the question of burning in regard to the exhibited pieces, nor does his catalog of the fragments in the storeroom mention any traces of fire.

3. When they were examined in 1988, these pieces were in a wooden tray in the north magazine in the basement of the Herakleion Museum, on the floor, under dexion shelves and under Case 124. The tray that contained them had two small slips of paper in it with Greek writing. One had "S VIII"; the other, the mysterious note: "68 or 89 and various fragments, Giolantas."

4. It is possible, of course, that a painted rather than an impressed grid was preferred in the Mycenaean frescoes. In another case, the net in a hunting scene in a mural in the palace of Tiryns was rendered entirely with the use of impressed string lines (Rodenwaldt 1912: pl. 17, nos. 6-7), but there the intention was to define the net itself, which inherently has such a design.

5. Given that, in one of his letters to Hall, Seager (1907a) had referred to the discovery of a fragment of a figure in plaster relief found in another house at Pseira, the possibility is raised that the latter could be among the fragments in storage in the Herakleion Museum, indeed the very foot under discussion. It is thus important to show here that this is not the case. Luckily, relevant information is present in another of Seager's letters (1907b), in which he quotes the major pieces of plaster relief found in Building AC and refers to the presence of two feet. The danger of using fragments from another relief composition was unknown to Kaiser as he did not have access to Seager's letters, and it is lucky that he, nevertheless, made the right assumption.

6. It is interesting that the "wrist" fragment (perhaps Fragment C13) in Seager's restoration does not appear either in the facsimile published by Rodenwaldt or in the museum version of Panel A, but it was reassigned by Kaiser to the same location that Bagge had proposed.

7. It is interesting that in other painted representations of women in large scale, where both top and lower body are known, there is a degree of balancing in the distribution of the patterns. This approach is true of the ladies from the House of the Ladies at Thera, who combine a simple jacket with a more elaborate skirt (Marinatos 1968-1976: V, pls. G-H), and in early Mycenaean frescoes depicting women in procession, like those in the palace at Thebes (Reusch 1956: pl. 15).

8. See discussion of Cameron's "signposts" by Hagg, who, however, prefers the identification of figures like those in relief at Pseira as goddesses (Hagg 1985:210, 213-214). That the Pseira ladies represent the goddess is also suggested by Inmerwahr (1990:162).

9. An exception to this rule may be the composition in the painting from Phylakopi, as recently restored by Morgan with the seated woman on the left, facing right (Morgan 1990:259, fig. 8). On the other hand, the painting itself does not provide evidence that the figure in question was actually sitting.