





KEOS

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VOLUME XI

WALL PAINTINGS AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

THE NORTHEAST BASTION AT AYIA IRINI



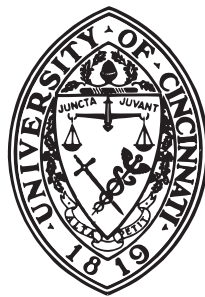
# KEOS

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## WALL PAINTINGS AND SOCIAL CONTEXT THE NORTHEAST BASTION AT AYIA IRINI

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*To the people of Kea, past and present,  
and  
to Doan, who has lived all his life with this book.*





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## Preface

This book presents the results of my study of the wall paintings from the Northeast Bastion at Ayia Irini, situating them within the wider social context of the island of Kea and the Aegean world. Like the spectacularly well-preserved town of Akrotiri on Thera, with which these paintings are contemporary, Ayia Irini thrived three-and-a-half-thousand years ago. But unlike Akrotiri, Ayia Irini was not protected by a layer of volcanic ash. When the site was excavated, the paintings had long since collapsed, fracturing into thousands of small pieces and becoming mixed with stones, broken pottery, and accumulated debris. This study attempts to bring the wall paintings back to life through the best-preserved fragments. Within the Northeast Bastion was a miniature frieze and, in the adjacent room, large-scale panels of plants. Human action set within townscapes, landscapes, and the sea presents a vivid account of the social life and environment of the people for whom this harbor town was vital within the trading network of the time. In this book I explore the social implications of the fascinating and often unique iconography, whose setting within a fortification wall is quite extraordinary.

Ayia Irini, excavated by the University of Cincinnati under the auspices of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens in the 1960s–1970s, was a small but crucially important settlement. “Kea” (Τζιά in demotic Greek) is the modern name of the island. “Keos” is the Classical name and the form used in the series title of the excavation reports. What the island was called during the Bronze Age is unknown. The wall paintings from Ayia Irini were first studied by Katherine Abramovitz Coleman and presented in her doctoral thesis and two articles.<sup>1</sup> In the 1980s, Elizabeth Schofield, then director of the site, invited me (along with

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<sup>1</sup> Coleman 1970, 1973; Abramovitz 1980. She wrote under her married name (Coleman) in the 1970s and subsequently under her maiden name (Abramovitz).

the late Ellen Davis) to work on the wall paintings for final publication. As my focus I chose the Northeast Bastion.<sup>2</sup>

In the way of large projects, this book has a history, yet longer and more layered than some. I began work in the mid 1980s with several summers of fieldwork on the island, during which time the study drawings, drafts of the reconstructions, and the photographs were undertaken. Teaching and other projects then intervened, as did the captivating childhood of my son. Such an enormous undertaking as this needed a focused period of work to bring it to a conclusion. It was not until 2007 that I was ready to resume work on Kea. Photographs and drawings were digitized, graphic editing was started, and in the ensuing years I developed and painted new reconstructions—visualizations, as I prefer to call them—in the midst of the long process of writing. By the time it was all finished, preparation of the book had taken more than ten years of concentrated work spread over a period of three decades.

The book is organized in three main parts, preceded by a prologue, which provides the framework for what follows, and followed by an epilogue, which draws some broad conclusions.

The Prologue defines my methodology, both in the intellectual journey that leads to interpretation, and, more briefly, in the process of reconstructing fragments into pictures. The first part defines my approach to contextual analysis within the framework of reflective awareness. The central precept is the symbiotic relationship between wall paintings, architecture, and human action and response. Through their structure and context, images play a role in sociocultural memory. Following these underlying principles, I attempt to situate my own intellectual development and theoretical positions that led to the method of iconographic interpretation that I practice, delineating how the structure of the book reflects the process of interpretation and chronicling the path that led from fragments to the visualization of scenes.

Part I sets the scene physically and culturally. Chapter 1 (which stands alone) situates the wall paintings within their geographic, sociological, and architectural contexts, raising the central issues of “Minoanization,” interisland trade, and cultural dynamics, looking at the structure of the town of Ayia Irini, then focusing on the Northeast Bastion and the archaeological, architectural, and chronological contexts of the wall paintings (Figs. 1.1–1.7; Table 1.1). The chapter ends with a summary of the other paintings from the site, situating them in relation to those from the Northeast Bastion in terms of date and content.

Part II forms the core of the book with the presentation and discussion of the wall paintings. The first section deals with the Miniature Frieze; the second, shorter section deals with the Plant Panels. Each chapter ends with a summary, for ease of reference. The various elements of a painting are, of course, inextricably interconnected, yet from an archaeological position and through an iconographer’s lens, in aiming to understand the culture through the texts of its images it is necessary to analyze those elements before interpreting the whole. As such, prior to presenting the visualizations of the scenes, Chapters 2–6 examine the individual elements of the Miniature Frieze—human figures, vehicles, buildings, animals, landscape—discussion being followed by the respective catalogs (see Figs. 2.1–6.2;

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2 Preliminary publications: Morgan 1990, 1995b, 1998, 2013; Marinatos and Morgan 2005. Ellen Davis, sadly, died before she was able to complete her work on the Ayia Irini paintings, which focused on House A. In a preliminary article she discussed the brushwork of fragments from House A and Building M (Davis 2007). Publication of the paintings of Ayia Irini outside the Northeast Bastion will follow future study. An overview of their contents is given in Chapter 1, pp. 38–40, based on a survey of the material that we undertook in the 1980s.

Pls. 1–51). The human figures have been given precedence as Chapter 2, since human figures drive the narrative and define the “social.” It is figures—their gestures, clothing, actions, and interactions—that vividly reveal the social life of the time. Vehicles and buildings (Chs. 3, 4) are structures that shape aspects of human action and signal status, place, and occasion, as, in different ways, do animals (Ch. 5). Landscape (Ch. 6) provides the environmental context for the action, is crucial in setting the scene, and establishes the threads that link and separate the scenes. Landscape also occurs as a subject in itself, and its importance for establishing meaning within the paintings cannot be underestimated. By far the largest number of fragments are of land and sea. It was in this order that I studied the fragments, since how the environment holds everything together only becomes clear after seeing what surrounds the individual elements, thereby enabling one to bring pieces together into compositions.

Chapter 7, “Visualizing the Past,” brings together the various elements of the Miniature Frieze in considering composition. Here, 25 illustrations (Figs. 7.1–7.25) are offered as visualizations of how parts of the paintings might have looked, each discussed in some detail. They range from single fragments of figures, through small groups of figures or buildings, to large scenes such as the Town by a River, Cauldrons and Ships Scene, Men by a River, Deer and Dogs, the Marsh, and the Rocky Landscape. Each illustration distinguishes the fragments from the reconstruction and is accompanied by a visual record of those fragments used. “Cauldrons and Ships with Rocky Landscape” (Fig. 7.26) brings together two of the scenes in a watercolor painting that suggests how the action may have been integrated in its setting. In “A View of the Room of the Miniature Frieze” that follows, a visualization of how room N.20 might have looked is presented, and suggestions are made for how the various scenes are likely to have been related to one another (Figs. 7.27, 7.28). The concluding part of the chapter considers how the frieze might have been situated on the walls and what form of narrative structure might have been in play.

In Chapter 8, the focus shifts to the Plant Panels of room N.18, located adjacent to the room with the Miniature Frieze. The paintings are first considered within their architectural setting, followed by individual consideration of the Bramble and Myrtle and the Grasses and Leaves (Pls. 52–63). Significance of the plants from a social perspective is central to the discussion. In a somewhat different order from the chapters on the Miniature Frieze in Part IIA (in which the visualizations form a separate chapter), the discussion is followed directly by presentation of the eight illustrations reconstructing sections of the Plant Panels (Figs. 8.1–8.8), along with a visualization of how the room might have looked (Figs. 8.9, 8.10), followed by the catalog.

Miscellaneous fragments not included in the previous chapters are cataloged in Appendix A (Pls. 64–67).

Part III is about the process of production of the wall paintings. In Chapter 9, “Materials, Techniques, and Pigments,” the constituents and application of plaster are examined (Pls. 68–74), the long-standing debate on *fresco* versus *secco* technique is aired and some conclusions are offered.<sup>3</sup> The pigments used in the paintings are then discussed, based in particular on the results of the analyses

<sup>3</sup> The appellation “Fresco” for specific Aegean paintings (as in “Procession Fresco,” “Spring Fresco”) has been retained in this book only because it is now part of the common language of Aegean studies.

of Vassilis Perdikatsis (App. B and Table B.1) and related to what is known of the use of pigments in contemporary sites. The chapter ends with comments on some pieces of ocher found on the site.

Chapter 10, "Color and Artistic Performance," offers insights into the process of painting and the choices made by the artists as they built the images. It begins with a discussion on the important issue of color; then it examines the planning of the scenes through guide lines and organization of the surface of the wall, the sequence in which the paints were applied, and the use of colors in creating the composition (Figs. 10.1, 10.2).

Part IV, "Paintings as Cultural Signifiers," broadens the perspective to examine the implications of my analysis of the wall paintings in terms of the wider Aegean world and social context. Chapter 11, "Intercultural Connections," begins with an inquiry into the phenomenon of miniature paintings in the Aegean, focusing on the relationship of paintings to architectural space in an attempt to understand the functions of the rooms in the different locations in which miniature paintings occur (Figs. 11.1–11.6). This is followed by a review of craft and iconography as discussed in the book, here focusing on what they reveal about intercultural relations. The broad picture of interrelationships in the Aegean is then examined, revealing insights into the crucially significant social role of miniature paintings. This is followed by thoughts on the artists of the Ayia Irini paintings, along with the elusive question of commission, and what it was that gave rise to the building of the Northeast Bastion with its rich iconographic cycle.

Chapter 12, "Feasts, Festivals, and Social Context," builds on this investigation to focus on the social significance of the wall paintings. The importance of feasts and festivals in the social dynamics of the ancient world and the allusive nature of the iconography of feasting provide a conceptual framework for interpreting the cumulative evidence of wall paintings, architecture, artifacts, and cultural geography at Ayia Irini (Figs. 12.1–12.3). The socially cohesive role of feasts, festivals, and gift exchange at Kea is considered in terms of the broader network of Aegean Bronze Age relations.

In the Epilogue, "Wall Paintings and Memory," the wall paintings in their social context are seen as a catalyst and chronicler of elite cohesion and as a stimulus for sociocultural memory.

This is a long book, in which presentation of new material is combined with discussion and ideas of interest to a wider audience. Much of the central part of the book is for specialist reading, which those who are interested will explore. Those who wish to follow the intellectual journey are referred to the Prologue; those concerned with the visualizations will find explanatory text in the Prologue and Chapters 7 and 8. For those who want the crux of the matter, I recommend the following: Part I, Chapter 1, which sets the scene; the summaries at the end of each of the analytical chapters on the wall paintings in Parts II and III, along with the illustrations in Chapters 7 and 8; and Part IV, which broadens the discussion, situating the paintings in terms of intercultural connections (Ch. 11) and social context (Ch. 12 and the Epilogue).

Illustrations are presented as photographs, drawings, and paintings, each shown at a specific scale. The plates at the back of the book present the most significant fragments at 1:1 scale, arranged according to subject in the order of the chapters and within each category according to placements within the reconstructions. In the catalogs, photographs of all the fragments included in the book appear at 1:2 scale, paired (in the case of the miniatures) with the study drawings. The visualizations appear at 1:3 in Chapters 7 and 8, the largest scale that would fit

the book page in the case of the larger illustrations. Each is accompanied by outlines of the fragments with their identifying numbers to enable the reader to locate them with ease.

Numbers in bold in the text correspond to the catalog entries and run continuously through the chapters. The contexts of the fragments are given in the catalog entries and in Chapter 7 with the visualizations. Since the methodological approach involves analyzing the elements in the fragments prior to presentation of the visualizations, the figure numbers for Chapter 7 appear in the text of Chapters 2–6 after the catalog number only when the discussion touches on aspects that are clarified through the visualizations.

Concordances A and B list all of the Miniature Frieze fragments studied, ordered, respectively, by context and catalog numbers, accompanied by brief descriptions of their subject matter, plate numbers, and Chapter 7 figure numbers, and an indication of whether the fragment belonged to an edge of the wall paintings. These concordances make it possible for the reader to see at a glance into which (if any) of the visualizations in Chapter 7 a particular fragment has been placed. Concordance C correlates the catalog numbers used in the present work with those of the earlier publications of Abramovitz Coleman.

At the time of writing, the fragments are housed in the storerooms of the Archaeological Museum in Chora on Kea. The painted plasters from the rest of the site, also stored there, are briefly discussed in Chapter 1. It is envisaged that they will be the subject of a future study.



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## List of Abbreviations

avg.	average	LH	Late Helladic
ca.	approximately	LM	Late Minoan
cat.	catalog	m	meter(s)
cm	centimeter(s)	MBA	Middle Bronze Age
CMS	<i>Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel</i>	MC	Middle Cycladic
col.	color	MM	Middle Minoan
EC	Early Cycladic	m asl	meters above sea level
EDX	energy dispersive X-ray analysis	no(s).	number(s)
esp.	especially	opp.	opposite
frag.	fragment	SEM	scanning electron microscopy
km	kilometer(s)	SEM-EDX	scanning electron microscopy-energy dispersive X-ray analysis
H.	height	th.	thickness
LB	Late Bronze	TT	Theban Tomb
LBA	Late Bronze Age	w.	width
LC	Late Cycladic	XRD	X-ray powder diffraction

