

Narrative Cycles on the Hagia Triada Sarcophagus

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The Hagia Triada Sarcophagus (“HTS”) is one of the most intriguing records of Minoan visual text discovered to date. Durability of material, fresco-style painting technique and complexity of narrative program all combine to suggest that this object represented an exceptional set of events. Although the fact that the object has been identified as a sarcophagus links the imagery with a funerary context, the imagery employed by the Hagia Triada artist does not necessarily support an exclusively funerary reading, since sacrificial and processional scenes are also present on Cretan non-funerary objects.

Whitney Davis states, “irrespective of the possible votive, ceremonial, commemorative, ritual, magical, documentary, exchange, propagandistic, or other functions of the decorated objects, they have a *representational* function.”¹

While it is possible to identify the individual narrative zones disjunctively on the HTS, determined by direction and figurative action, it is also equally possible to read the HTS as presenting an all-encompassing, “global” view or *fabula*. This reading treats the HTS decoration as a complex narrative. The relationships of the various narrative zones presented on the HTS can be read cyclically, as is suggested by an infinite code of movement found in the rosettes and spirals framing the panels on the sarcophagus itself. The principal themes suggested by such a reading could include life, death, sacrifice, homage, passage and regeneration. This essay traces elements of representation that appear in the four sides of the HTS and offers comprehensive diagrammatical readings of possible narrative cycles.

In analyzing the narration of the Narmer Palette, Whitney Davis argued that the images were organized to be “read” in a specific way.² The *fabula* can evolve from these images in any

¹ W. Davis, “Narrativity and the Narmer Palette,” *Narrative and Event in Ancient Art*, ed. P. Holliday (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1993) 20.

² Davis, “Narrativity” 19.

order determined by the viewer who invests a personal logic in the narrative. Individual scenes link together in a concatenation of passages which function for the viewer as a referential whole.

Each image requires the viewer to:

- 1) reorient the object to determine beginning or entry point
- 2) discover logic of *fabula* within visually discrete zones
- 3) determine mutual relationships between zones using placement of animal or human figures, bodily orientation and directions of glances
- 4) physically or imaginatively move object to identify relationship of zones

This essay endeavors to apply Davis's concept of "active narrativization of an image through its real or notional manipulation and transformation" to achieve an understanding of the narrative program on the HTS.³

Situational Details of HTS

A brief examination of the details of the HTS discovery site is sufficient to determine that there were funerary aspects to the function of the sarcophagus. Long dates the HTS to the Neopalatial or beginning of Postpalatial period, around the time of the destruction of the palace at Knossos.⁴ The HTS was situated in a tomb-like structure, accompanied by an undecorated terracotta larnax. The raised stone walls of the structure suggest that it may have been the foundation for a wooden structure, perhaps similar to the building illustrated on the HTS.

Two skulls lay in the HTS. Human bones, a razor and a seal were found in the larnax. Other items found inside the structure were a serpentine bowl, a large bronze razor, triton shell

³ Davis, "Narrativity" 28.

⁴ C. Long, *The Ayia Triadha Sarcophagus*. (Göteborg: Paul Astroms, 1974) 13.

pieces and parts of a female figurine. These items, which were of Cretan origin, may have been ceremonial or part of the grave goods of the deceased.⁵

Although the scenes on the HTS do not specifically depict mourning processions or prothesis scenes as on Mycenaean larnakes, the presence of bones in a tomb-like structure with grave goods suggest that the HTS was an object associated with burial. The imagery on the surface might therefore reflect natural and supernatural scenes associated with Minoan beliefs about death. The relatively sophisticated fresco painting technique and use of limestone in the construction of the HTS may link it to a wealthier, perhaps prominent level of society.⁶

Unlike Egyptian sarcophagi, Minoan larnakes usually had a series of holes drilled in the bottom, perhaps to allow bodily fluids to drain off or the tissues to desiccate. While the painstaking mummification of Egyptian dead suggests a belief in a type of physical resurrection in their afterlife, Minoan culture is thought to have minimized the importance of the physical body. After decomposition, Minoan bones were apparently removed either to one side of the sarcophagus, onto the floor of the tomb itself, or simply accumulated into another larnax which then served as ossuary.⁷

Literal Reading of Direction - Chart 1

Since the North and East sides of the HTS were found facing the door of the tomb structure, Long labels the north side the “front”. This face is the one most frequently illustrated in other studies of the HTS. Long’s usage of compass points to name the sides is adopted for the purpose of this essay, rather than the potentially hierarchical “front” and “back” labels. In the writer’s view, the use of the “front” as the more “popular” illustration of the HTS reinforces an

⁵ Long, *Ayia* 14.

⁶ Fragments from stone sarcophagi were found at Kefallenia and Cyprus. Long, *Ayia* 16.

⁷ Long, *Ayia* 18.

unnecessarily one-dimensional interpretation of the wrapped figure, processional and altar scene as literal representations of funerary customs in Minoan society.

C. Long has stated that the HTS “remains unique in the specificity of its funerary iconography.”⁸ W. Davis points to the fact that often complex images from ancient works are reproduced individually and out of context from the entire series of images that they belong to.⁹ This linear reading is in fact a type of editing process, which conveys an unnecessarily limited idea of the significance of the work as a whole. By exhibiting separate sequences from the HTS and not examining the “pictorial mechanics,”¹⁰ a comprehensive meaning is not discernible and may be lost.

The six sides of the HTS offer a total of thirteen episodes of movement and narrative information. Directionality is suggested by the way that a viewer might be required to circumnavigate the sarcophagus, either clockwise or counter-clockwise, to achieve a complete view, either physically or in the mind’s eye.

A literal reading of the six sides of the HTS is set out in chart No. 1, illustrating the movement and basic action of each of the following thirteen “episodes”:

- A. The Figure (male) observes proceedings
- B. Procession of 3 figures (male) carry 2 bulls and boat
- C. Figure (female) pours offering, figure (female) carrying baskets, figure (male) plays lyre
- D. Two birds standing on double axes, ready to fly
- E. Processional with 5 figures (females)
- F. Slain Bull, 2 goats and pipe player (male)
- G. Dying Bull looks out of frame, at viewer

⁸ L. Morgan, “A Minoan Larnax from Knossos.” (*The Annual of the British School at Athens* 82, 1987) 192.

⁹ W. Davis, *Masking the Blow*. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1992) 38.

¹⁰ Davis, *Masking* 38.

- H. Figure (female) at altar making offering in basket
- I. Bird on double axe, having landed or making ready to fly
- J. 2 figures (females) in chariot pulled by 2 griffins
- K. Large Flying Bird
- L. Figures (2 + males) walking
- M. 2 figures (males) in chariot pulled by 1 agrimi

North Side

The North side is divided into four separate directional zones. Starting from the far right, an arresting figure (A), wrapped in a cloak and without articulated arms or feet, gazes down the length of the side. This character might be identified with the actual deceased, the spirit or soul of the deceased, or with an actual deity or the image of a deity. J.P. Nauert asserts that “the identification of this figure is of utmost importance to the understanding of the iconography, the key to his identity does not seem to lie within the complex compositions of either of the two longer sides of the sarcophagus.”¹¹

Although Nauert goes on to suggest that the Figure is a vegetation god associated with the Hyakinthia cult, the reliability of any one reading of this character cannot be determined from the visual or historical information presently available about Minoan art. The Figure’s position on the sarcophagus which seems to command much of the action, his enigmatic presence and compelling gaze can be used as an entry point into the narrative cycles of the HTS. For the purpose of this discussion, the character will be termed the “Figure” in the development of the following themes.

A structure with spiral borders, similar to the edges of the HTS, is situated directly behind the Figure. An immature or non-flowering tree and set of three stairs appear directly in front of him. S. Hiller states that stepped structures are a “most exceptional element” in Aegean

¹¹ J.P.Nauert, “The Hagia Triada Sarcophagus: An Iconographical Study.” (*Antike Kunst, Heft 1*, 1965) 91.

art and as a comparison with Egyptian art, the appearance of stairs “provides transition from one area to another, and symbolically between one state and the next.”¹²

Long compares the HTS Figure with Egyptian scenes in which a mummy stands supported in front of tomb-like structures, often with a large plant or tree in front of them¹³ (Fig. 1). The Figure’s head is level with the chins of the males in the procession and he is either standing or sinking into lower ground. Some scholars believe that he may represent the deceased, a deity or the spirit of the deceased.¹⁴

A procession of three males (B) carrying two bull figures and a boat shape occupies a central location on the HTS and moves in a counter-clockwise direction towards the Figure. The format of this processional has been linked with Keftiu carrying bull statuettes on Egyptian caskets.¹⁵ Terracotta animal figures have been discovered at various Cretan altar sites and often Minoan rhyta and larnakes feature bulls with blunt horns and a net design on their backs, whereas the HTS bulls possess a spotted hide and no horns.¹⁶ Similar in posture to the animals in bull leaping scenes, the HTS bulls are illustrated in a fully extended position.

The initial gift offered to the Figure is a crescent-shaped white boat, which may have signified a mode of transportation to the afterworld, while the bulls may have represented the necessary food for the voyage.¹⁷ Watrous suggests that the illustrations on larnakes of ships, deer, goats, bulls, chariots and Nilotic landscapes refer to the afterworld.¹⁸ As an example of a “vessel,” which carries the definition of both container and sea craft, the Minoan sarcophagus functioned on literal and symbolic levels.

¹² S. Hiller, “Egyptian Elements on the Hagia Triada Sarcophagus”(Betancourt and Karageorghis, 1999) 367.

¹³ Long, *Ayia* 45.

¹⁴ Long, *Ayia* 45.

¹⁵ Long, *Ayia* 47.

¹⁶ N. Marinatos, *Minoan Sacrificial Ritual: Cult Practice and Symbolism* (Göteborg: Paul Aströms, 1986) 31.

¹⁷ Long, *Ayia* 46.

¹⁸ L.V. Watrous, “The Origin and Iconography of the Late Minoan Painted Larnax”, (*Hesperia, Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens*, 60, 1991) 296.

On the left of the north side (C), a male lyre player, a female basket carrier and a female pouring a libation onto an altar decorated with double axes, all face in a clockwise direction. The variety of costume on the HTS ranges from long gowns and short robes to “hide” or sheep skin skirts. Different types of clothing may indicate hierarchical status in Minoan society or the supernatural world and a similar array of outfits is found on Cretan and mainland frescoes.¹⁹ Similar hairstyles, headdresses and the addition of wavy “streamers” also have comparanda in Minoan art and may designate status.²⁰ Similarities between the female pouring the liquid and the *potnia theron* with double axes on lentoid seals have led to her being labeled a goddess.²¹ The liquid that she is pouring into the receptacle and possibly onto the ground below, may be either wine, water or blood from the sacrifice taking place on the middle panel on the South side.

Long comments that since large and smaller bronze axes have been discovered at Hagia Triada, the pouring scene on the HTS could represent an actual ceremony that occurred at the village.²² B.C. Dietrich argues that the double axes may represent not only the ritual of sacrifice, but also the theme of renewal. He suggests that the “contrast between life and death, or rather the idea of life from death, seems to be signaled quite explicitly by the abundance of green foliage wound about the axe stands” on the North Side.²³ S. Hiller suggests that the green colour on the uprights of the axes gives them a “tree-like appearance” and “they should be seen as abbreviated, symbolic substitutes for trees.”²⁴

On top of the set of double axes (D) stand two yellow and black birds ready to take flight. The anticipated movement of their flight would take them in a clockwise direction. Birds often

¹⁹ Long, *Ayia* 38.

²⁰ Long, *Ayia* 38.

²¹ Long, *Ayia* 36.

²² Long, *Ayia* 35.

²³ B.C. Dietrich, “The Instrument of Sacrifice” (Hägg and Marinatos, 1988) 39.

²⁴ Hiller, “Egyptian” 366.

appear in Cretan art sitting on columns, altars, horns of consecration and perched on female figures.²⁵ L. Morgan suggests that a bird may have “functioned as a mediator, whether between the world of human and divine or between the world of the living and the dead.”²⁶ Marinatos argues that there is no evidence that birds are the “epiphany of the deity” but simply “messengers of the gods, signifying their future arrival or goodwill.”²⁷

The central space on the North side features the image of a simulated animal sacrifice. This scene with miniature bulls corresponds with the scene of a real bull sacrifice on the South side. The interconnection of these two sacrifice scenes through the centre of the sarcophagus impresses on the viewer the importance of this act and symbolically links the contents of the coffin with the ceremony depicted on both sides.

The altar, which might be considered one of the most significant features of the site, is placed to the far left and does not warrant a central placement. Seals often illustrate the altar off to the side with the goddess or personage in the dominant place as in a gold ring from Midea (Fig. 2). In contrast, Long cites a gold ring from Mycenae Tomb 91 with females surrounding a tree shrine (Fig. 3) and a female and shrine in the center of a Pylos ring.²⁸

South Side

The South side is divided into five separate directional episodes (E, F, G, H, I). A viewer entering the tomb could not see the actual bull sacrifice on the South side in the position the sarcophagus was found in the tomb. Only the simulated animal sacrifice or gift presentation was on view. But there is no reason to believe that this was the only way it could be viewed, since it

²⁵ Morgan, “Larnax” 184.

²⁶ Morgan, “Larnax” 184.

²⁷ N. Marinatos, “The Imagery of Sacrifice: Minoan and Greek.” (In Hägg and Marinatos, 1988) 11.

²⁸ Long, *Ayia* 39.

could have been carried in a procession or on view outside the tomb. Certainly the original artist and the patron, or patron's family at least, would have viewed the entire program of images.

On the left side of the South face, a large portion of the plaster is missing but it appears to show a procession of five females (E), moving in a counter-clockwise direction. This group is led by a female whose hands are extended to touch the dying bull. The size of the bull makes it the most prominent feature on the South side, a factor that may reflect the significance of the bull in Minoan culture and their respect for the animal and the ritual of its death. The act of sacrifice of a huge animal conveys both mastery over the animal world and affluence, since the expense of a large sacrifice might be funded by a wealthy and prominent individual or group.

Two goats, under the table, face in a counter-clockwise direction (F). Behind the bull is a male double-pipe player moving in a similar direction. Marinatos suggests that the flute music accompanying the bull sacrifice might be piercing, while the music produced by the lyre on the North Side would be soothing.²⁹ A lyre, a priest, large flying birds and the horns of consecration were illustrated on a pyxis from Kalamia and Marinatos suggests that here the "pictorial cultic code" is showing a winter-spring cycle or death and renewal (Fig. 4).³⁰

The central display on the South side (G) is the active sacrifice of a large, spotted bull tied to a wood table. Although the body of the bull faces in a counter-clockwise direction, the gaze of the dying bull confronts the viewer directly. Blood flows from the bull's neck into a receptacle that appears to be buried in the ground. The process of allowing blood to flow into a particular spot may have indicated the sanctity of that location.³¹ A Minoan wall painting illustrating bull sports at Tell el Dab'a, Egypt, has a similar frontally facing bull engaging the

²⁹ N. Marinatos, *Minoan Religion: Ritual, Image and Symbol*. (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1993) 35.

³⁰ Marinatos, *Religion* 139.

³¹ Marinatos, *Sacrificial* 27.

viewer (Fig 5). A seal from the Iraklion museum features an impaled, front facing bull and a bent tree which may have had the function of marking a sacred spot in relation to sacrifice. On a gold ring from Vapheio, the elements of female participant, a tree, a front facing bucranium and double axe may be indicators of the life and death cycle (Fig 6). L Morgan suggests that “the dimension of renewed life is perceivable in many of the scenes of death in which frontal face plays a role.”³²

On the right, facing in a counter-clockwise direction (H), a woman makes an offering in front of a stand or altar, which is decorated with an S-spiral pattern. Long suggests that the purpose of the libation ceremonies, performed on both sides, was to obtain the favor of the deities in whose honor it was performed and thereby to ensure for the deceased a safe journey to the afterworld.³³

A black bird (I), which sits on top of a double axe with a slightly raised wing, is ready to take off in a clockwise direction. On the far right is a structure, decorated with the S-spiral pattern, with four horns of consecration on top and a vigorous tree growing up from the middle. The combination of the altar and structure may denote a significant site, but similar to the North side, this image is not situated in a central position and placed on the far right of the South side. The tree is an obvious symbol of seasonal regeneration. Marinatos suggests Minoan belief embraced the cyclic symbol of the tree as a sacred object. She states, “its presence on the constructed shrine signifies prosperity and the arrival of the divinity.”³⁴

³²L. Morgan, “Frontal Face and the Symbolism of Death in Aegean Glyptic” (*Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel Beiheft 5*, 1995) 147.

³³ Long, *Ayia* 68.

³⁴ N. Marinatos, “The Tree as a Focus of Ritual Action in Minoan Glyptic Art” (*Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel Beiheft 3*, 1989) 142.

East Side

Two female figures (J) ride in a chariot drawn by two griffins in a clockwise direction. On entering the tomb, the east side would be the first scene on the HTS to be noticed. The use of the griffin as a supernatural creature might indicate that the figures are deities. L. Morgan states that human or divine figures are uncommon on Cretan larnakes and suggests that the ends “may have been considered the appropriate position for a divine protector of the dead.”³⁵

A spotted hide covers the body of the chariot and links it with the bull sacrifice on the south side. Bull hide was also depicted on figure-eight shields and the cabins of ships. Marinatos suggests that the bull sacrifice and its repeated use implies an element of renewal.³⁶ Dissimilar in size and appearance to the birds on the North side, a large bird (K) with long legs and bright plumage, flies in a counter-clockwise direction above the griffin.

West End

This side is divided into 2 registers, moving clockwise. The upper section (L) is missing most of the plaster, but the feet of two male figures appear to be walking forward. Space would allow for three or four men to be present on this register.

In the lower register (M), two male figures drive an agrimi-drawn chariot, which are a parallel to the griffin chariot scene on the other end. The mode of transportation and the type of animals, griffin and agrimi, may reference the supernatural status of the drivers and travel to the afterworld. W. Burkert points out that when wheels and chariots are illustrated, “gods and goddesses on chariots are common everywhere, whether we look at Indo-European, Oriental, or Greek evidence. One might be tempted to say: no god without a chariot.”³⁷

³⁵ Morgan, “Larnax” 192.

³⁶ Marinatos, *Religion* 58.

³⁷ W. Burkert, “*Katagógia-Anagógia* and the Goddess of Knossos.” (Hägg and Marinatos, 1988) 83.

By harnessing the agrimi, an essentially wild animal, the drivers are shown in control of both the natural world and of the direction of their destination. Agrimi are commonly illustrated on Minoan larnakes in hunting scenes which illustrate man's control over death by slaying a powerful animal. Marinatos states that hunting "is an activity that links life and death".³⁸ The illustration of hunting on funerary vessels might suggest leisure and wealth in mortal life and an idyllic pastime in the afterlife. Similarly, this scene which controls the agrimi may indicate a presumed continuum of activity for the deceased.

Watrous states that a "new" scene featuring the chariot carrying the deceased to the afterworld, appears in Late Minoan IIIB larnakes, a convention that may have been borrowed from Mycenaean art.³⁹ The afterworld, which according to Watrous, is represented by birds and palm trees, may be reached by a sea journey. Mycenaean larnakes illustrate scenes with chariots making their way over a sea of wavy borders, similar to the undulating lines that appear on both ends of HTS. Marine imagery in combination with goats may also place the action in the afterworld, according to Watrous. He suggests that on a LMIIIB larnax from Kavrochori, the association of goats, an argonaut, a palm tree, an aerial view of a chariot and wavy lines signal a journey by sea to the afterworld (Fig. 7).⁴⁰

Bathtub larnakes were commonly decorated with sea imagery on the exterior and wavy lines on the interior, which simulates the movement of the deceased over the waves. On a terracotta bathtub vessel from Milatos, the interior where the deceased would be placed, features bivalves, fish and wavy lines (Fig. 8). Marinatos suggests that the "interior of the larnax becomes

³⁸ N. Marinatos, "Minoan and Mycenaean Larnakes: A Comparison" (*Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique, Supplement 30*, 1997) 284.

³⁹ Watrous, "Origin" 301.

⁴⁰ Watrous, "Origin" 299.

the sea” which symbolized the actual burial at sea of the deceased.⁴¹ In addition, it is noted that mollusks were an appropriate symbol for a coffin since they have a regenerative quality.⁴²

Narrative Reading of Direction - Chart 2

This geometric or linear reading builds on the directional plan in Chart 1 and infers a narrative sequence from linking the individual directional zones.

Defining terrestrial and celestial activities and their connotations as mortal and supernatural activities may produce another possible layer of narrative in this reading. The central axis point in the middle of the sarcophagus bisects the connection between the real and simulated bull sacrifices on opposing sides of the HTS and at the same time, binds the deceased with the events of the narrative.

According to this suggested reading, the linear narrative begins with the Figure (A), whose omniscient gaze compels the viewer both physically and imaginatively into a clockwise movement. Another reason for entering the action at this point might be the close proximity of a tree to the Figure. This tree is not in full bloom. Morgan states that the tree was “universally employed as a symbol of life and regeneration in the Ancient World” and suggests that the procession on a larnax from Knossos, logically terminates at the tree illustrated on one of the ends.⁴³ A spiral pattern runs vertically, framing two female figures on the front, while the sprouting tree motif on the sides might be associated with the theme of regeneration (Fig. 9).⁴⁴

On Chart 2, the linear reading might begin with the Figure near the undeveloped tree and end with arrival at the fully flowering tree on the South side, signifying the renewal of life for the

⁴¹ Marinatos, “Mycenaean” 283.

⁴² Marinatos, *Religion* 231.

⁴³ Morgan, “Larnax” 187.

⁴⁴ L.V. Watrous states that this motif is a lily chain and not a tree. “Origin” 290.

deceased in the afterworld. Marinatos states that the tree marks a place of sacrifice and divine epiphany yet it is “not an object of worship in itself but a focus of cultic activity.”⁴⁵

The Figure and the viewer observe the procession (B), and then move on to the offering (C). This sequence begins with a celestial event determined by the building, figure, tree and steps and moves onto terrestrial-based events in B and C. At the NE corner, the viewer is escorted around the corner and into the centre of the sarcophagus by the flight of the two birds, perched on the double axes (D). Crossing through the central focal point, the viewer joins the procession (E) toward the actual bull sacrifice. Narrative movement continues counter-clockwise along the south side through the terrestrial-based events of pipe playing (F), bull sacrifice (G) and offering (H).

At this point, the terrestrial events involving the processions, pouring and offering libations are complete. The tree, which is in full bloom and is growing out of the centre of the structure, is reached and the narrative and the movement becomes celestial. Next, the impetus of the griffin-drawn chariot (J) and the upward movement of the large bird (K) combine with another bird (I) to carry the narrative back into the central focal point. The narrative moves through the focal point to pass by the walking figures (L) and the agrimi-drawn chariots (M). At this point, the viewer connects once again with the celestial setting of the Figure (A).

If the movement of the narrative is connected with the journey of the soul away from the body, it is at this moment, before rejoining the scene with the Figure (A), that the soul could separated and escorted by chariot to the afterworld.

Directional Progression in Rosette Chain – Chart 3

The rosette motif, framed by a tooth or dentil pattern, is a prominent design feature on all sides of the HTS. It frames the narrative on the North and South sides in a “letter-box” style and

⁴⁵ Marinatos, *Religion* 136.

a rosette is also placed in the centre of the S-spirals along the edges. Immerwahr states that bands of rosettes appeared in later Knossian works and “became especially characteristic of the mainland.”⁴⁶ The rosettes on the HTS are drawn with ten petals and are blue in colour. When analyzed graphically, they are a string of circles that work back and forth along the length of the HTS. It is of course entirely possible to dismiss the rosette design as a simple decorative device. However, its pronounced usage on all sides of the HTS as a framework for the narrative suggests that the repetitive and cyclical nature of the pattern may symbolize a particular Minoan belief.

The rosette and spiral patterns may signify life, death and the regenerative cycle of nature and in man. Each rosette might mark a single event in time and the connection of many similar rosettes may indicate continuous, revolving movement. As seen in Chart 3, the motion around the rosette may be traced clockwise and counter-clockwise, with recurring points of interconnection. This transition from one point to another, around a circular form, might imitate the processions that moved around the sarcophagus.

Marinatos states that “compatible with the concepts of Mediterranean religions of the second millennium B.C., is the notion of cyclical transformation.”⁴⁷ The circular movement around the rosettes might symbolize the transmigration of the soul as it journeys on its transition from one state or condition to another. The undulating motion of the rosette motif imitates wave action on the water and may have originated with the experience of Minoan travel to different regions. Chart 3 illustrates movement in one direction around the rosettes extracted into a blue undulating pattern, which is similar to the wavy lines commonly used on Minoan objects. As a universal sign of movement, water and the passage of time, the wavy line symbol is still used by modern day artists. Andy Goldsworthy is an artist whose observation and sensibility to nature is

⁴⁶ S.A. Immerwahr, *Aegean Painting in the Bronze Age* (University Park: Pennsylvania State U.P., 1990) 100.

⁴⁷ Marinatos, *Religion* 196.

similar to the Minoan artist's apparent appreciation of natural phenomena. He uses the undulating line in many of his outdoor sculptures and whenever this design appears, inside a Roman sarcophagus or traced through a bed of sand, the artist is signifying the continuous behavior of nature and man (Fig. 10). Goldsworthy states, "It is not a river . . . but in calling it one I hope to touch on the movement associated with a river. A river for me is not bound to water. It is the flow, not the water that is important – a river of wind, animals, birds, insects, people, seasons, climate, stone, earth, colour . . ."48 Marinatos points out that although "Crete does not have many rivers . . . the whole iconographical package, river plus plants and animals was inspired by Egyptian or Near Eastern prototypes . . . for in the iconographical code of the great river civilizations, rivers equal fertility."49

Wavy lines radiate along the borders of both chariots scenes of the two ends of the HTS. Although this pattern is usually interpreted as a "variegated rock pattern,"50 it could also reference the passage of the deceased by chariot over the water to the afterworld.

Directional Progression in Spiral – Chart 4

Long states that the running spiral border and rosette pattern were used extensively at Knossos in the Neoplatial period.⁵¹ The S-spirals on the HTS, in which blue and white paints accentuate an "S" in the design, occur on a later fresco in the Throne Room. Since the S-spiral is found at Tiryns, Pylos, Tanagra and Argos, Long suggests that the origin of the HTS spiral pattern is Mycenaean rather than Minoan.⁵² On the HTS, the S-spiral is prominently displayed on the upright sections of the North and South faces. This pattern is repeated within the narrative on the structure behind the Figure, on the offering altar and on the structure with horns of

⁴⁸ A. Goldsworthy, *Time* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2000) 10.

⁴⁹ Marinatos, *Religion* 193.

⁵⁰ Long, *Ayia* 23.

⁵¹ Long, *Ayia* 22.

⁵² Long, *Ayia* 22.

consecration on the South side. Not only does the viewer experience the effects of the S-spiral pattern, but the illustrated figures also experience the effect of this design within their narrative episodes. The repetition of the S-spiral causes the imaginative space of the HTS panels to connect with the physical space of the viewer.

A graphic comparison to the structure on the South side is a fresco from Xeste 3, Akrotiri which illustrates a doorway with the horns of consecration (Fig 11). A retorted spiral pattern surrounds the door, which is decorated with lilies. Over the horns, there is a evidence of a red liquid poured down the front of the doors, which parallels the HTS, linking the elements of horns of consecration, blood sacrifice, structure and spirals.

Fragments of painted plaster from the Old Palace period illustrate the use of the spiral band pattern, with and without central rosettes, as one of the earliest motifs at Phaistos.⁵³ The spiraliform ornament is commonplace on Late Minoan and Mycenaean pottery and wall paintings. Similar to the HTS, the early spiraliform is associated with sea imagery and agrimi imagery (Fig. 12) and (Fig. 13). The Shield Fresco from the Old Palace at Tiryns exhibits a continuous spiral border along with the interlocking double helix of the typical “figure-eight” shields (Fig.14). Immerwahr terms the spiral band friezes as being “emblematic,” but does not discuss the cyclical nature of the design.⁵⁴ The outline of the figure-eight is similar to the modern day concepts of the “infinity” sign and the Mobius strip, in which there is continual movement, and it is possible that Aegean artists realized the correlation between the motifs of the spiral, the rosette and the figure-eight shield. N. Marinatos references B. Rutkowski for the statement that the viewer “sees an inherent magico-religious power in the shape of the eight-shield which

⁵³ Immerwahr, *Aegean* 22.

⁵⁴ Immerwahr, *Aegean* 142.

involves two interconnected circles.”⁵⁵ Long, however, suggests that the significance of the decorative use of the figure-8 shield “seems to be merely a filling ornament.”⁵⁶

Watrous states that certain types of borders occur regularly on larnakes such as running spirals, the wavy border, curved stripes, rosettes, zigzags and wavy lines. He suggests that spirals, the wavy border and lines symbolize water.⁵⁷

The Armenoi Rethymnis larnax has spiral borders and rows of concentric circles, like rosettes, in similar locations to the HTS (Fig.15). In addition, the inclusion of the horns of consecration, the double axe and agrimi are comparable to the HTS. On a larnax from Palaikastro, a stylized lily sprouts from a wavy line, with the horns of consecration and a double ax emerging at its centre. Watrous states that this combination “can be taken to signify that sacrifice (horns of consecration and double ax) produces regeneration (flowers).”⁵⁸ A vertical spiral border frames the lily motif, griffin and two larger horns of consecration, while wavy lines border a sizeable bird and fish on the opposite side (Fig. 16).

A Minoan larnax from Knossos has an irregular spiral design as a central motif , which is bordered by retorted spirals and a tricurved arch net pattern, which may represent the sea (Fig. 17).⁵⁹ L. Morgan describes the retorted spiral as being “potentially infinite” since the central point of the spiral is where the line both ends and begins.⁶⁰ The HTS has a sophisticated combination of spiral features: a retorted spiral design that is punctuated with central rosettes and the highlighted “S” form. Morgan states that “since the spiral resembles no physical object and our culture knows no meaning for this form of visual patterning we call it abstract. But the

⁵⁵ Marinatos, *Religion* 54.

⁵⁶ Long, *Ayia* 56.

⁵⁷ Watrous, “Origin” 290.

⁵⁸ Watrous, “Origin” 295.

⁵⁹ Morgan, “Larnax” 187.

⁶⁰ Morgan, “Larnax” 189.

continuity of structure which it, and it alone of design elements, entails should at least alert us to the possibility of the signification of continuance or perpetuity.”⁶¹

Chromatic Progression – Chart 5

Davis points to the use of registers on the Narmer Palette as not only an attempt at compositional organization, but as a conveyance of information about the social world that generated the object. Register compositions might “reflect the reorganization of Egyptian society in the formation of the dynastic state at the end of the fourth millennium B.C.”⁶² Instead of registers, the HTS has four individual sides and specific horizontal registers or background shifts behind each of the narrative episodes. The viewer might infer from the background shifts either the hierarchy of the participants or as on Chart 5, the temporal order of the entire program of events.

The background treatment on Minoan art may consist of many different designs including horizontal wavy bands of colour, continuous rocky ground, overall textile-like patterning and simple white plaster. On the HTS, the artist has used different coloured panels to reinforce individual zones and episodes. As shown on Chart 5, the panels on all sides alternate the colours of blue, white, yellow and red. On the north side, the backgrounds shift from light to dark to light and on the south side the colours range from medium to light to dark to light. The East side features a bright red background, appearing behind the griffin, while the two registers on the West side have a white background on the upper section and a yellow background behind the agrimi. The continuous interchange of colour implies a shift in location and event. The light and dark background shifts might be read as movement from day to night or from mortal to supernatural states or sites.

⁶¹ Morgan, “Larnax” 189.

⁶² Davis, *Masking* 39.

The Chromatic Progression on Chart 5 is a non-linear reading in which the narrative imitates the motion of the waves on the sea and the cycles around the rosette and spiral designs as discussed previously. W. Davis states that “. . . the meaning contained in the chain of replicating images can be “reviewed” only by going back through or over it, as well as moving away from it”⁶³ Similarly, Chromatic Progression allows the viewer to move through the narrative episodes using their knowledge of the individual episodes synthetically, to weave an entire program of events. The scenes may be viewed from the actual sides of the sarcophagus, from an aerial perspective, a concept familiar to the Minoans, or linked together in one’s mind. Ultimately, the cyclical movement throughout scenes might be understood as a metaphor for the inevitable events of life and death, regeneration, the journey to the afterworld and the passage of time.

The viewer enters this cycle with the Figure’s gaze as it weaves towards the central focal point in order to view the real sacrifice of the bull and to face the animal head on. The light background suggests, possibly, that this activity might take place in daylight. Next, the viewer cycles back into the centre and joins the processional to the pouring scene, which has a daylight background. Directed by the birds on the double axes and the forward motion of the griffin-drawn chariot, the narrative movement circles around the corner to view the offering ceremony. Background colours turn to dark red on the East end, then change to a light background behind the structure with tree and finally into the dark background of the offering scene.

Since the tree background is not differentiated with the wavy line used between the other backgrounds, it might be possible that the light background was used to allow the individual branches and leaves of the tree to be seen. In this case, the temporal shift would be through twilight, symbolized by the red colour into night. The bird on the double axe guides the viewer

⁶³ Davis, *Masking* 151.

back through the centre of the sarcophagus to watch the procession of males with the simulated sacrificial animals and the boat.

This episode takes place in front of a dark blue background, possibly night. The cyclical momentum takes the viewer through the centre once again to observe the procession of females against a yellow background. Movement continues around to the top register of the West end with the men walking against a yellow background. This colour could represent dawn. The lower half of the West end features an agrimi-drawn chariot against a white background. The viewer circles the corner to complete the journey and join the Figure against a white background. The light background might again symbolize morning light. Theoretically, the entire journey might have lasted the duration of one day and one night.

The cyclical movement creates three connected circles within the framework of the sarcophagus. The sacrifice is the pivotal focal point and cohesive central motif for both sides and the action circles around this event. This central sphere is where continual sacrifice takes place and the revisiting of this focal point reminds the viewer that this activity must be repeated through generations.

The two libation scenes on either side connect to form a sphere as an offering focal point to the east of the sacrificial circle. The journey, in its beginning and end, creates the sphere to the West of the sacrificial circle and this is the point where the traveler, whether it is the deceased, the soul or the contemporary viewer, can either join back into the original set of cycles or continue on to another set.

The same option is actually available to the viewer/traveler at the East end of the sarcophagus, where the voyage could continue outside the cycles of the sarcophagus. The uncertainty of whether one's journey in life and in death will take a "high" or a "low" road may

be implied by the endless possibilities of the cyclical movement. The circuitous movement of man through the natural states of life, death and renewal are echoed by Watrous who states that on the imagery of Late Minoan IIIA larnakes “the deceased is implicitly regarded not as a unique living being but as an integral part of the natural world, who will experience the same physical regeneration.”⁶⁴

Episodic Progression – Chart 6 and Chart 7

When examining the Narmer Palette, W. Davis used a rotational method encompassing all images repeatedly, to form the “whole context of meaning”. He stated, “image and meaning always come up around each other; and whatever wholeness of image there may be obtains, unviewably, in and as this encirclement.”⁶⁵ Parallel to the movement of the ocean that surrounds the Minoan population, the ebb and flow of the narrative content on the HTS may be discerned by analyzing cyclical movement around the sarcophagus frescoes.

On Chart 6, and its counterpart, Chart 7, narrative cycles operate somewhat like opposed blades of a fan, stacked above each other. The different cycles move with simultaneous clockwise and counter-clockwise motion, above, below and through each other, producing a four-dimensional space-time continuum of narrative. The four axes in Chart 7 are x (forward, backward), y (side to side), z (up and down) and T (time). The viewer or observer interacts with this self-contained universe in a functional manner, similar to the active narrativization process described by W. Davis. In this space-time continuum, “the time coordinate of one coordinate system depends on both the time and space coordinates of another moving system and the apparent space and time intervals depend upon the velocity of the observer.”⁶⁶ Although the Minoan artist was, of course, unaware of modern theoretical physics, his observations of life and

⁶⁴ Watrous, “Origin” 305.

⁶⁵ Davis, *Masking* 151.

⁶⁶ “Space-time,” *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 1990 ed.

death in nature could have lead him to a similar, multi-dimensional view of the continuum of the universe.

On Chart 7, the central focal point is the universality of life and death in the plant, animal and human world. Marinatos states that for the Minoans, “nature was alive, the source of potency and livelihood but also a source of potential threat and disaster.”⁶⁷ Revolving around the centre are the segments of the circle, which represent four sets of interconnecting narratives:

- A. The sacrifice/gift cycle revolves counter-clockwise
- B. The chariots orbit in a clockwise direction
- C. The processions of gesturing and offering on the South side are united in one blade to move counter-clockwise
- D. The Figure and the libation scene are connected is one blade which moves clockwise

Whitney Davis mentions the term “ellipsis” in his work and this is defined as the part of the story that is not delineated. He states, “although representations render a particular narrative of the ruler’s complete mastery over the natural and social worlds, they do so not just through direct reference but also through reshuffling and substituting elements of the narrative, which suppresses or drops some of the them into ellipsis altogether – finally, masking the blow of the ruler.”⁶⁸

In the episodic progression in Charts 6 and 7, the point of ellipsis on the HTS would seem to be the transitional point from death to the afterworld. The imagery does not feature traditional

⁶⁷ Marinatos, “Tree” 141.

⁶⁸ Davis, *Masking* 41.

mourning or prothesis scenes and Marinatos notes that although such scenes were common on the Mainland there were “conspicuously absent from the Cretan equivalents.”⁶⁹

The HTS bull is dying, but is not yet completely dead. Marinatos states that in both Minoan and Egyptian imagery, the actual moment of killing or “the supreme violence” is not shown. The sacrifices, processions and offerings suggest actions that may influence or cause the change of state to take place. However, the cyclical program on the HTS reinforces the idea that the path to reach the state of transition requires certain repetitive actions and observances throughout one’s life in order to reach the afterworld. The concept of continuing the observance of the rituals of one’s belief during a lifetime in order to ensure a respectable place in the afterlife, is one that is still followed by many individuals in our society today.

Conclusion

It is clear that the cyclical path of the narrative movement on the HTS illustrates the elements passing into each other.”⁷⁰ Rather than cataloguing a series of funerary events, the narrative cycles represent the continuum of necessary activities and beliefs that defined Minoan society. W. Davis suggests that the act of viewing images corresponds or becomes a “homologue” for the narrative taking place on the observed object. During this process, the viewer may in fact, become subordinated to the *fabula* or logic of the story itself.⁷¹ In the case of the HTS, interaction with the space-time continuum of the narrative forces the viewer to acknowledge his position within the cosmos, and the inevitability of his own death and potential renewal into another state of being.

⁶⁹ Marinatos, “Mycenaean” 282.

⁷⁰ “Continuum,” *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 1973 ed.

⁷¹ Davis, “Narrativity” 49.

Chart 1. Literal Reading of Direction in Hagia Triada Sarcophagus

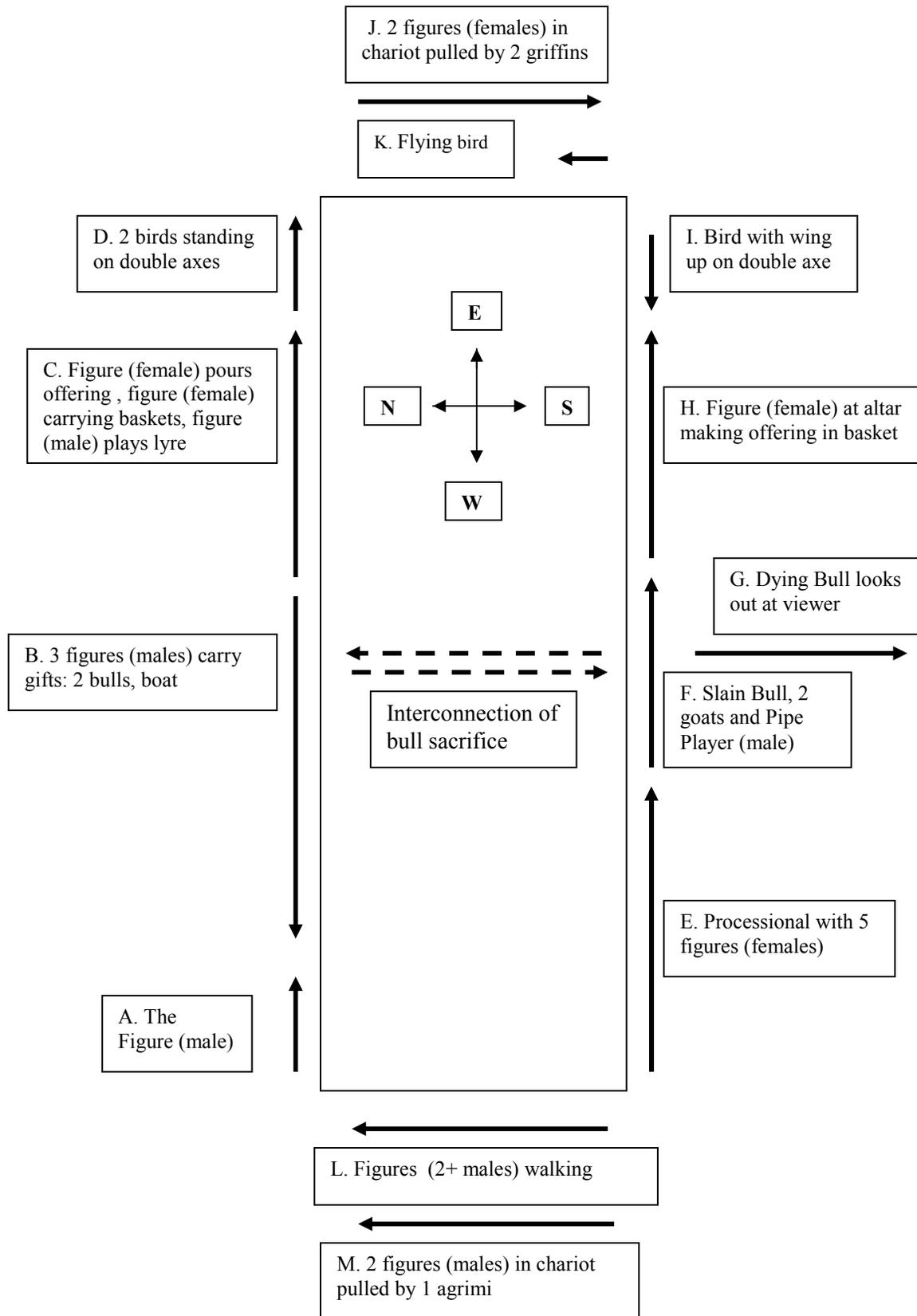


Chart 2. Narrative Reading of Direction on Hagia Triada Sarcophagus

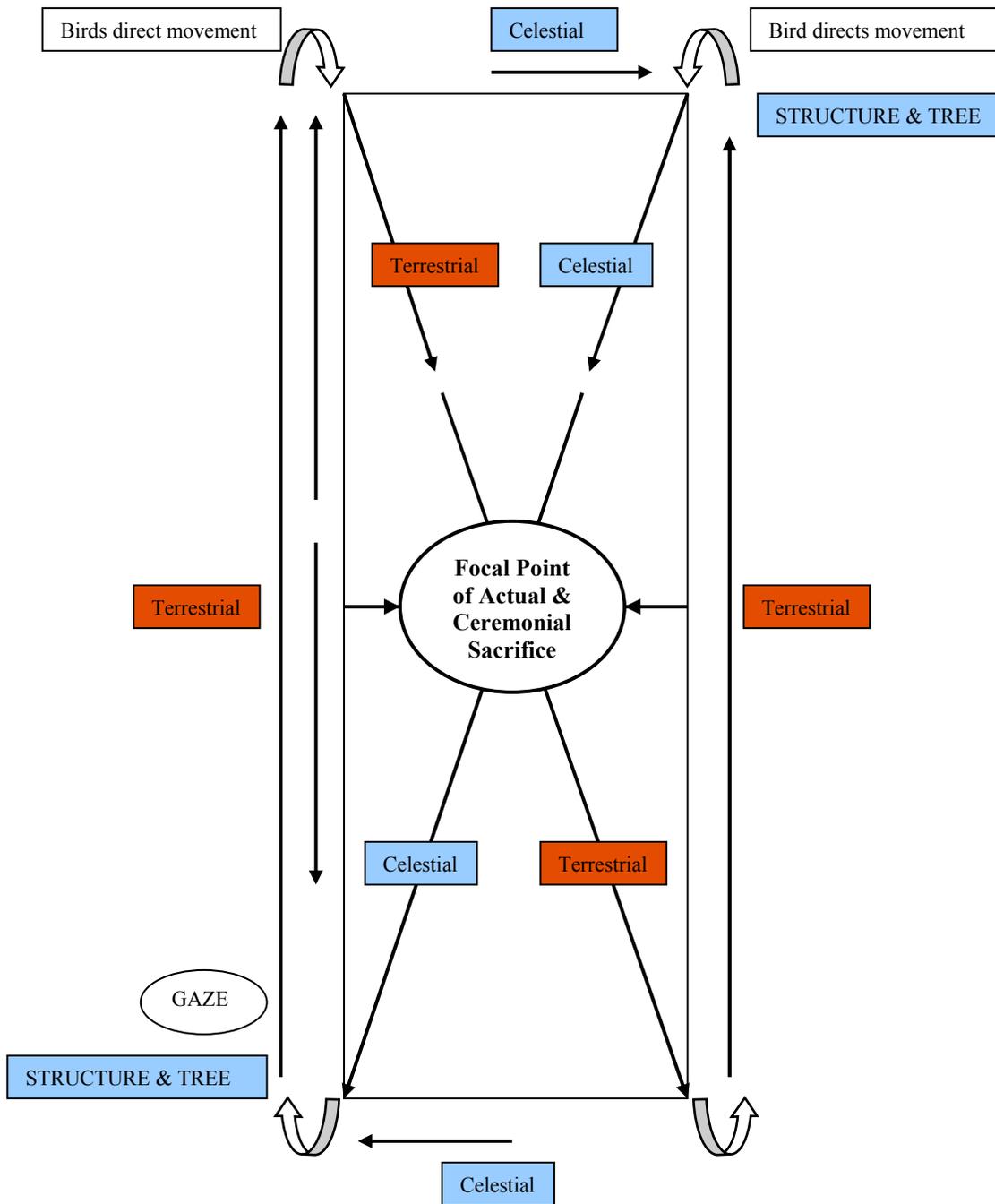


Chart 3.
Directional
Progression in
Rosette Chain
on Hagia Triada
Sarcophagus



Chart 4.
Directional
Progression in
Spiral on Hagia
Triada
Sarcophagus



Chart 5.
Chromatic Progression
on Hagia Triada
Sarcophagus

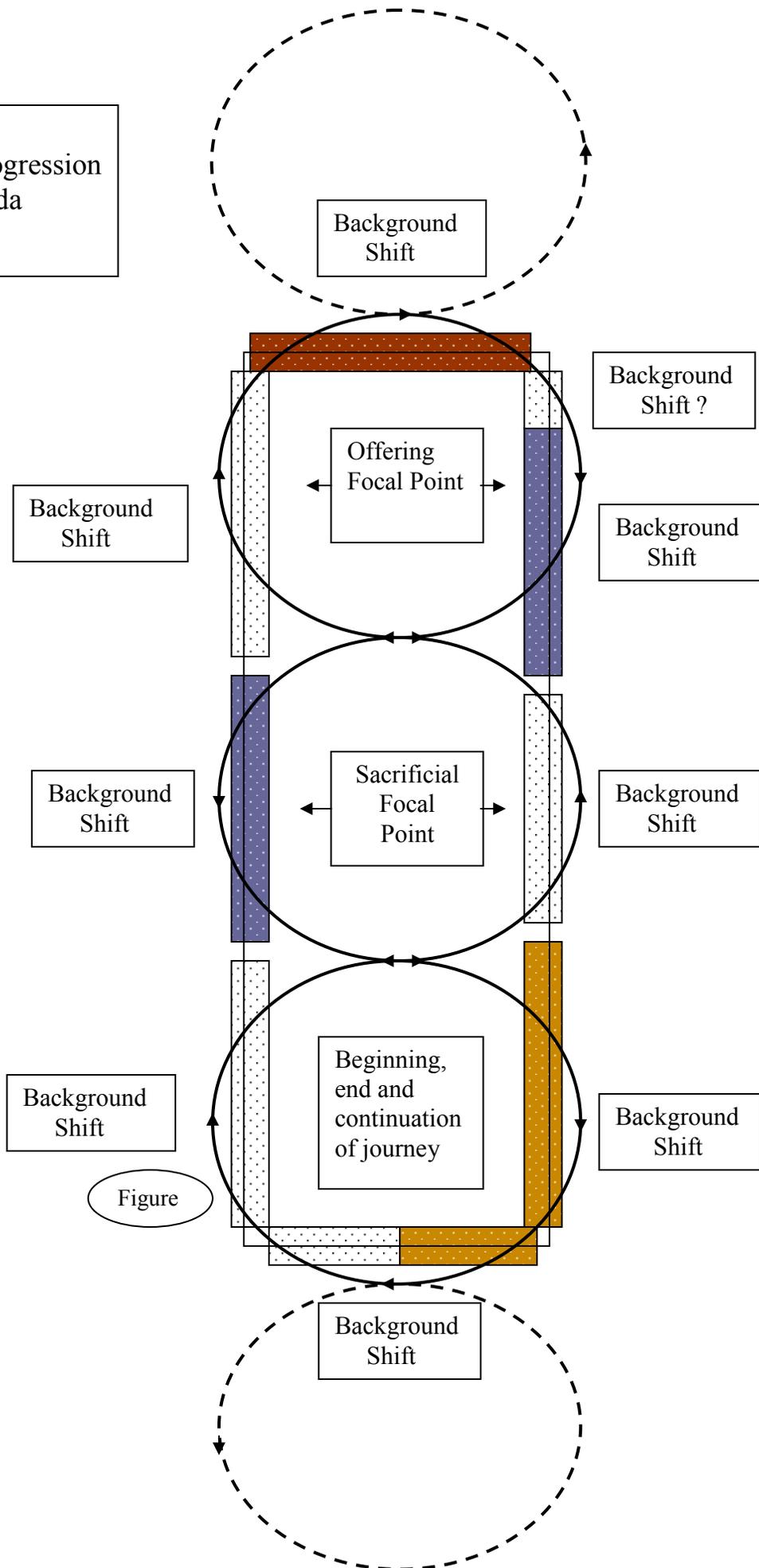


Chart 6.
 Episodic Progression in
 Hagia Triada Sarcophagus

- A. Sacrifice/Gifts: Same direction: counter-clockwise 
- B. Chariots: Same direction: clockwise 
- C. Procession of Gesturing & Offering: counter-clockwise 
- D. Figure & Libation Scene: clockwise 

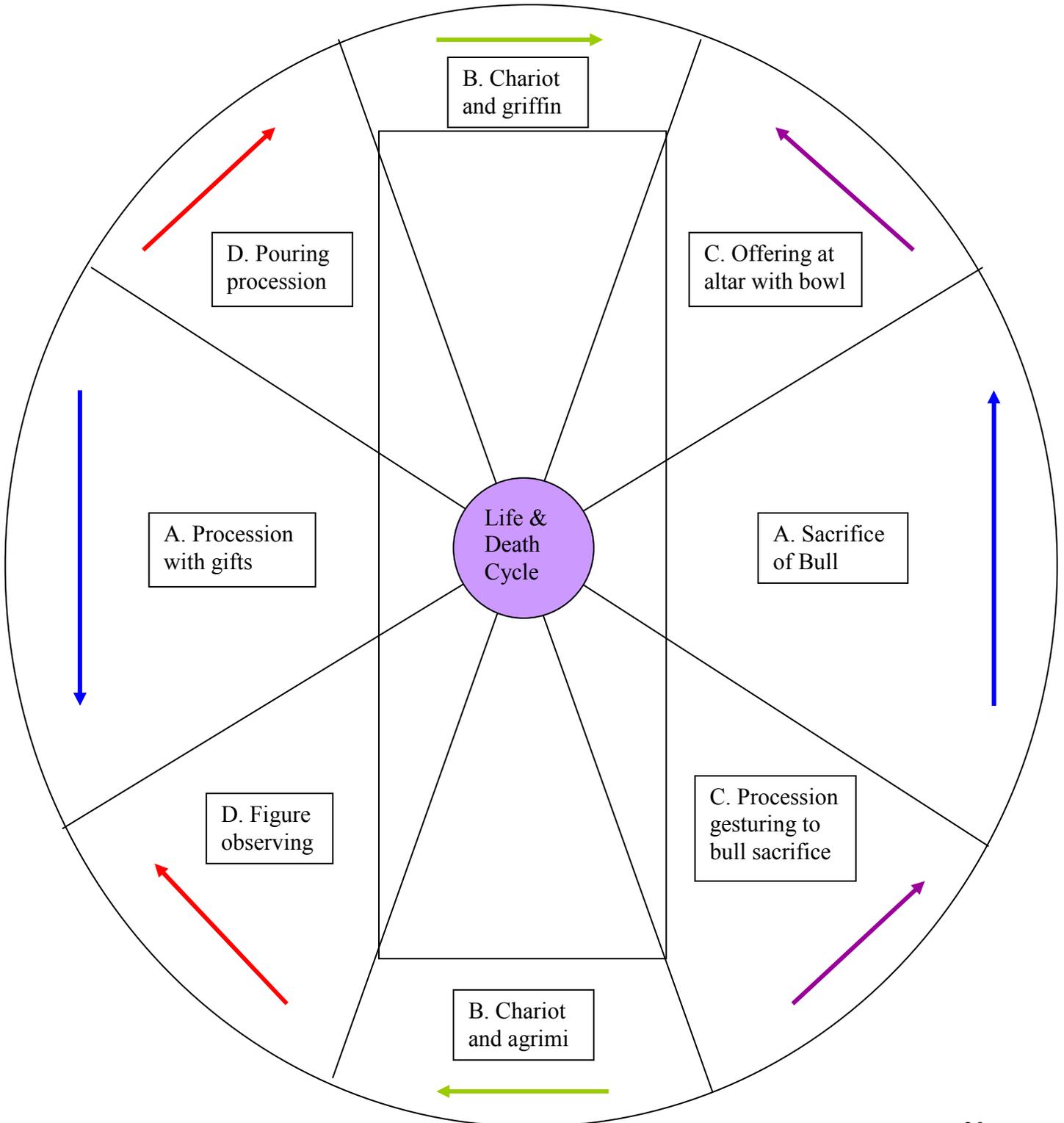
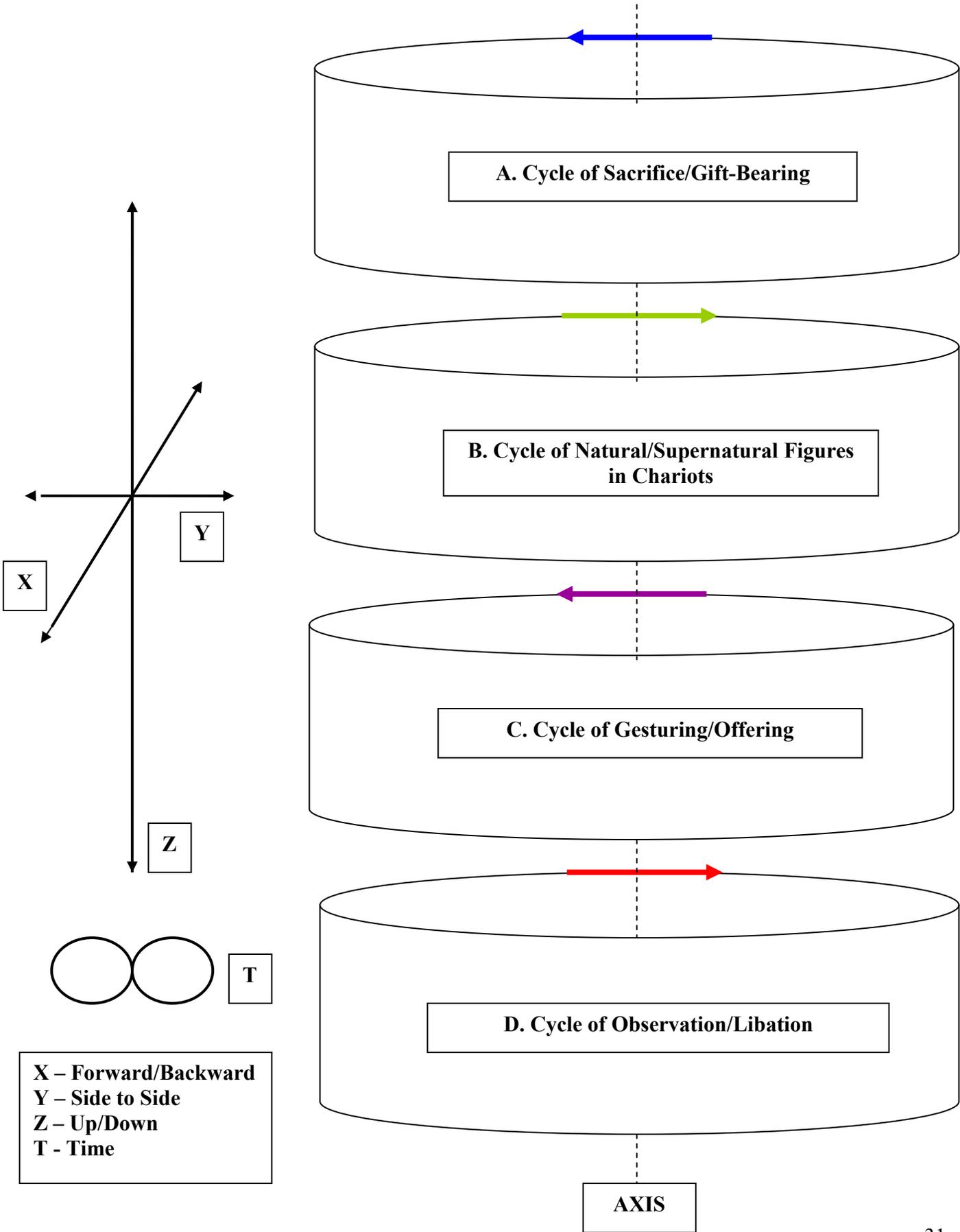


Chart 7. Continuum of Narrative in Hagia Triada Sarcophagus



Illustrations

Fig. 1. Thebes, Egypt, Tomb of Neb-Amun (mid-18th dynasty). Ceremony of the “Opening of the Mouth.” C.R. Long, 1974. *The Ayia Triadha Sarcophagus: A Study of Late Minoan and Mycenaean Funerary Practices and Beliefs*. Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology 49. Göteborg: Paul Aströms: Fig. 63.



Fig. 2. Gold Ring, Midea. CMS I no. 191. L. Morgan. 1987. “A Minoan Larnax from Knossos.” In *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 82: 196.

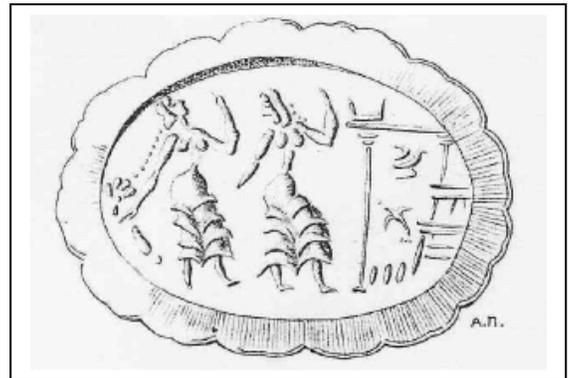


Fig. 3. Gold Ring, Mycenae. CMS I no. 127. L. Morgan. 1987. “A Minoan Larnax from Knossos.” In *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 82: 196.

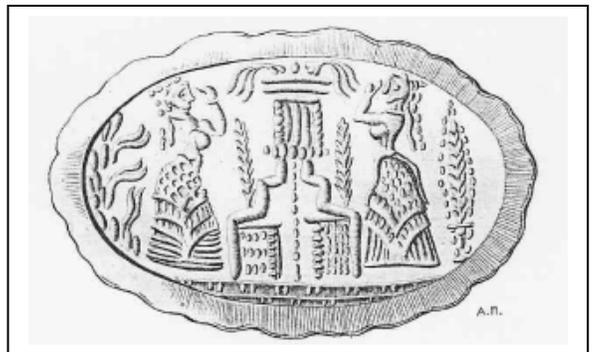


Fig. 4. Two sides from a clay box (pyxis) from Kalamia. N. Marinatos, 1993. *Minoan Religion: Ritual, Image and Symbol*. Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press. 139.



Fig. 5. Drawing of a Minoan wall painting from Tell el Dab'a, Egypt.
 L. Morgan, 1995. "Frontal Face and the Symbolism of Death in Aegean Glyptic." In *Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel Beiheft 5*: 143.

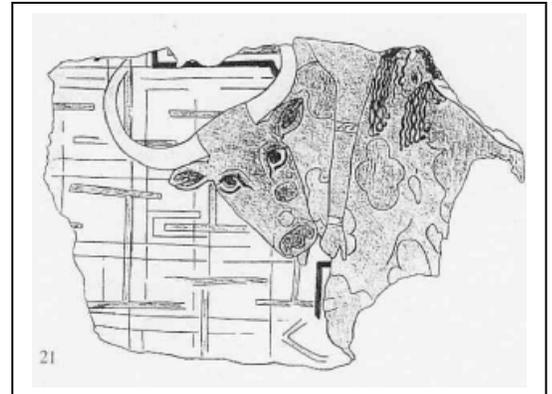


Fig. 6. Gold ring, Vapheio. CMS I No. 219; 33
 L. Morgan, 1995. "Frontal Face and the Symbolism of Death in Aegean Glyptic." In *Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel Beiheft 5*: 146.



Fig. 7. Larnax from Kavrochori, front
 L.V. Watrous, 1991. "The Origin and Iconography of the Late Minoan Painted Larnax." *Journal of the American School of classical Studies at Athens* 60: Plate 89.



Fig. 8. Bathtub from Milatos.
 L.V. Watrous, 1991. "The Origin and Iconography of the Late Minoan Painted Larnax." *Journal of the American School of classical Studies at Athens* 60: Plate 85.

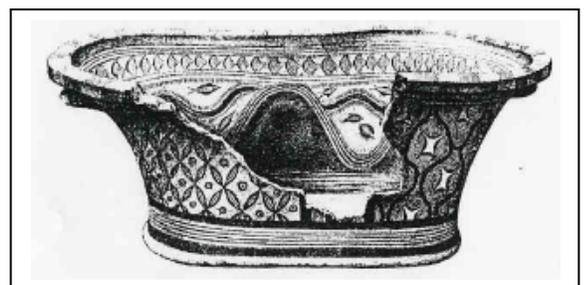


Fig. 9. Minoan larnax from Knossos, east end.
L. Morgan, 1987. "A Minoan Larnax from Knossos."
In *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 82: 185.

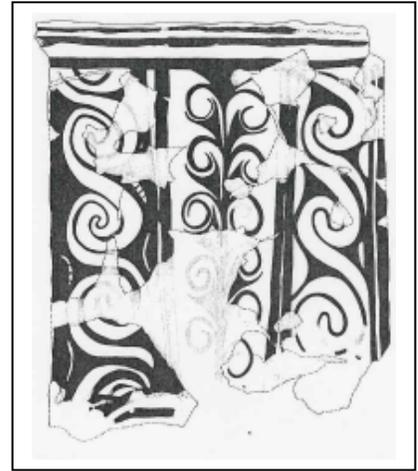


Fig. 10. Sandwork in sarcophagus, British Museum, London, 1994.
A. Goldsworthy, 2000. *Time*, New York: Harry N. Abrams., 196.



Fig. 11. Shrine topped with horns of consecration from which blood is dripping. Fresco from Xeste 3, Akrotiri. Slightly reconstructed drawing.
N. Marinatos, 1986. *Minoan Sacrificial Ritual: Cult Practice and Symbolism*. Göteborg: Paul Aströms, 28.

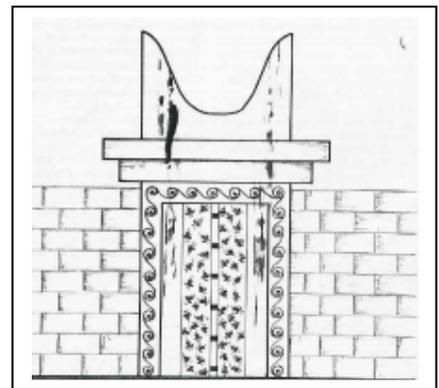


Fig. 12. Pithoid jar with fish from Old Palace, Phaistos.
S.A. Immerwahr, 1990. *Aegean Painting in the Bronze Age*
University Park: Pennsylvania State U.P., Pl. I.

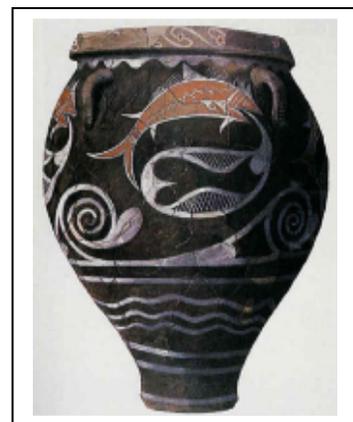


Fig. 13. Hole-mouthed jar with appliqué of goat from Old Palace, Phaistos.
 S.A. Immerwahr, 1990. *Aegean Painting in the Bronze Age*
 University Park: Pennsylvania State U.P., Pl. IV.



Fig. 14. The Shield fresco from the Old Palace at Tiryns as restored.
 S.A. Immerwahr, 1990. *Aegean Painting in the Bronze Age*
 University Park: Pennsylvania State U.P., Pl. XIX.



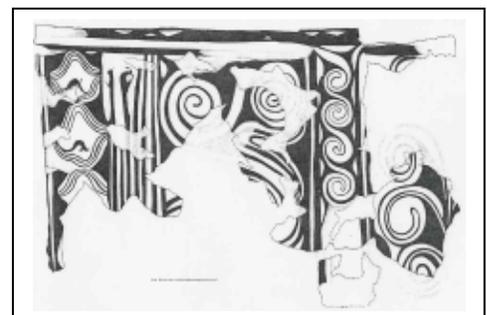
Fig. 15. Larnax 2 from tomb 10, Armenoi, front
 L.V. Watrous, 1991. "The Origin and Iconography of
 the Late Minoan Painted Larnax." *Journal of the American
 School of classical Studies at Athens* 60: Plate 85.

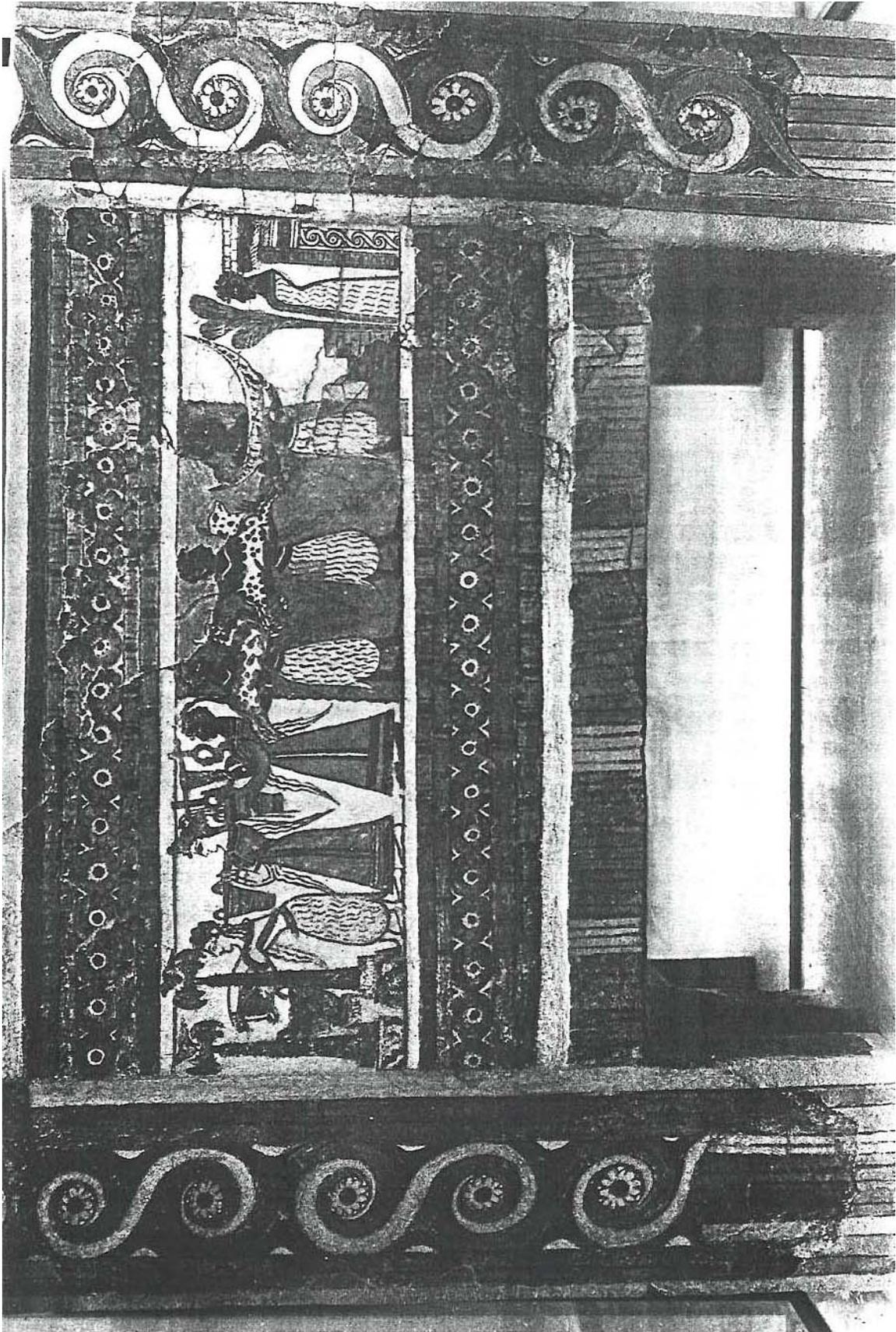


Fig. 16. Larnax from Palaikastro, front
 L.V. Watrous, 1991. "The Origin and Iconography of
 the Late Minoan Painted Larnax." *Journal of the American
 School of classical Studies at Athens* 60: Plate 82.

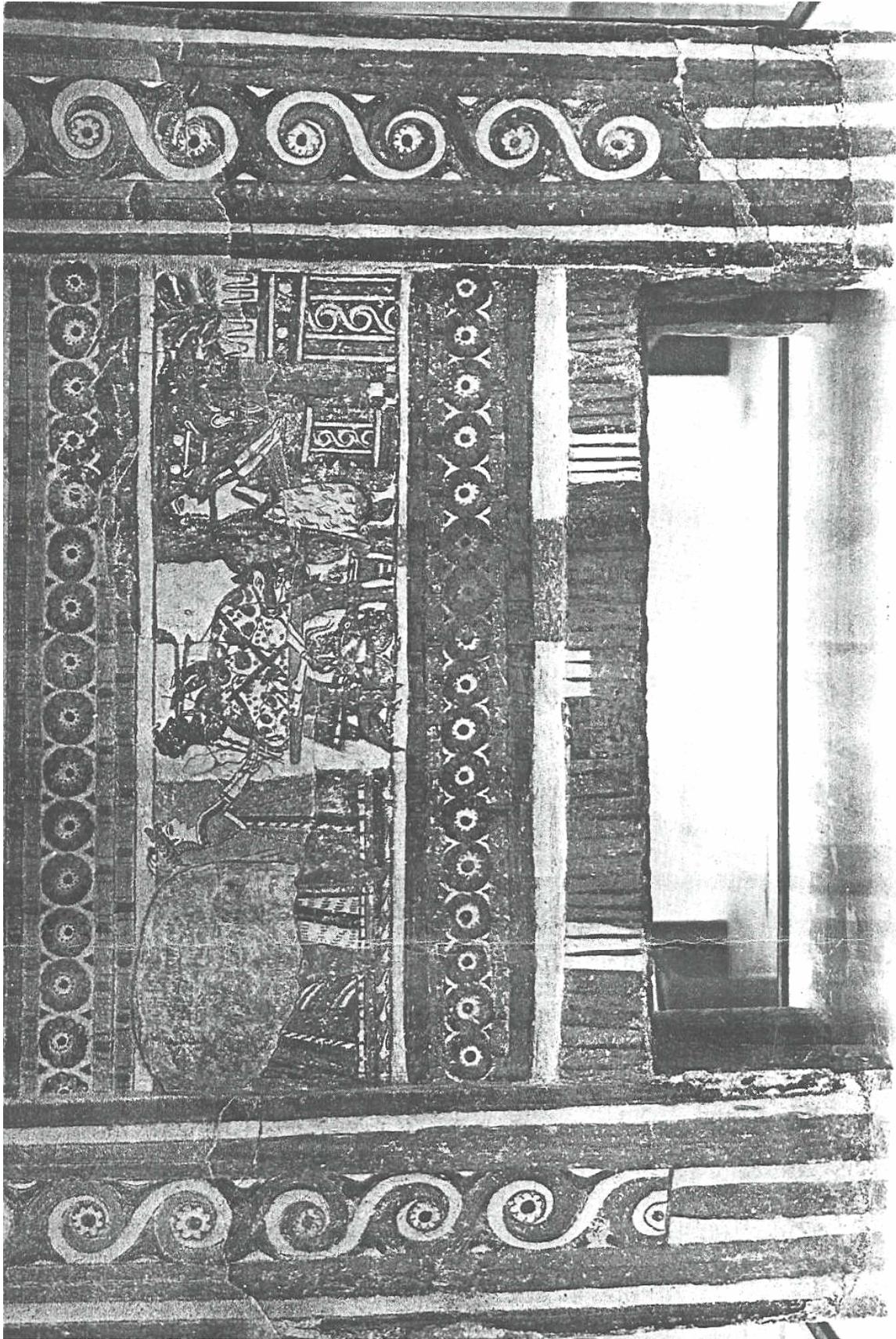


Fig. 17. Minoan larnax from Knossos, Side B.
 L. Morgan. 1987. "A Minoan Larnax from Knossos."
 In *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 82: 188

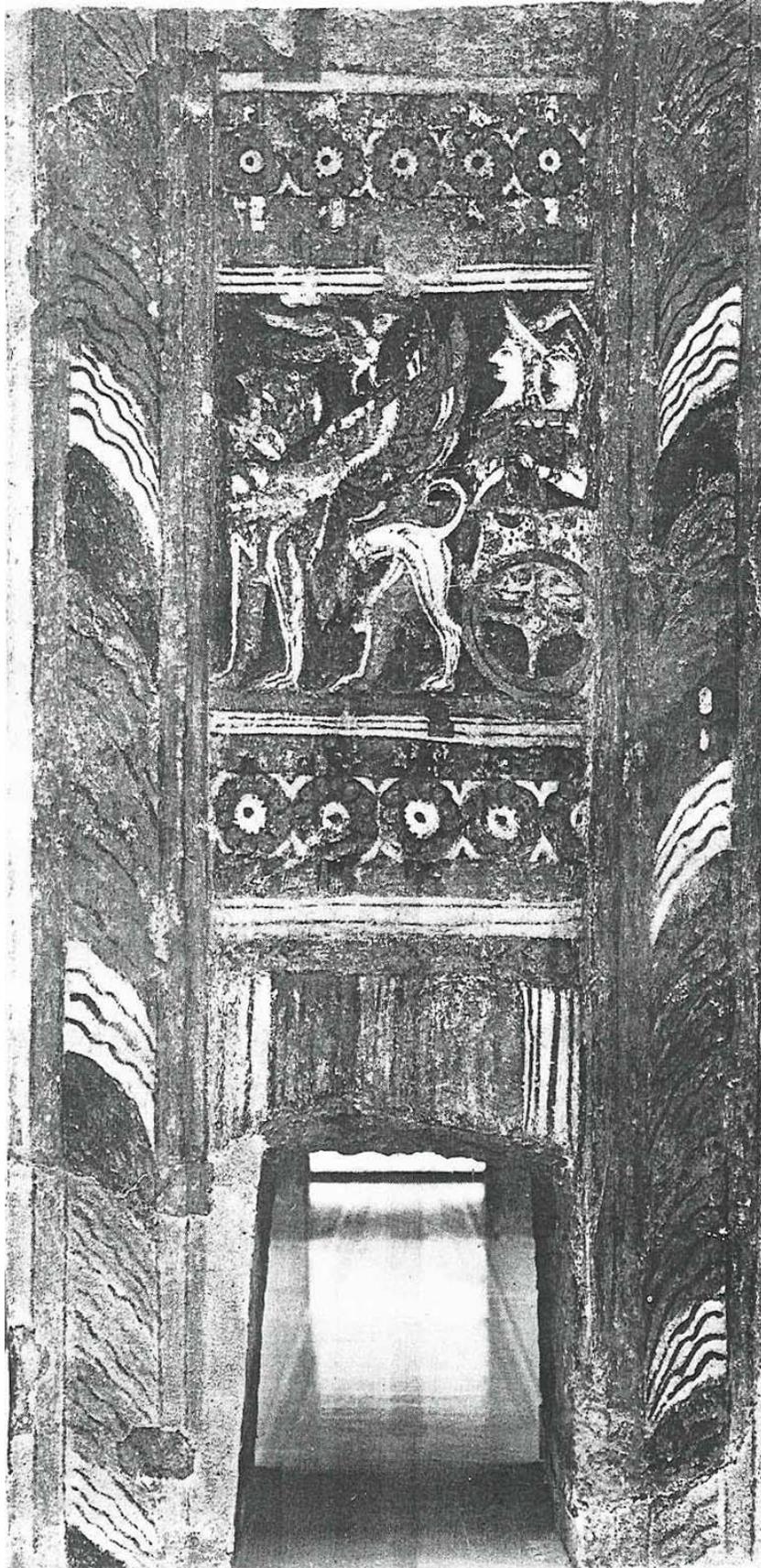




NORTH END – HAGIA TRIADA SARCOPHAGUS



SOUTH END – HAGIA TRIADA SARCOPHAGUS



EAST END – HAGIA TRIADA SARCOPHAGUS



WEST END – HAGIA TRIADA SARCOPHAGUS

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