

**In the Shadow of the Goddess:
The Legacy of Sir Arthur Evans and the Interpretation of Minoan Religion**

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Abstract

The work of British archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans (1851-1941), the forefather of the field of Minoan studies, has undoubtedly left a lasting impact on modern conceptions of the Minoan civilization. Recent scholarship however has begun to scrutinize the conceptual frameworks and intellectual agendas that drove his work, illuminating the ways his interpretations were shaped by his goal of asserting Minoan Crete as 'European.' While this work has been influential in rethinking the future of the field, many of Evans's narratives continue to be perpetuated in academic and introductory texts. This paper reveals the legacy of Evans's work through a survey of the scholarship as well as introductory and public works to provide insight into the ways his work continues to impact modern conceptions. An exploration of Evans's background and writings illustrates the Eurocentric and imperial narratives that influenced his later interpretations of Minoan civilization, with a focus on the ideas presented in his culminating work, *The Palace of Minos*. Conducting a survey of the historiography of Minoan religion in the century that follows reveals the continued legacy of his narratives, focusing particularly on the question of the Mother Goddess and the concept of Minoan monotheism. Furthermore, an examination of introductory texts and sources, such as those utilized in secondary-school curricula, post-secondary education, and spaces of public history, illuminates the ways these sources perpetuate Evans's narratives and framework.

In the spring of 1903, British archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans and his team of excavators unearthed two partially damaged statuettes on the Eastern Mediterranean island of Crete, bringing them into the light of day for the first time in three thousand years. These figurines, at the time identified as a Snake Goddess and female attendant, came from an ancient civilization known now as the Minoan civilization that inhabited the now-Greek island of Crete from roughly 3000 to 1100 BCE. Following publication of these findings, the statuettes quickly became among the most recognizable artifacts associated with Minoan civilization. Now, 120 years after rediscovery, they remain emblematic of both Minoan religion and the civilization as a whole. Yet, the image of the figurines that has become representative of the Minoans are not the same as what was found in the Cretan soil. The statuettes known today are rather a product of reconstruction and interpretation, just as Evans constructed his imagination of Minoan civilization from fragments and ruins.

As British Classicist Mary Beard once said, “excavators of the past have a powerful hold over the future of the subject.”¹ When digging at Knossos, Arthur Evans found not only the remains of an ancient civilization but the future of an entire field of scholarship. Now considered the father of the field of Minoan studies, his work has served as the foundation of scholarship over the past century and defined the ways in which Minoan Crete is understood. However, as Evans excavated Knossos, he was not simply rediscovering an ancient civilization, but *reconstructing* one. Evans’s interpretation and imagination of Minoan Crete was fundamentally shaped by his intellectual agenda and larger goals, which have in turn become embedded within both academic and public perceptions of this Bronze Age culture. As modern scholarship has

¹ Mary Beard, “Builder of Ruins,” review of *Minotaur: Sir Arthur Evans and the Archaeology of the Minoan Myth*, by J. A. MacGillivray, *London Review of Books* 22, no. 23 (November 2000), <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v22/n23/mary-beard/builder-of-ruins>.

begun to question and analyze Evans's intellectual framework, it becomes equally vital to scrutinize the legacy of his work and interpretations.

With his work being foundational to the field, Evans's framework and interpretations have remained present throughout academic scholarship as well as in popular and public works. Recent scholarship has shown how his conceptual framework was part of a larger intellectual agenda of asserting Minoan Crete as an early 'European' civilization, imbuing his vision of the Minoans with imperial narratives. Despite this recent shift in scholarship, there has yet to be a larger survey of the legacy of his work and the ways in which his conceptual framework continues to shape understandings of Minoan civilization, both within the academic field of Minoan Studies as well as outside the field. As such, an exploration of these sources will address this gap, surveying the history of scholarship as well as introductory and public works to analyze the continued impact of Evans's work, and particularly the ways in which the enduring influence of his interpretations reinforces his original agendas.

This paper will examine Evans's larger work in constructing modern visions of Minoan civilization by focusing on his interpretation of Minoan religion, with special interest in the conceptions of the Minoan Goddess. His interpretation of Minoan religion, and particularly his Minoan Goddess, was constructed and imagined in ways that bear strong resemblance to modern European and Christian values in order to fulfill his agenda of presenting Minoan Crete as an ancient European civilization. Surveying and analyzing the legacy of his interpretation of Minoan religion reveals how modern conceptions and presentations continue to be impacted by and support Evans's intellectual agenda, representative of the significance and legacy of his larger construction of the whole of Minoan civilization.

To fully explore Evans's legacy, this paper will examine a variety of academic and introductory texts and sources. This historiographical review of Minoan scholarship in the decades following Evans's publications reveals the varying ways in which scholars accepted or rejected his interpretations, as well as the recent questioning of Evans's narratives and the current state of the field. A survey of the ways introductory, nonacademic works present Minoan civilization and religion provides further insight into how Evans's intellectual agenda and legacy continue to impact modern conceptions. These introductory sources include texts used in secondary and post-secondary education, as well as spaces of public education such as museum exhibits. An analysis of Evans's legacy and impact in these spaces reveals how these works retain and perpetuate his conceptual framework, and how his work remains foundational to contemporary understandings of Minoan religion and civilization in scholarly, academic, and public fields.

Archaeologist and Architect: Arthur Evans and the Construction of Minoan Crete

Twenty-one years after the initial season of excavations at Knossos, Arthur Evans published the first volume of excavation reports and what would become his culminating work on Minoan civilization. From the opening pages Evans makes his narrative agenda explicit, introducing his work and subject as such:

For the first time there has come into a view a primitive European civilization, the earliest phase of which goes back even beyond the days of the First Dynasty of Egypt... we gain a vision of a beneficent ruler, patron of the arts, founder of palaces, stablisher of civilized dominion.²

In this introduction, Evans expressly presents his construction of Minoan civilization as one that is inherently connected with Europe and European values, while being juxtaposed with their

² Arthur J. Evans, *The Palace of Minos*, Vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1921), 1.

older Near Eastern neighbors. This conceptual framework is the basis upon which Evans imagined and constructed his interpretation of the Minoans. In order to understand how he arrived at this framework, it is vital to understand the ways his upbringing influenced these later ideas and interpretations that have laid the foundation of the field of Minoan studies as a whole. As such, an exploration of Evans's life alongside analysis of his ultimate construction and imagination of Minoan religion provides insight into the interpretations that have become foundational in the scholarship.

Born in 1851, young Arthur Evans was exposed to prehistory from an early age; his father, Sir John Evans, was a successful businessman as well as a collector of prehistoric and Bronze Age implements. John Evans was a distinguished antiquarian, archaeologist, and numismatist, with a particular focus on ancient stone and bronze implements from Great Britain.³ During his career, he contributed to the debate over the age of the earth and humanity, a major controversy during the nineteenth century between the developing science of archaeology and theologians. Recent discoveries, such as those examined by Evans in 1859 from the Brixham Cave in the southwest of England, suggested that humans lived alongside extinct animals and fauna.⁴ These finds conflicted with previous narratives of human history that intentionally aligned with Biblical narratives. It is this scholarly world, one beginning to break from Biblical authority and redefining itself in scientific practices, that Arthur Evans was born into and educated within.

Arthur Evans grew up in this academic world of history, but also in a world that firmly believed in British imperial supremacy. Britain's 'Imperial Century' from 1815 to 1914 saw the

³ For further discussion of the academic scene in the nineteenth century, particularly on the different communities of historians, archaeologist, and antiquarians, see Philippa Levine's 1989 *The Amateur and the Professional*. Evans himself was part of the Numismatic Society, the Society of Antiquaries, and the Royal Society, among others.

⁴ Brian M. Fagan, *Eyewitness to Discovery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 20.

immense growth of the empire under Queen Victoria, with expansion in Asia, Africa, and the Pacific Ocean. The idea of British imperialism as a national destiny was perpetuated by the writings of historians, politicians, journalists, and, importantly, the British education system.⁵ Classical studies in particular, the foundation of an upper-class education and the field from which Evans's work in part grew out of, was imbued with imperial narratives of "acquisition and validation of worldly privilege and power."⁶ Evans was raised and educated amongst these narratives of British imperial supremacy, and thus his early life and education would have undoubtedly been influenced by and inseparable from British imperial narratives.

One aspect of British imperialism that is of particular interest to Evans's later work is the relation between imperialism and religion. By the mid-nineteenth century, Christianity was arguably "woven into the fabric of the British Empire," intertwined and inseparable concepts.⁷ Missionaries, and thus Christianity and religion as a whole, were viewed as influential and powerful agents of the Empire, both by British imperialists as well as nationalists in colonized countries.⁸ The glorification of British imperialism in education and society was a significant influence in Evans's later interpretation of Minoan civilization, which he consistently likened to imperial Britain. Describing the Minoans as a thalassocracy, a peaceful ruler over Minoan colonies, and, as seen previously, as "stablisher of civilized dominion," he repeatedly describes Minoan culture in imperialist terms that draw parallels to his familiar British Empire. As such, the connection between religion and imperialism is important context when looking at and analyzing Evans's work on Minoan Crete.

⁵ Philippa Levine, *The British Empire: Sunrise to Sunset* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 102.

⁶ Victoria Tietze Larson, "Classics and the Acquisition and Validation of Power in Britain's 'Imperial Century' (1815-1914)," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 6, no. 2 (1999), 189.

⁷ Sarah Stockwell, ed., *The British Empire: Themes and Perspectives* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2008), 144.

⁸ Stockwell, *The British Empire*, 132.

Following graduation from Oxford in 1874, Evans spent time travelling around Europe, winding up in the Balkans supporting the cause of Illyrian independence.⁹ In 1882 however, he was arrested by Austrian authorities due to his sentiments and support of insurrection, forcing his return to England. Upon his return, Evans was appointed the role of Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, with the goal of reestablishing it as an archaeology museum. Alongside this new position, in 1883 Evans visited Heinrich Schliemann, excavator of Troy and Mycenae, in Athens to view the Mycenaean treasures he had found. Seeing these grand, prehistoric remains of a distinctive and advanced civilization that existed prior to the Classical Greeks spurred Evans's interest in the Aegean Bronze Age.

Following multiple trips to Greece between 1883-1893, Evans announced his belief that a "system of picture-writing" was present in Greece in a presentation to the Hellenic Society in London in 1893.¹⁰ It was this search of writing, particularly symbols on seal-stones, that led Evans to the island of Crete.¹¹ On Crete Evans visited the site of Knossos, where earlier excavations led by local Cretans proved it to be a promising site. Various other archaeologists had expressed interest in the site, but due to political conflict and changing authorities experienced difficulty gaining access. Through various deals to purchase the land, however, Evans was able to gain access to the site, and began excavations and reconstruction in 1900 that continued, albeit with some pauses, for roughly thirty years.

⁹ For further exploration of Evans's time in the Balkans, see Sylvia Horwitz's 1981 biography of Evans, *The Find of a Lifetime*, and Arna Elezovic's 2021 dissertation "Modern Antiquities: Arthur Evans, the Balkans, and the Discovery of a Lost European Civilization."

¹⁰ Yannis Galanakis, "Arthur Evans and the Quest for the 'Origins of Mycenaean Culture'," in *AΘΥΡΜΑΤΑ: Critical Essays on the Archaeology of the Eastern Mediterranean in Honour of E. Susan Sherratt*, eds. Yannis Galanakis, Toby Wilkinson, and John Bennet (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2014), 85.

¹¹ For greater exploration of Evans's path towards interest in Crete, see Galanakis's chapter in full.

Published a year after the first season of excavations was Evans's *Mycenaean Tree and Pillar Cult and its Mediterranean Relations*.¹² In this text he outlined a religion centered on the worship of sacred trees, stones, and pillars, drawing connections to ancient Britain. Here he envisions a practice of aniconic deity worship and dedications to "the Cretan Zeus," consistently asserting that there was no anthropomorphic shape or depiction of the divine. While in this work Evans is describing the divine in a masculine sense, it is notable that even in this early stage he describes and imagines Minoan divinity in terms of a singular divine. It is from these early ideas that Evans's interpretations of Minoan religion develop, from this aniconic worship of the Cretan Zeus to ideas of a divine pair between The Goddess as Rhea and Cretan Zeus, to finally the primacy of the Great Goddess in her various aspects alongside the dying god.¹³ It is this last phase of interpretation that is presented in Evans's culminating work on Minoan civilization.

After the excavations came the site publication and Evans's culminating work on Minoan civilization, *The Palace of Minos*. Published over four volumes from 1921 to 1935 and totaling over 3,100 pages, this work presents not only a comprehensive survey of excavation findings, complete with photographs, diagrams, and illustrations, but Evans's interpretations and analyses, constructing his view of the whole of Minoan society and civilization. As an excavation report, *The Palace of Minos* includes an array of archaeological diagrams and photographs from the excavation itself, alongside introduction and discussion of the vast array of materials and artifacts that were uncovered. Most importantly, however, is the ways in which *The Palace of Minos* presented his conclusive interpretations and effectively reconstructed the whole of

¹² Arthur J. Evans, "The Mycenaean Tree and Pillar Cult and Its Mediterranean Relations," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 21 (1901). Note, Evans's early work uses the terms 'Minoan' and 'Mycenaean' interchangeably to refer to the pre-Greek civilization on Crete prior to the differentiation between the two.

¹³ For further exploration on the stages of development of Evans's Great Goddess, see Cynthia Eller's 2012 article, "Two Knights and a Goddess."

Minoan civilization and religion. In addition to the definitive position on the supremacy of the Great Goddess are three significant ideas that Evans emphasized in his construction of Minoan religion: the monotheistic nature of religious objects and beliefs; the comparison to Christian morals and practice; and the connection between religion and his ideas of possible Minoan colonies.

The first point is one of the most vital elements of Evans's argument, his interpretation of the centrality of the Great Goddess as a singular deity with various aspects among the different depictions. Evans identifies a multitude of different iterations of his Goddess, including, but not limited to, the Lady of the Underworld, the Mistress of the Sea, Patroness of the Priest-King, Our Lady of the Sports, the Huntress, and the Dove Goddess. He often identifies these various aspects with different iconography, such as the association of the chthonic nature of the famous Snake Goddess statuette as the Goddess in her role as the Lady of the Underworld or the presence of animals in a Potnia Theron motif as indicative of the Huntress. However, he repeatedly argues that this is not evidence for a multiplicity of divinities, but rather consistently maintains that the various depictions are "essentially the same divinity" and simply changing impersonations of the same Great Goddess.¹⁴ As such, Evans essentially constructs the Minoan Goddess as a singular, supreme deity, and frames his interpretations of religious objects around this idea.

Alongside his establishment of his Minoan Goddess as a singular divinity, another vital characteristic to Evans's interpretation of the Goddess is his emphasis on a pure and innocent aspect to her depiction and worship. Evans directly argues on behalf of "the sustained purity of all Minoan artistic representations,"¹⁵ and consistently portrays representations of the Goddess as

¹⁴ Arthur J. Evans, *The Palace of Minos*, Vol. 3 (London: Macmillan, 1930), 468.

¹⁵ Evans, *The Palace of Minos*, Vol. 3, 468.

‘matronly’ and ‘sacred’ rather than sexual. In regard to the possibility of a sexual relationship between his Minoan Goddess and the boy-god, he counters that that Minoan thought was “incompatible with the idea of a male consort” since “the fatherhood of children was an unknown or at any rate a non-essential element,” and as such the relationship between the two is rather one of mother and young son.¹⁶ This repeated and consistent construction of Evans’s Minoan Goddess as pure and matronly is thus an important and intentional aspect of his interpretation, alongside the supremacy of the Goddess as a singular deity.

Evans further builds on the associations of his Minoan Goddess as matronly and pure by presenting her as a likeness to the Christian Virgin Mary. Between his emphasis on her purity, motherly role, and her relationship to the young boy-god as her son, there are clear implicit parallels between the Minoan Goddess and Mary, alongside explicit comparisons made by Evans to draw connection between the two. When describing a scene of the Goddess as Mistress of the Sea Evans suggests a “reflection of the marine aspect of the Minoan Virgin Mother” in an early hymn “attributed to the Madonna.”¹⁷

Not only is Evans making a direct comparison between what he is interpreting as the Mistress of the Sea and later depictions of Mary, but he is directly referring to his Minoan Goddess as “the Minoan Virgin Mother” to further emphasize the ways in which he is conceptualizing the Goddess as a direct likeness to the Christian Virgin Mary. Furthermore, Evans continues to strengthen the association between the two by comparing his interpretation of the varied aspects of the Minoan Goddess being representative of a singular deity to the “medieval worship of the Madonna with varying attributes” as an analogy.¹⁸ Throughout this

¹⁶ Evans, *The Palace of Minos*, Vol. 3, 466.

¹⁷ Arthur J. Evans, *The Palace of Minos*, Vol. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1928), 252.

¹⁸ Evans, *The Palace of Minos*, Vol. 2, 277.

repeated association between his Minoan Goddess and the Christian Virgin Mary, Evans consistently portrays his Goddess as not just a singular supreme divinity but one that is anticipating Christian beliefs and ideals.

It is not just his Minoan Goddess that Evans constructs and imagines within this Christian framework, but the whole of his interpretation of Minoan religion. He consistently presents his vision of Minoan religious beliefs and morals as ones that are reminiscent of Christian values, such as placing emphasis on the “emotional hold on its adherents” or his argument that Minoan religion “almost inevitably entailed a certain moral code,” despite there being little evidence to truly substantiate the proposition.¹⁹ Evans additionally seeks to emphasize the comparisons between Minoan religion and Christian beliefs over comparisons to later Greek religion, arguing that the religious scenes have a greater connection with Christianity rather than Classical religion.²⁰ Throughout his work, it is clear how Evans intentionally presented both his Minoan Goddess and the whole of Minoan religion as comparable to Christian values.

Finally, Evans’s construction of Minoan religion shares parallels with not just Christian ideals but that of European imperialist beliefs as well. Just as the British Empire utilized and relied on religion as a branch of imperial projects, Evans imagined the same for the Minoan thalassocracy he constructed in ways reminiscent of his native British homeland.²¹ At various points Evans discusses his theories of Minoan colonial projects, explaining these theoretical Minoan colonies through the spread of religious ideas. For example, Evans posits that there may have existed “a colonial Minoan element” in or near Egypt due to familiarity with Egyptian

¹⁹ Evans, *The Palace of Minos*, Vol. 2, 277, 279.

²⁰ Evans, *The Palace of Minos*, Vol. 3, 144.

²¹ It is worth noting that the concept of the Minoan Thalassocracy was not proposed by Evans, but rather was first mentioned by Thucydides. However, various scholars have pointed out the similarities between Evans’s interpretation of the ‘Minoan Thalassocracy’ and the British Thalassocracy.

religious ideas.²² The discovery of Minoan religious imagery on islands outside of Crete, such as the island of Thera (Santorini), is further utilized to sustain the narrative of a theoretical Minoan colonial power. Just as his familiar British Empire exported Christian practices, so too did Evans's Minoans. The connections between religion and his ideas of Minoan colonial power are subtler throughout his works, but reflects another way in which Evans constructs his interpretation of Minoan religion in relation to his view of modern Europe.

Evans's ideas have been accepted or questioned to various degrees in the past century of study. For example, in 1982 an academic conference was held in order to explore the reality and evidence of the idea of the Minoan Thalassocracy.²³ Similarly, various scholars have examined Evans's frameworks and agendas, such as the argument that the construction of his Great Goddess was influenced by his agenda of depicting Minoan Crete as an early European civilization in contrast to their Near Eastern contemporaries.²⁴ Despite this, his work has laid a foundation for the rest of the field, with his construction of Minoan religion and civilization as European and anticipating Christian morals and practice becoming the primary framework within which the Minoans are understood. As such, Evans remains a critical influence to the writings and interpretations of later scholars, his legacy persisting as the successive generations of scholarship build upon his work.

Religion, Evans, and the Historiography of Scholarship

In the decades since Arthur Evans's excavations at Knossos and the publication of his works, a rich wealth of scholarly discussion around Minoan religion and, more recently, Evans

²² Evans, *The Palace of Minos*, Vol. 1, 291.

²³ Robin Hagg and Nanno Marinatos, eds, "The Minoan Thalassocracy: Myth and Reality. Proceedings of the Third International Symposium at the Swedish Institute in Athens" (Stockholm: Swedish Institute of Athens, 1984).

²⁴ For example, Ilse Schoep's 2018 article "Building the Labyrinth."

himself has emerged. Despite the diverse approaches and interpretations proposed in the scholarship and even the recent questioning of his frameworks and agendas, the ideas established by Evans have remained integral to much of the field and have become foundational to the larger understanding of Minoan civilization with little questioning. A survey of academic works since the initial publication of *The Palace of Minos* reveals the contours of the scholarship and enables the examination of the legacy of Evans's interpretations.

One primary question of interest in the debates over Minoan religion that will be focused on is that of the Minoan Goddess. There has been a broad scale of arguments about how to interpret images of the Minoan divine. On one end, many scholars have followed Evans in asserting that the Minoan pantheon was essentially monotheistic, while other scholars have argued that there are distinguishable characteristics that are suggestive of a multiplicity of deities. Examining the various approaches to this question reveals the impact of his work on the following scholarship. Additionally, an exploration of the recent scholarship that takes Evans and his work as the focus of study is valuable as part of the historiography of Evans's work, as the analysis of his conceptual framework and intellectual agenda that guided him has become an integral part of scholarly discussion of Minoan religion and civilization as a whole.

Following Evans's publication of *The Palace of Minos*, many scholars accepted his interpretation of a singular Minoan Goddess, including Swedish scholar Axel W. Persson (d. 1951) and Greek scholars Spyridon Marinatos (d. 1974) and Stylianos Alexiou (d. 2013). Marinatos, Greek archaeologist most known for his works on Thera (Santorini) and a collaborator under Evans in his earlier years, discussed the debate over a monotheistic or polytheistic nature in Minoan religion and expressed his personal favoring of the former,

describing his interpretation of Minoan religion as “un-achieved monotheism.”²⁵ With this terminology, he concedes that Minoan religion was likely not truly monotheistic, but still places the religion within the framework of monotheism. Additionally, while he acknowledges that there is a distinct iconographic series of goddesses with different symbols, he argues that it is far too obscure to be able to determine the differences and that it is counterproductive to do so. As such, when discussing his interpretation of Minoan religion Marinatos chooses to accept and build upon Evans’s ideas of the various goddess imagery being essentially one unified, or partially unified, deity as a form of monotheism.

Similarly, Swedish archaeologist Axel W. Persson proposed an image of Minoan religion that accepted Evans’s ideas of the Minoan Goddess in his work *The Religion of Greece in Prehistoric Times*.²⁶ In the 1942 text, he analyzes a series of signet rings and images to illustrate his two main arguments: first, that Minoan and Mycenaean religion was centered around the vegetation cycle, and secondly, that pre-Greek religion, including the Minoan Goddess, arose from an old, widely diffused and uniform ‘Afrasian’ culture. For Persson, the Minoan Goddess as Great Goddess had equivalents in the Near East, particularly in the goddess Cybele, and served as an example of parallel offshoots of a universal divinity from an earlier ‘Afrasian’ culture. The prominence and singularity of a Minoan Goddess was as such an important aspect to his interpretation of the religion. Persson’s analysis of the female divine proposes his own interpretation, while still accepting and perpetuating the focus on Minoan religion as monotheistic under a Great Goddess.

²⁵ Spyridon Marinatos and Max Hirmer, *Crete and Mycenae*, trans. John Boardman (London: Thames & Hudson, 1960), 36.

²⁶ Axel W. Persson, *The Religion of Greece in Prehistoric Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1942).

Like Persson, Cretan archaeologist Stylianos Alexiou emphasized the centrality of the vegetation cycle in Minoan religious artifacts and imagery in his translated 1973 work on Minoan civilization.²⁷ Unlike Persson, however, Alexiou includes discussion of both monotheistic and polytheistic elements in his presentation of Minoan religion; in discussion of the divinities he both emphasizes the importance of a Great Mother and suggests that the later Mycenaean may have introduced polytheism to Crete, while also acknowledging that there are many and various forms of the female deity.²⁸ Rather, he argues that this idea of distinction would have likely been unimportant to the Minoan populations, and that instead the most important element for worshippers was the emotional aspect of the religion rather than the specificities of the divinities. In his reconstruction and interpretation of Minoan religion, the ritual and religious imagery reflects a practice driven by emotion and intuition, while simultaneously both highlighting and minimizing the importance of the goddess.

While many scholars accepted and followed Evans's ideas of Minoan religion and utilized his framework in their own interpretations, it is important to note that there were criticisms of Evans's work from early on. Martin Nilsson (d. 1967), Swedish scholar of Greek and Hellenistic religion, was a contemporary of Evans and a prominent opponent to his ideas of Minoan monotheism. His work *The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion and Its Survival in Greek Religion*, first published in 1927, devotes the most time to discussions of Minoan religion and serves effectively as a survey of archaeological findings.²⁹ Nilsson, like many other academics of his time, was primarily focused on the interpretation of Minoan religion through the lens of later Greek religion, as evident by the title of his work. This approach was popular with scholars in

²⁷ Stylianos Alexiou, *Minoan Civilization*, trans. Cressida Ridley (Heraklion: Spyros Alexiou Sons, 1973).

²⁸ Alexiou, *Minoan Civilization*, 75.

²⁹ Martin P. Nilsson, *The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion and Its Survival in Greek Religion* (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1927).

the early-mid 20th century and many attempted to find parallels and precursors to later Greek deities and myths in Minoan artifacts.³⁰

Notably, Nilsson's work also served as a vocal opposition to Evans's idea of Minoan monotheism, arguing for the importance of the differing characteristics of the goddess imagery and suggesting that these characteristics may likely be representative of various deities with different functions. He identifies a 'Mother of the Mountains' type, a war goddess type, the domestic cult of the snake goddess, and a goddess of sea-faring, among others.³¹ The differing iconography of these suggested goddesses and goddess types is familiar to Evans's identification of the various aspects of his Minoan Goddess, however Nilsson argues that these characteristics should be seen as distinguishing different possible deities rather than differing aspects of a singular goddess, as Evans argues repeatedly. As such, Nilsson's work is a prime example of early dissent against Evans's proposed image of Minoan religion.

Despite this early opposition, it was Evans's ideas that prevailed in the scholarship of the following decades, as seen by the examination of the works of Sp. Marinatos, Persson, and Alexiou. As these various scholars propose and construct their own imaginations of the Minoan religion and beliefs, they are building off of and utilizing Evans's ideas, often without much discussion of alternative theories. Despite the differences between the individual interpretations, they are all still working within the framework of ideas established by Evans and further strengthening the legacy of his work as a foundation of the field.

³⁰ Axel W. Persson, previously discussed, and W. K. C. Guthrie, Scottish classical scholar, are further examples of this trend of viewing Minoan religion through the lens of later Greek religion. One such aspect of this analytical approach was the exploration of Minoan goddess imagery as evidence of pre-Greek roots of the later goddesses Artemis and Athena.

³¹ Nilsson, *The Minoan and Mycenaean Religion and Its Survival in Greek Religion*, 353-4.

In the mid-1980s, however, there was a turning point in the scholarship. In 1988 Peter Warren, British archaeologist and academic, published *Minoan Religion as Ritual Action*, followed by Nanno Marinatos's seminal work *Minoan Religion: Ritual, Images, and Symbol*.³² These two publications reflect a new direction of studying Minoan religion, focusing less on the construction and interpretation of Minoan beliefs and instead arguing for the importance and possibility of interpreting material evidence in terms of cult practice and ritual action. Warren, in his much shorter work, establishes five examples of Minoan ritual action, including dance, baetylic,³³ robe, flower, and sacrifice rituals, ideas which are then built upon in much greater detail and example in Marinatos's text.

Nanno Marinatos, scholar of Minoan religion and civilization and daughter of the formerly discussed Spyridon Marinatos, has been a leading figure in the field of Minoan religion, and as such her 1993 text remains influential in the field. In her work, she focuses on reconstructing the ritual practices utilizing Minoan artifacts and drawing comparisons from contemporaneous civilizations and practices in the Near East. While this text in many respects revisits the earlier works of Evans and Nilsson, Marinatos underscores the importance of looking at contemporary Near Eastern parallels as opposed to later Greek; she argues that one of the primary flaws of previous scholars, including specific reference to Nilsson, was the imposition of Greek mythology and religion onto the Minoan.³⁴

In regard to the Minoan Goddess, Marinatos repeatedly expresses agreement with Evans's interpretation of "essential unity" in the symbolism and iconography of the female

³² Peter Warren, *Minoan Religion as Ritual Action* (Gothenburg: Gothenburg University, 1988); Nanno Marinatos, *Minoan Religion: Ritual, Image, and Symbol* (Columbia: South Carolina University Press, 1993).

³³ A baetyl is a sacred stone that was believed to have divine origins and were worshipped as objects dedicated to a deity or as a symbol of a deity themselves, and had a role in religious practices throughout the ancient Near East as well as in later Greek religion among others.

³⁴ Marinatos, *Minoan Religion*, 10.

divine throughout her text. However, in a chapter dedicated to Goddesses and Gods, she explicitly addresses the debate and proposes a more nuanced approach and interpretation of the Minoan Goddess. While she argues that there is a lack of strong enough distinction of attributes to suggest a specialization of deities, she presents the hypothetical Minoan monotheism as parallel to Egyptian practices, which she describes as “a peculiar monotheism (or rather henotheism) which admitted the concept of the One alongside that of the Many.”³⁵ She concedes that female polytheism “almost certainly did exist,” and that what she has referred to throughout the text as ‘the goddess’ was very likely several deities.³⁶ Despite her frequent reliance and use of Evans’s interpretations and terminology, it is this aspect that adds nuance to her argument. While she repeatedly discusses ‘the goddess,’ there is a key difference between the discussion of the goddess as an archetype, and Evans’s singular Minoan Goddess. As such, this is a distinct argument being made by Marinatos, adding her interpretation into the larger debate over the identity of the Minoan Goddess. Despite these nuances, much of her work continues to utilize and build off many assumptions and interpretations about Minoan religion stemming from Evans’s work without questioning and analyzing the origins of those ideas.

Alongside the recent scholarship on Minoan religion has been a recent shift towards taking Evans himself and the processes by which he constructed his interpretations as the focus of study. As a key figure in the field of archaeology, Evans has attracted multiple biographers,

³⁵ Marinatos, *Minoan Religion*, 165. In regards to the limited distinction of attributes, Marinatos notably does concede in a footnote the fact that the iconographic diversification of Greek gods in the early Archaic period is similarly less distinct, despite the fact that literary evidence makes clear that there were distinct divine specializations and personalities. With Linear A still largely undeciphered, there remains the possibility of similar written evidence that could further illuminate the degree of specialization, and some scholars have already argued that various names for divinities can be deduced from Linear A texts.

³⁶ Marinatos, *Minoan Religion*, 166.

including his half-sister.³⁷ As biographies, these works are far more interested in Evans's life story and dramatic adventures than his intellectual agenda and frameworks. However, a 2000 biography by J. A. MacGillivray sparked heated discussions due to its highly critical portrayal of Evans.³⁸ Despite receiving unfavorable reviews upon its release for this negative view, the book marks a shift in the study of Evans and has since become an influential and important work when exploring the ways in which Evans has been viewed and discussed by modern scholars.

MacGillivray's book was arguably one of the key influences that compelled Nanno Marinatos to write her own book on Evans and his work, written in response to the negative portrayal of Evans.³⁹ In her work, she not only seeks to reestablish and support his reputation, discussing a variety of aspects of Evans's work, but also to paint a more personal picture of him, constructing a portrait of him from descriptions from friends and acquaintances, including her own father, Spyridon Marinatos, who was a colleague. Both biographies by Marinatos and MacGillivray seek to contextualize and unpack Evans's intellectual frameworks but do so with the goal of depicting him in a specific light. Despite this, these recent biographies contribute to the larger shift towards the examination and assessment of Evans and his work.

Various scholars, such as Ilse Schoep and Cynthia Eller, have analyzed and dissected elements of Evans's conceptual frameworks and agendas to illuminate the ways they impacted his constructions of Minoan religion. Eller, historian of religion and gender studies, has explored the possible impact of Sir James Frazer, Scottish anthropologist and folklorist, and his seminal

³⁷ Joan Evans, *Time and Chance: The Story of Arthur Evans and His Forebears* (London: Longmans, 1943). For a fuller biography, expanding upon Joan Evans's work, see Sylvia Horwitz, *The Find of a Lifetime* (1981). Additionally, C. W. Ceram's 1951 *Gods, Graves, and Scholars* and Leslie Fitton's 1996 *Discovery of the Greek Bronze Age* both discuss Evans and his work alongside other major archaeologists and antiquarians.

³⁸ J. Alexander MacGillivray, *Minotaur: Sir Arthur Evans and the Archaeology of the Minoan Myth* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000).

³⁹ Nanno Marinatos, *Sir Arthur Evans and Minoan Crete: Creating the Vision of Knossos* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015).

work *The Golden Bough* on Evans's interpretation of Minoan religion.⁴⁰ First published in 1890, Frazer's *Golden Bough* was a highly influential, albeit controversial, work, serving as a comparative study of religion and mythology and presenting his theory of the evolution of religion. Eller explores in particular the themes of the Mother Goddess and the dying and rising god, arguing that Evans, by the time of writing *The Palace of Minos*, had constructed his understanding of Minoan religion within the framework that Frazer had proposed. Through the parallel analysis of both Frazer's work and the development of Evans's interpretations of Minoan religion and the Minoan Goddess, Eller explores one possible element of Evans's conceptual framework that contributed to his final interpretations and arguments that have since laid the foundations of the field.

Ilse Schoep, Bronze Age archaeologist, has similarly explored and sought to deconstruct Evans's intellectual framework and agenda, with her 2018 article "Building the Labyrinth: Arthur Evans and the Construction of Minoan Civilization" being of particular relevance.⁴¹ In this article, she extensively dissects and analyzes a variety of aspects of Evans's conceptual framework, arguing that it was not only biased by his Eurocentric ideals, but that many of his interpretations began as preconceived notions prior to excavation. She asserts that many elements of Evans's interpretation of Minoan civilization and religion were rooted in goals of both associating the Minoans with Europeans as well as in opposition to the Near East, pointing out the constant emphasis on the "European nature of Minoan religion" and the ways in which Evans's Mother Goddess was repeatedly set apart from Egyptian and Near Eastern goddesses.⁴²

⁴⁰ Cynthia Eller, "Two Knights and a Goddess: Sir Arthur Evans, Sir James George Frazer, and the Invention of Minoan Religion," *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology* 25, no. 1 (January 2012).

⁴¹ Schoep, "Building the Labyrinth."

⁴² Schoep, "Building the Labyrinth," 15.

Importantly, Schoep seeks to reveal the ways in which many of these ideas had origins in the 1890s, prior to his excavations on Crete and when there was little other evidence to support his theories. She argues that many of his ideas had their foundations in his vision of an ancient European civilization, and that the pre-1900s origins of these ideas “exposes the essentially imagined, rhetorical nature of Evans’ vision and agenda.”⁴³ This work by Schoep provides another example of the recent deconstruction of Evans’s intellectual agenda and frameworks, showcasing the ways the origins of his arguments are being questioned by the scholarly field.

Beyond the reassessments of Evans, other recent shifts within the field of Minoan studies have called for the necessity of rethinking and recontextualizing the ways in which we think about the Minoans. One of the most influential proponents calling for change is Greek archaeologist Yannis Hamilakis, with his work such as the 2002 text *Labyrinth Revisited: Rethinking ‘Minoan’ Archaeology*.⁴⁴ In this text he discusses not only the necessity of reevaluating Evans himself and his framework but for a larger rethinking of how the ‘Minoans’ as a whole are understood. His work heading conferences and leading the publication of proceedings centered around this recontextualization has further established him as a leader of this new direction of the field, such as his work with the archaeologist and historian Nicoletta Momigliano on the text *Archaeology and European Modernity: Producing and Consuming the Minoans*.⁴⁵ These works, and their focus on the reevaluation and implication of previous frameworks, have become foundational in the movement towards the rethinking of the future of Minoan studies.

⁴³ Schoep, “Building the Labyrinth,” 8.

⁴⁴ Yannis Hamilakis, ed., *Labyrinth Revisited: Rethinking ‘Minoan’ Archaeology* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2002).

⁴⁵ Yannis Hamilakis and Nicolette Momigliano, ed. *Archaeology and European Modernity: Producing and Consuming the “Minoans”* (Padova: Bottega d’Erasmus, 2006).

Momigliano has continued to develop this recent focus on the larger implications and uses of Minoan history. Her works, such as *Cretomania: Modern Desires for the Minoan Past*, survey and examine the reception of Minoan archaeological findings, particularly the ways the Minoan past is utilized in connection with modern identities.⁴⁶ Her most recent work, *In Search of the Labyrinth: The Cultural Legacy of Minoan Crete*, was just published in 2020, reflecting the continued development towards this focus on the reception and cultural utilization of Minoan history.⁴⁷ Her work reflects the ways historical and modern conceptualizations of the Minoans have a tangible impact beyond the strictly academic world, and that this reception is worth studying. As such, the works and scholarship of both Momigliano and Hamilakis represent examples of the shift within the field towards the rethinking and recontextualizing of the ‘Minoans,’ and the direction in which the future of the field is heading.

While this recent work dissecting Evans’s conceptual framework and the rethinking of Minoan civilization is a step in the right direction, these ideas have had little impact on the legacy of Evans’s interpretations on a larger scale. In many ways, these recent changes have remained confined to the highest levels of scholarly publications, with minimal effect outside of these academic circles. One of the most important areas in which Evans’s legacy and impact remains prominent is in the introductory texts, sources that are often a student’s first, and often only, exposure to Minoan Crete. While scholarly work continues to reveal the ways in which we must reconcile modern interpretations and findings with the fundamental beliefs held by Evans,

⁴⁶ Nicoletta Momigliano and Alexandre Farnoux, ed., *Cretomania: Modern Desires for the Minoan Past* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

⁴⁷ Nicoletta Momigliano, *In Search of the Labyrinth: The Cultural Legacy of Minoan Crete* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020). Notably this text was published as a part of a series dedicated to “New Directions in Classics,” reflecting how this work on Minoan history is a part of a broad shift in the larger field of Classics that has been ongoing in the recent decades.

it becomes important to analyze the ways in which the legacy of his work continues to impact the narratives on a foundational level.

Evans's Legacy in Introductory and Public Texts

For the general public, Minoan history will likely only be heard about briefly in a classroom or public educational setting, if at all. For many, exposure and discussion of ancient history will be limited to what is presented in secondary school curricula, while others may go on to take an ancient history course at a post-secondary level or engage with Minoan history in a public educational setting. Outside of those who pursue further study of the Aegean Bronze Age, these are the three primary sources of information and exposure to Minoan Crete. As such, the introductory and survey texts that are utilized in these classrooms and educational settings play a key role in the public conception of Minoan Crete.

Secondary social studies education regularly includes ancient history, and as such the textbooks utilized in these courses are a key source of exposure to Minoan history for many students.⁴⁸ While the information presented in these survey-level textbooks is often broad and minimal, this basic introduction is often a student's first and only exposure to Minoan Crete. Discussion of ancient history, and thus Minoan civilization, appears in two different locations in a general secondary school curriculum in the United States: once in a year-long focus on ancient civilizations in grades 6-8, most often in grade 6, and then again in a year on world history, often taken in grades 9 or 10.⁴⁹ A selection of US-based textbooks utilized at these different secondary

⁴⁸ For the sake of scope and accessibility of information, discussion of secondary school curricula is limited to that utilized in the United States.

⁴⁹ While there is no set national secondary curriculum in the US, this assessment of a general curriculum comes from the analysis of curriculum structures from various states, including Washington, California, New York, and Florida.

levels provide insight into the ways in which Minoan civilization and religion is presented in introductory texts, and the legacy and impact of Evans's work at this level.⁵⁰ While the texts are used in different grade levels, they will be looked at as a whole due to the similarities and shared goal of a survey approach for an introductory audience.

Almost all the introductory textbooks assessed feature a central focus on Minoan trade and wealth, with limited discussion of culture and religion. This lack of focus on religion arguably reflects the priorities of the educational curriculum, viewing these early civilizations in the contexts of trade and interconnection rather than having the time to dedicate focus towards the individual cultures and belief systems when having such a broad, survey-level focus. However, despite the general lack of discussion on religion, many of the textbooks showcase images of the Snake Goddess statuette. This inclusion of the figurine exemplifies the ways in which its image has become emblematic of both Minoan religion as well as the whole of the civilization. Even when many of these textbooks do not discuss religion in the text, the figurines still come to represent and serve as an iconographic articulation of the civilization.

Of those that do contain brief mentions of religion and divinities, there is a great variety between different textbooks in the ways in which Minoan religion is presented. Some discuss the religion in ways that support many elements of Evans's construction, while others present alternative interpretations. For example, one textbook mentions "a Great Mother Earth

⁵⁰ The textbooks selected for analysis have been selected from lists of approved curricula at various different school districts. The following textbooks discussed, as of January 2023, can be found in use in Washington at Lake Washington School District, Seattle Public Schools, Northshore School District, Spokane Public School, and Tacoma Public Schools, as well as in districts in California, New York, and Florida. These districts have been selected due to size and accessibility of curriculum information, in order to obtain a reasonable sample size. The edition specifics can vary from district to district, in all cases the latest edition accessible within reason has been looked at for analysis.

Goddess,”⁵¹ while another directly states that Minoan religion was polytheistic.⁵² This diverse depiction of Minoan religion is in some ways reflective of the lack of scholarly consensus on the topic, but creates complications by presenting an interpretation without the acknowledgement or questioning of alternative theories and uncertainties. As such, these differing depictions further illuminate the varied ways Minoan religion is presented to introductory readers.

While these texts present Minoan religion in diverse ways, there is near unanimity in presenting Minoan civilization as a predecessor of Greece and Europe. Sections dedicated to the Minoans are most often placed within the context of Ancient Greece, falling under chapters and units such as “Greek Civilization” and “The Legacy of Greece.”⁵³ Section names and headings further solidify this presentation of Minoan civilization as a direct precursor to later Greek, falling under headings such as “Early Development of Greek Society” or “Rise of Greek Civilization.”⁵⁴ While modern conceptions of nation and borders place Crete as a part of the Greek state and the Minoan period does chronologically precede Mycenaean and later Greek culture, this organization suggests a simplification of history while eliding Near Eastern connections. Presenting the Minoans as part of the history of “Early Greece” suggests a distorted conceptualization of the civilization, as one that is directly related to later Greece rather than as their own independent and unique culture that shared far more in common with their Bronze Age contemporaries in the Near East.

⁵¹ Roger B. Beck et al., *World History: Patterns of Interaction*, rev. ed. (Evanston, IL: McDougal Littell, 2009), 72.

⁵² Fredrik Hiebert et al., *World History: Great Civilizations* (Willard, OH: National Geographic and Cengage Learning, 2016), 209.

⁵³ Hiebert et al., *World History: Great Civilizations*, 208; John P. McKay, Bennet D. Hill, and John Buckler, eds., *A History of Western Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983), 63.

⁵⁴ Jerry H. Bentley and Herbert F. Ziegler, eds., *Traditions & Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past*, 3rd ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2006), 232; Jackson J. Spielvogel, *Discovering Our Past: A History of the World, Early Ages*, rev. ed. (Columbus: McGraw-Hill, 2013), 174.

Of the texts surveyed, only one featured an alternative structure, opting to discuss Minoan civilization in comparison with Phoenician traders.⁵⁵ Notably, this organization separates the Minoans from the Mycenaeans, who are discussed in a section in a completely different chapter on early Greece. In doing so, the text situates Minoan Crete in a Near Eastern rather than Greek context. This structural decision provides an example of an alternative approach to the temporal and thematic presentation of Minoan civilization. Examining these texts, it is clear that the different structures in which the Minoans are presented plays a significant role in the conceptualization of the civilization, whether it be as a precursor to later Greece or in conjunction with their Near Eastern counterparts.

The most important aspect to the presentation of Minoan civilization, however, is the ways in which it is equated and associated with “European” history, a direct result of Arthur Evans’s agenda. Ancient Greece has long been associated with an imagined narrative of Western history, and associating Minoan civilization with later Greek places it as part of this longer chronicle of European history. This association between Minoan and European history is presented in these secondary texts both implicitly through the organization as well as explicit connections made between the two in the text itself. One textbook introduces the Minoans as “the first civilization to develop in Europe,” and another as “the first advanced European civilization to have complex political and social structures and advanced technologies.”⁵⁶ It is not simply a subtle presentation of Minoan Crete as European based on placement within the text, but a statement that is explicitly made in these texts. In doing so, these textbooks continue to support and fulfill Evans’s agenda and framework that was influenced by imperial and

⁵⁵ Beck et al., *World History: Patterns of Interaction*, 72.

⁵⁶ Spielvogel, *Discovering Our Past*, 174; Richard W. Bulliet et al., *The Earth and Its Peoples: A Global History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), 57.

Eurocentric narratives, favoring a simplified picture of Minoan Crete as a precursor to Classical Greek and Western civilization while minimizing the complex and nuanced world of the Bronze Age and their Near Eastern contemporaries.

The importance in the presentation of Minoan religion and civilization is not limited to depictions in secondary level texts but continues into texts and textbooks that are written for a post-secondary audience. Written for a more experienced reader and with the goal of a more in-depth exploration, these sources often present a more nuanced depiction of Minoan civilization and religion, albeit still meant to serve at an introductory level. Similar to the textbooks utilized at a secondary level, there is often a wide spectrum of ways in which Minoan Crete is presented and conceptualized, with various degrees of impact from Evans's interpretations and intellectual framework.

While some post-secondary texts omit discussion of religion in the way that secondary-level textbooks opted to do,⁵⁷ on the whole these texts devote greater time and detail to the cultural and religious aspects of Minoan Crete. Some of the texts acknowledge how Evans's ideas have been rethought and challenged, such as a text that includes a section authored by Nanno Marinatos: "One of the fallacies introduced by Evans into Minoan religion is the dominant role of a Great Minoan Mother Goddess... A close scrutiny of the iconography of the numerous extant rings and seals shows that the Minoan pantheon consisted of several deities."⁵⁸ Here this text is both presenting Minoan religion as one that is inherently polytheistic while also directly challenging Evans's Mother Goddess.

⁵⁷ Eugene Berger et al., *World History: Cultures, States, and Societies to 1500* (Dahlongea, GA: University of North Georgia Press, 2016).

⁵⁸ Nanno Marinatos, "Minoan and Mycenaean Civilizations," in *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*, ed. Sarah Iles Johnston (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 206.

Many others however retain and perpetuate the narrative of the Mother Goddess, to varying degrees and in different ways. For example, one text echoes Evans's work by arguing that "one single goddess [lays] at the center of Minoan practices," and that "the various forms are merely different manifestations of this one goddess."⁵⁹ Others go even further, stating directly that Minoan religion was "virtually monotheistic."⁶⁰ With these statements and depiction of Minoan religion, these texts are reinforcing Evans's interpretations and perpetuating the intellectual agenda and the framework that he constructed his interpretation of the Minoans within.

Just as in the secondary-level texts, the utilization of Evans's framework becomes especially apparent in the conceptualization and association of Minoan Crete as "European." Many of the texts directly associate the ancient civilization with the West and Europe, introducing the Minoans as "the first literate civilization in Europe," or as the site of "the earliest historical religions in Europe."⁶¹ The latter quotation comes from a textbook entitled *The Handbook of Religions in Ancient Europe*; the issues of conceptualizing "Europe" as a unified region in ancient history aside, the simple inclusion of Minoans within a textbook on "Ancient Europe" alone shows the success in Evans's intellectual agenda in permeating modern conceptualizations. Textbooks such as these frame Minoan civilization and religion as a "prologue to the religions of Europe," firmly placing them within a linear narrative of European history.⁶² This clear establishment of Minoan Crete as a precursor to later European religion

⁵⁹ David A. Warburton, "Minoan and Mycenaean Religion," in *The Handbook of Religions in Ancient Europe*, eds. by Lisbeth Bredholt Christensen, Olav Hammer, and David A. Warburton (New York: Routledge, 2013), 112.

⁶⁰ Nanno Marinatos, "Minoan Religion," in *The Cambridge History of Religions in the Ancient World: From the Bronze Age to the Hellenistic Age*, eds. Michele Renee Salzman and Martin. A Sweeney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 238.

⁶¹ Berger et al., *World History*, 183; Warburton, "Minoan and Mycenaean Religion," 103.

⁶² Warburton, "Minoan and Mycenaean Religion," 130.

reflects the continued persistence of Evans's legacy in constructing his interpretation of Minoan civilization and religion as inherently European in nature.

Alongside the association of Minoan Crete with "Europeanness," these post-secondary introductory texts paint an even more complex picture through contrasts with the Near East. While some of these pieces, specifically those written by Nanno Marinatos, do argue for the importance and advantages of looking at Near Eastern parallels when making inferences about Minoan culture and religion, many of these texts continue to present Minoan civilizations in opposition with their Near Eastern contemporaries. For example, one text states that Minoan religion was "much more low key" in comparison to Near Eastern civilizations, utilizing religion as one example of a larger argument that Minoan Crete inherently differed from their Near Eastern neighbors.⁶³ By thinking about and presenting Minoan religion and civilization in direct contrast with Near Eastern contemporaries, this not only further emphasizes the "Europeanness" of the Minoans but also hinders the ability to gain greater insight and understanding through analyzing parallels. By continuing to rely on Evans's framework and construction, not only are Eurocentric ideals and interpretations being perpetuated but so is the active limitation of further understanding.

Another way that the general public may come into contact with depictions of Minoan civilization and religion is through museums and tourism. Museums are perhaps one of the most common settings where the public interacts with ancient history outside of school settings, and as such are an important location where public perceptions of ancient civilizations are constructed. Minoan sites and history in particular have become popular tourist destinations among visitors to

⁶³ Ralph W. Mathisen, *Ancient Mediterranean Civilizations: From Prehistory to 640 CE*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 115.

Crete and the greater Mediterranean.⁶⁴ Heraklion, the city nearest the site of Knossos, serves both a major air travel port for the island as well as a popular sea port for major cruise lines touring the Mediterranean, bringing thousands of tourists to the archaeological sites and museums daily.⁶⁵ The two most prominent sites of Minoan history are the Palace of Knossos archaeological site and the Heraklion Archaeological Museum, which houses the largest collection of Minoan artifacts.

The Palace of Knossos Archaeological Site now serves as a popular tourist destination, presenting the reconstructions of the court complex and guiding the visitor through different sections of the site and displaying Evans's vision of the reconstructed partial ruins. While the site is primarily focused on the architectural and engineering feats rather than the display of Minoan culture and society, the site is a physical example of the way that Evans constructed his vision of Minoan civilization and the ways in which that image remains indebted to him. After entering the site itself, just past the ticketing booths, a visitor to the archaeological site is greeted with a large metal bust of Arthur Evans atop a pillar, giving him a place of significance as the establisher of the site right from the beginning.⁶⁶ Through this display, as well as the frequent discussions of him in guiding signs, it is made clear just how central Evans and his work remains in this physical reconstruction.

⁶⁴ As of a Jan. 2023 ranking of top attractions in all of Crete, Trip Advisor ranks the Heraklion Archaeological Museum and the Palace of Knossos archaeological site at 3rd and 10th overall, respectively, as well as both being popular excursions for the many large cruise ships that stop at Heraklion. Additionally, research from 2010-2015 records found that on average over 20% of visitors to Crete visited Knossos, via study by George Alexandrakis, Constantine Manasakism, and Nikolaos A. Kampanis, "Economic and Societal Impacts on Cultural Heritage Sites, Resulting from Natural Effects and Climate Change."

⁶⁵ In 2022, the Palace of Knossos archaeological site had an average of five thousand daily visitors during the summer season, via Paula Tsoni's "Record Numbers of Tourist Visit the Minoan Palace of Knossos on Crete."

⁶⁶ Interestingly, across the way from the bust of Evans now stands a bust of Minos Kalokairinos, the Greek archaeologist who began excavations at Knossos before Evans, one that is visibly younger than that of Evans. Additionally, while Evans's bust is labelled in English, making it accessible for the multi-lingual visitors, that of Kalokairinos is solely in Greek. These two busts can be seen as representative of the differences between the larger international association of Evans with Knossos and the more recent shift towards the reestablishment of Kalokairinos's role.

While modern scholars believe religion played a central role in the utilization and significance of the court complex, the archaeological site and informational material available contains little discussion of Minoan religion. Alongside the guidance signs posted throughout the site that provide information to the viewer, there are short informational books published in a variety of languages that are available for purchase at the site. In the two offered in English, religion is mentioned only briefly but present an image of a supreme Mother Goddess akin to Evans's interpretations, with one of the texts stating that "the main deity is always the Mother Goddess, who is portrayed in her different forms."⁶⁷ The central focus on a Mother Goddess with different forms suggests, albeit implicitly, an idea of a singular goddess, following Evans's interpretations. While the discussion of religion is limited, it is heavily influenced by Evans's Minoan Goddess. As such, both the site itself and the presentation of religion at the Palace of Knossos archaeological site maintains Evans's construction of Minoan civilization.

In conjunction with the archaeological site, Heraklion is also home to the Heraklion Archaeological Museum, housing the largest collection of Minoan artifacts both from Knossos as well as other major sites from throughout the island. While the archaeological site dedicates little time to the topic of religion, the museum displays a wide range of religious objects and presents a much larger picture of Minoan religion. Despite this more in-depth and nuanced discussion of religion, the presentation of the female divine is still based in Evans's interpretation of the singular female divine. Furthermore, both Minoan religion and the whole of civilization is repeatedly presented as related to modern European and Christian practices, again revealing the continued legacy of Evans's intellectual agenda.

⁶⁷ Sosso Logiadou-Platonos, *Knossos: The Palace of King Minos: A Survey of the Minoan Civilization* (Heraklion, Greece: Mystis Editions, 2008). See also Costis Davaras, *The Palace of Knossos: Brief Archaeological Guide* (Athens, Greece: Hannibal Publishing House, 1980).

Discussion of Minoan religion in the museum culminates in an exhibition room dedicated solely to religion, including a prominent display of the famous Snake Goddess figurines. Here the museum presents an in-depth depiction of religious objects and practices, with a particular focus on the epiphany cycle and ritual practices.⁶⁸ Throughout this exhibition room, however, there is a consistent usage of “the goddess” in the singular; while not capitalized in the style of Evans’s Goddess, this emphasis on a singular, archetypal goddess is strongly reminiscent of his interpretation. Certain plaques and descriptions go even further in descriptions of a singular goddess: “the goddess appears as a tiny figure hovering in the air, and then seated on a pedestal or in a shrine, or even sailing in a sea-going vessel.”⁶⁹ Here it is clear that the references to “the goddess” are meant to be interpreted as the same, singular goddess, just as Evans suggested.

There is only a singular, brief mention of any other deity in this exhibition room dedicated to Minoan religion, where it is mentioned that “the epiphany cycle also includes a male figure who seems to converse with the female deity as an equal.”⁷⁰ This interpretation of the male figure, whom Evans would refer to as the boy-god, does not even clearly suggest a divine status, again emphasizing the singularity of the female divinity. While there are no explicit claims that Minoan religion was essentially monotheistic, as Evans directly argues, there is a clear underlying narrative about the supremacy and singularity of the female goddess in Minoan religion. As such, it is evident how the legacy of Evans’s Minoan Goddess continues to be presented in this public academic setting.

Additionally, while there are fewer direct connections made between Minoan religion and Christian practices, there are still vestiges of these comparisons as well as a continued narrative

⁶⁸ This focus on ritual practices and the epiphany can be seen as influenced by the shift in scholarship exemplified in Nanno Marinatos’s 1993 text.

⁶⁹ Wall text, “The Epiphany Cycle,” Heraklion Archaeological Museum (AMH), Heraklion, Greece.

⁷⁰ Wall text, “The Epiphany Cycle,” AMH.

of Minoan civilization as being a direct predecessor to modern Europe. In regard to religion, the practice of offering human and animal figurines is compared to modern Orthodox votive offerings,⁷¹ a comparison reminiscent of the ways in which Evans frequently sought to construct Minoan beliefs and practices in relation to modern Christian beliefs and values. Similarly, the whole of Minoan civilization is repeatedly associated with modern Europe. In an infographic on the relevance of the Minoan world, the following is said: “This advanced Bronze Age civilisation, as showcased by Evans, included – as opposed to the civilizations of the East – features of modern European culture.”⁷² Not only is Minoan civilization being explicitly compared to modern Europe, but is put in direct contrast with Near Eastern contemporaries. This presentation and understanding reflects the success of Evans’s intellectual agenda in intentionally constructing Minoan civilization as European in nature and in opposition to their Near Eastern counterparts. From the archaeological site of Knossos to the Heraklion Archaeological Museum, the legacy and continued influence of Evans’s interpretations and ideas remain prominent in these spaces of public history.

Continued Relevance of Minoan Crete and the Future of Minoan Studies

When discussing the famous Snake Goddess statuette and why it became emblematic of Minoan civilization, art historian Kenneth Lapatin suggests the following:

Snakes bear symbolic connections in many cultures, be they beneficent or ominous. In conjunction with the female image... the results are especially powerful, for they combine in disturbing ways the comforting and familiar with the terrifying and repellent. Linking desire with fear, and attraction with repulsion, such images, often highly erotic, exercise a strong hold on the imagination.⁷³

⁷¹ Wall text, “From Small Communities to Towns,” AMH.

⁷² Wall text, “The Timeless Topicality of the Minoan World,” AMH.

⁷³ Kenneth Lapatin, *Mysteries of the Snake Goddess: Art, Desire, and the Forging of History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), 78-79.

In many ways, this captivation of our imagination that Lapatin describes in relation to the Snake Goddess statuettes applies to the whole of Minoan civilization. While Arthur Evans sought to present the ancient civilization as anticipating and recognizable to modern Europe, at its core it is a distinctly unique and unfamiliar culture. Arguably it is this duality, the imagined modernity combined with the ancient unfamiliarity, that continues to fascinate us. While the history of Minoan Crete plays a relatively small role in the grand scale of history, we continue to find relevance and interest in this ancient island civilization.

One representation of this sustained interest among the general public is in the continued effort of organizing and hosting presentations of Minoan history and material through museum exhibitions. The previously discussed Heraklion Archaeological Museum, the largest holder of Minoan artifacts, underwent a large-scale renovation between 2007 and 2014, reflective of the strong interest base.⁷⁴ Additionally, other museums have hosted major exhibitions of Minoan material; just recently in February 2023, the Ashmolean Museum, the very same museum that Evans held the role of Keeper of during his lifetime, opened a major, limited time exhibition of Minoan materials, entitled “Labyrinth: Knossos, Myth & Reality.”⁷⁵ While the museum permanently holds a sizable Minoan collection due to Evans’s former residency, this 2023 exhibit has been promoted as “the first UK exhibition to focus on Knossos,” reflecting the continued growth of interest in Minoan civilization abroad. The effort and organization by these museums towards hosting these presentations of Minoan history and material exemplifies the sustained relevance and interest in Minoan civilization in the public conscious.

⁷⁴ Data from 2017 placed the Heraklion Archaeological Museum as the third most popular museum in Greece with 545,555 visitors, following the Acropolis Museum and the National Archaeological Museum, both of which are in Athens. Via “Greek Museums, Sites See Rise in Visitors, Revenue in 2017.”

⁷⁵ “Labyrinth: Knossos, Myth & Reality,” Ashmolean Museum, <https://www.ashmolean.org/exhibition/labyrinth-knossos-myth-reality>.

Alongside spheres of public history, such as museums, Minoan history continues to be present in spaces of popular history. Books aimed at popular audiences, such as Eric Cline's *1177 B.C.: The Year Civilization Collapsed* or Margalit Fox's *The Riddle of The Labyrinth: The Quest to Crack an Ancient Code*, include discussion of Minoan Crete alongside larger narratives of ancient history.⁷⁶ Similarly, large-scale texts, such as David Graeber and David Wengrow's *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*, discuss Minoan civilization in their broad reassessments of history.⁷⁷ These textual uses of Minoan history in these various sources reflect a continued awareness and relevance of Minoan Crete beyond the strictly academic field, reaching larger audiences.

Aside from textual sources, Minoan imagery and history has been employed in artistic works that engage the general public, from art installations to video games. In 2016 British visual artist Elizabeth Price, in collaboration with the NYU Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, created an 18-minute video installation titled "A Restoration," inspired by the watercolor paintings and drawings from Evans's excavation.⁷⁸ This artistic work was in part driven by the theme of archaeology as invention, seeking to showcase Evans as an artist, rather than strictly an archaeologist, in his restorations. Similarly, representations of Minoan Crete have been seen in modern video games, such as the 2018 game *Assassin's Creed: Odyssey*, which included the Palace of Knossos as an explorable setting in the open-world video game. Depicted is a reimagining of what the site would have looked like as ruins during the 5th century B.C.E., with the myths and history of Minoan Crete playing a key role in the larger plot of the game. These

⁷⁶ Eric H. Cline, *1177 B.C.: The Year Civilization Collapsed* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Margalit Fox, *The Riddle of the Labyrinth: The Quest to Crack an Ancient Code* (New York: Ecco, 2013).

⁷⁷ David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (London: Allen Lane, 2021).

⁷⁸ See Jennifer Chi's *Restoring the Minoans: Elizabeth Price and Sir Arthur Evans* for further discussion of the exhibition.

artistic usages of Minoan history and imagery reflect the ways individuals continue to be inspired by Minoan Crete, creating and showcasing works that persist in giving meaning to the ancient civilization within the modern public consciousness.

As the excavator of Knossos, Arthur Evans and his work proved to be instrumental to this academic and public conceptualization of Minoan civilization. However, as it has been shown, his interpretations were constructed with an intellectual agenda and framework in mind, seeking to establish Minoan Crete as an ancient European civilization. As such, the continued utilization of and reliance on his ideas without questioning contributes to the perpetuation of Evans's Eurocentric ideals in the continued interpretation and reinterpretation of Minoan civilization, in both scholarly and introductory spaces. The perpetuation of these imperial and Eurocentric ideas further hinders the field and conception of Minoan Crete by frequently isolating them from their Near Eastern contemporaries, which both limits the understanding of the complexities of the Bronze Age world as well as serves as a detriment when trying to understand and interpret Minoan archaeological findings. By understanding the far-reaching impact of Evans's ideas and the ways in which his legacy persists both within and outside of academia, it is clear how modern conceptions and constructions of Minoan civilization are the direct product of Evans's imperial goals.

By understanding the pervasiveness and continued impact of Evans's intellectual agenda and framework, it becomes clear how important and necessary the processes of rethinking our conceptualizations of Minoan Crete and deconstructing his imperialist interpretations is for the future of the field. This necessary reexamination of the foundations of the field is in many ways a part of the larger conversations being had in both the study of classics and history as a whole. In the recent decades the field of classics has begun to change drastically, seeking to acknowledge

and move beyond its elite and highly Western roots, with these questions about the future of Classics being led by scholars such as Dan-el Padilla Peralta.⁷⁹ The practice of history as a whole has too had to face a reckoning, addressing the ways in which Eurocentric narratives are often centered and perpetuate the injustices of the past and present. This necessity for historical and academic revisionism is not limited to the study of ancient history, but part of a greater issue across many fields of history and classics.

As historians, it is vital to understand and acknowledge how previous ideas have supported and upheld imperialist and Eurocentric narratives and strive to continuously question and correct our interpretations. On reflection upon the role and job of historians, the historian Zachary Schrag has said: “we cannot identify all our biases, and future generations of historians will delight in pointing out the limits of our imaginations. But we can attempt some self-awareness and look for evidence that complicates the narratives that we have inherited.”⁸⁰ Our understanding of Minoan Crete will always be incomplete, influenced and biased by our contemporary worldviews and situations. Nevertheless, as Minoan civilization and religion is interpreted and reinterpreted throughout the generations, it is up to us to continuously seek to complicate the narratives we inherit.

⁷⁹ See Rachel Poser’s 2021 New York Times article featuring Padilla, “He Wants to Save Classics From Whiteness. Can the Field Survive?”

⁸⁰ Zachary M. Schrag, *The Princeton Guide to Historical Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 26.

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