FEELING THROUGH THE BODY
Gesture in Cretan Bronze Age Religion

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INTRODUCTION

The origins of this paper lay in an archaeological problem: the understanding of the variety of gestures of clay figurines we had excavated from a mountain peak sanctuary of the Cretan Bronze Age. As we discuss in greater detail below, such figurines from other peak sanctuaries, portraying the worshippers at the sanctuary, have been usually interpreted as representing gestures of worship, adoration, and supplication. While understandable within the conventions of applying familiar western religious norms to the reading of ancient religion, such an interpretation seemed to undervalue the essential physicality of the figurine gestures. Moreover the sanctuary findspot placed the physicality of the gestures firmly within the context of ritual action, the understanding of which has benefitted enormously from contemporary anthropological and archaeological interest in the body.

 Archaeological thinking through the body, however, often falls victim to the Cartesian mind/body duality it purports to resolve. Bodies are perceived as texts to be read, or as little more than mutable mental constructs. The Cartesian, and ultimately, Augustinian and Platonic, subjection of body to mind, is simply replayed in post-modern style.

By contrast, in this paper we have chosen to feel through the body, by addressing the fundamental physicality of gesture, as a conduit, not to ritual action, but to religious experience. In the context of an ‘embodied archaeology’ our interests lie less in the body as a site/text to be classified, read or deconstructed, and more in the ‘feeling body’ as a driving force in ritual behaviour and experience (Asad 1997, Stoller 1997)
RITUAL ACTION IN MINOAN CRETE

The first major work written on the Bronze Age civilization of Crete, Sir Arthur Evans' *The Mycenaean Tree and Pillar Cult and its Mediterranean relations* (1901) set the scene for what has been a consistent thematic focus in Aegean Bronze Age archaeology, the study of Minoan religion. Evans' seminal analysis, further elaborated in his extensive synthesis of Minoan civilization, *The Palace of Minos at Knossos*, also established the parameters of the primary evidence, the rich and diverse iconography of Minoan art: wall-paintings, seals and sealings, terracotta sculpture (Evans 1921–36; hereafter *PM* I–IV). While deities, belief systems, socio-religious interaction have all received due attention, the aspect of Minoan religion that has most consistently interested scholars has been: ritual.

In the past twenty years two key concepts have emerged as the fundamental starting points for the analysis of Minoan ritual. First, there is the notion that what we see in art is to some degree a record, albeit idealized and symbolized, of enacted events such as processions, sacrifices, libations, offerings, music and dance, i.e. what was really done (Cameron 1978, 1987, Hägg 1985). Secondly, Warren has articulated the notion of ritual action (Warren 1988). Borrowing from the vocabulary of the later Greek mystery cults, especially Eleusis, he defined three elements of ritual action as things said or sung (*legomena*) things done (*dromena*), and things displayed (*deiknumena*), adding a fourth element, things envisioned in epiphany. This creates a structure by which ritual action becomes the driving force of Minoan religion, rather than the incidence of intellectually defined belief. The raw material of Minoan ritual action is, fortunately for scholarship, presented in at times sophisticated, interactive, almost narrative scenes. Thus as well as recognizing obvious rituals of sacrifice and libation, we can also go some way towards interpreting a few purposes of ritual, such as epiphany (Hägg 1986, Niemeier 1989), rites of passage (Marinatos 1984:61–84, Peatfield 1995); healing (Myres 1902–3, Peatfield 1990).

The perception of ritual action as fundamental to Minoan religion is therefore established and accepted. Action can, however, take on at least two dimensions of meaning: the external and the internal. By ‘external’ we mean that an action is purely symbolic, done for the sake of form and tradition, to express ideas that are only ever intellectually defined. In a sense, it is action as play-acting. Even the most superficial actor is aware, however, of the powerful emotional force of drama, that what you do affects how you feel and what you experience (Turner 1982, 1991, Horton 1994). This is what we mean by the ‘internal’ or expressive dimension of action: that physical or