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Continuity and discontinuity of Minoan visual representations in Homeric Epics: The spirals of Okeanos

ABSTRACT

I suggest that the experience of Minoan visual culture was transmitted through oral epics during the “Dark Ages” that followed the Bronze Age collapse, in the same way that scholars usually assume the transmission of various narrative motifs across different cultures and areas. This experience then emerges in some of the many descriptions, similes and ekphrases of the Homeric Epics. Here, it is not usually possible to detect original Minoan iconographic motifs, but rather similar representational strategies and the intermingling and transformation of original contexts and meanings.

Using the example of Homer’s description of the Shield of Achilles, and especially its last two passages, the “Knossian dance” and the image of Okeanos, I first show their mutual visual resonance mediated by geometric motifs of circles, lines, and most especially spirals and whirls. I then argue that Okeanos does not have a cosmogonic dimension in Homer, but rather offers an ekphrastic image of spatial and cognitive unapproachability. I proceed to show how the three specific original contexts from which we know Minoan spiral ornaments – the association with figure-of-eight shields, their use as a kind of ornamental frame and their occurrence near the Knossian miniature frescoes (associated with the Shield of Achilles as early on as by Evans) – can crystallise into a new thematic element, the visual image of Okeanos.

Finally, I suggest that it is the ornamental, whose structuring quality inextricably links meaning to its form and context, that can conveniently transmit cultural content across the cultural seam between the Minoan Bronze Age and Archaic Greece, when no stable preferred medium of representation such as painting or poetry is at hand.

KEYWORDS: Minoan fresco painting; Spiral friezes; Figure-of-eight shields; Miniature frescoes from Knossos; Homeric Epics; Shield of Achilles; Okeanos; Homeric Cosmogony; Homeric Cosmology; Ekphrasis; Ornament

I. INTRODUCTION: MINOAN FRESCO PAINTING AND THE SHIELD OF ACHILLES

Although contemporary archaeological research points to the continuity of many settlements during the turbulent times of the Bronze Age collapse, the visible cultural seam is marked not only by the destruction of the old and the emergence of new political arrangements, but also in some areas, such as between Bronze Age Minoan and Archaic Greek culture, by the change in

the preferred media of cultural representation. Minoan culture expressed itself mainly through the visual record, whereas the earliest layers of Greek culture are accessible to us primarily through the Homeric Epics.

In some rather exceptional cases, especially when the association of the Thera fresco paintings with the Homeric Epics has been discussed, scholars have looked for motifs familiar from the Epics that are iconographically traceable in painting, assuming that painting served mainly to illustrate (or at least interact with) the same oral epic contents inherited by the successor culture (e.g., Hiller 1990; Morris 1989, 515; 2000; Vlachopoulos 2007, 107-108; Watrous 2007; Chapin 2014, 22). In this paper, I propose to switch the perspective by which we see this historical process and the transmission through different media. In Homer, we find many descriptions, similes and ekphrases with low narrativising potential, for which Minoan visual representations, especially the generally non-narrative fresco paintings, may have served as templates. I rely on Nagy's evolutionary model of five stages in the development of the Homeric Epics, with the first fluid stage extending from the second millennium to the later part of the 8th century BC (Nagy 1997, 180-181). I assume that the experience with Minoan visual culture was transmitted by the oral epics in the same way as scholars usually assume the transmission of various narrative motifs between various cultures and areas, including those so extensive as the Indo-European (e.g., Tehrani 2013).

One such example of the transmission of Minoan visual culture in Greek Epics might be Homer's largest ekphrasis, the painting in words known as the description of the Shield of Achilles. Its symbolic topography suddenly introduces a surprisingly concrete cultural allusion to Knossos – long ago, Evans considered that the miniature *Sacred Grove and Dance Fresco and the Grandstand Fresco* at Knossos depicted the same motif based on Ariadne's dance as the Knossos reference on the Shield (*Il.* 18.590-606). However, if we focus on the visual qualities of both types of representations instead of on the theme, not only can we find similar compositional strategies, but we can also hypothesise a potential connection between the depiction of Okeanos on the Shield and Minoan spiral ornaments. I will show how the three specific contexts in which Minoan spiral ornaments appear – the connection with figure-of-eight shields, their use as a kind of ornamental frame and their occurrence near the Knossian miniature frescoes – can crystallise into the thematic element of the visual representation of Okeanos on the Shield of Achilles.¹

II. SPIRALS AND SHIELDS

II. 1 KNOSSIAN DANCE: SELF-REFERENTIALITY OF GEOMETRIC SHAPES ON THE SHIELD OF ACHILLES

If Andrew Becker (1995, 4-5) viewed the Shield as the *mise-en-abîme of the Iliad*, as well as of poetry in general, whereas Gregory Nagy (2003) pointed to the "Court Scene" (*Il.* 18.497-502) in particular, Jesús Carruesco suggests that the true focal point of the *Iliad* is the simile introducing Ariadne's Knossian choros (2016, 73). Daedalus, who made the dancing place for Ariadne, might be seen as the model emulated by Hephaestus when fabricating the Shield, who might in turn

¹ A comparison of Minoan representational strategies with that of the Shield of Achilles, and the full length of the argument presenting Okeanos as a visual image, is presented in my dissertation thesis (Valentinová 2021). For the non-narrative representational strategies of Minoan fresco painting, see Valentinová 2022.

be seen as a model for the poet. Ariadne's dance is mirrored by other choruses of boys and girls depicted on the Shield, in the wedding procession, and processional vintage song, and these dances allude to various choral performances in the real world, attached in the Archaic and Classical periods to the communal dimension of ritual in agonistic and juridical procedures, epic poetry or pictorial art (Carruesco 2016, 69-73).

Carruesco shows that there is a strong ornamental dimension not only in the *syntax* of the last *choros* – the geometric patterns it traces on the ground – but also in how it is morphologically paralleled by other geometric shapes and movements depicted on the Shield (2016, 77). The circle, compared to the potter's wheel and the wreaths or garlands of young girls (στεφάνας, 18.597), alludes to the way the heavens are crowned by the constellations (οὐρανὸς ἐστεφάνωται, 18.485), and the elders are seated in the circle (ἐνὶ κύκλῳ, 18.504). The straight lines (στίχες, 18.602) have literal analogies in the description of herders accompanying their cattle (νομῆες ἅμ' ἐστιχόωντο βόεσσι, 18.578) and we may also add the path through the vineyard (18.565) or the brides being led through the city (18.492).² The rotating lines traced by the acrobats "whirling" in the middle (ἐδίνευον κατὰ μέσσους, 18.605-606) reflect the "whirling" of dancing boys in the wedding procession (18.494) and the ploughmen turning their teams (ζεύγεα δινεύοντες, 18.543).³

This ornamentality is not easily discernible from the figural dimension of the depiction. As the chain of dancers frequently occurring on Geometric vases reveals, we regularly find this fragile and flexible distinction in the contemporary culture of viewing. As well as on the Shield of Achilles, it may be visible more generally in the motif of *kosmêsis*, of warriors "adorning" themselves with cuirasses, greaves and helmets (Lissarrague 2018, 129). In the case of the Euphorbus plate (Figure 1), Michael Squire (2018, 3-16) shows how the purely geometric ornaments descend from the ornamental frame and bleed into both the represented scene and its meaning. The floral patterns, dotted rosettes and swastika fill the space of the scene. But also, in the upper centre, it is suggested that the patterns of spirals (visually resonating with the inner decoration of the shields of Menelaus and Euphorbus, the decoration of their breastplates, and the spiral pattern emerging from the horizontal ground line of the bottom of the tondo), palmettes,



Fig. 1. *Euphorbus plate*. Found in Kamiros, Rhodes, circa 600 BC. Inv. A749 (1860/0404.1), London, British Museum. Creative Commons license CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

² Carruesco (2016, 81), however, follows scholiasts in associating the straight lines with the labyrinth pattern associated with Crete in Greek culture.

³ Here I break from Carruesco's interpretation, as he associates the "whirling" motion used to describe the ploughing with the *boustrophedon* pattern of inscriptions occasionally occurring on Geometric vases (Carruesco 2016, 78). He also suggests a parallel between the Shield and Geometric vases, assumes the organisation of the Shield in concentric bands, and concludes that it is a round shield (Carruesco 2016, 70).

chequerboard and the two eyes represent the face framed by the helmet and – in the very space where the gaze of Menelaos and Hector are supposed to meet – that they evoke what the two warriors see of each other. By entirely unexpected representational means, the viewer is thus able to become immersed in the “interlocked gaze” of the two warriors (Squire 2018, 15).

Similarly, the Shield’s ornamental quality, almost like a hidden decoration, surfaces the moment we turn our attention to it. The ornamental, belonging to the plane of the representing medium, blends in an almost inseparable way into the level of meaning. The semantic field of the word for dance, *choros*, illustrates this overlap. As Carruesco (2016, 72) shows, in its spatial sense, *choros* is the dance floor or architectural structure, but at the same time it describes the dance itself or a chain or choir of dancers. And even though Carruesco pairs Okeanos surrounding the Shield with the circular shape (Carruesco 2016, 79), if we consider the fact that we do not know what the overall shape of the Shield was, and the poet, benefiting from ekphrastic possibilities, does not encourage us to capture it in a single view – as the dominant composition is mapping-like and there are more scales used within the description⁴ – I suggest that we should instead pair Okeanos with the motif of whirls which occurs in its description elsewhere in the *Iliad*, as we will see below. In this sense, Okeanos prolongs the syntax of the *choros*, in the same way that the ornamental motifs *from* the frame penetrate the inner scene of the Euphorbus plate and the warrior figures protrude into its framing zone (Squire 2018, 7).

II. 2 SPIRALS AND SHIELDS IN MINOAN CULTURE

In Minoan art, the presence of the spiral motif, particularly the so-called running spirals (the spiral band) is common. Besides its context-unspecific and generic use in inexpensive products, when connected to more luxurious ones it seems to signal, as a part of “a kind of international pictorial vocabulary”, both palatial and secular sovereignty and power (Hiller 2005, 267). In high-status objects and architecture, the spiral frequently appears connected with the double axe, sacred knots or horns of consecration. However, a connection with the male sphere of activity is also visible (Günkel-Maschek 2012, 122-123). It embraces stone vases and bronze vessels, male clothing, sea sailing, bull-leaping, weapons such as swords, daggers and spearheads, defensive parts of weaponry such as helmets, and, most interestingly for our context, shields (CMS II.3.113, CMS II.8.277, CMS II.8.127; Hiller 2005, 259-263; Günkel-Maschek 2012, 122; see also Blakolmer 2012, 84-85).

The most notable example, the *Fresco of Figure-of-Eight Shields* (Figure 2) on the background of a frieze of running spirals, comes from the Knossian Hall of the Colonnades and is assumed to have still been in place at the time of the destruction, probably in LMIIIA, as its fragments were burnt and the frieze itself seems to have inspired Mycenaean examples from Tiryns and Mycenae (Immerwahr 1990, 99). Even though tracing concrete iconographical motifs of Minoan background through Mycenaean culture to Archaic Greece is an uncertain endeavour, in this case the association of the spiral with male affairs and especially weapons is evident on Mycenaean artefacts from the Tomb of Agamemnon (Figure 3), and can easily be associated with the inner spiral decoration of two of the round shields on the Euphorbus plate. In Homer, the verb *dineuō*

⁴ For detailed analysis of this perspective, see Valentinová 2021, 66-70; for various scales, see Purves (2010, 46-55).



Fig. 2. *Fresco of Figure-of-Eight Shields*. Knossos, LM II, Inv. No. T6, Archaeological Museum of Heraklion, Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports, Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development [HOCRED].

and its derivatives refer to the spiral forms used to decorate weaponry: the corselet Achilles is going to give to Eumelus (*Il.* 23.559-562) is described as ἀμφιδινέομαι, “whirled around”, and the shield of Cretan Idomeneus as “adorned with spiral” (δινωτός, *Il.* 13.407).⁵



Fig. 3. *Agamemnon's golden breastplate from grave V/A, Mycenae*. N. 625, National Archaeological Museum of Athens, Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports, Hellenic Organization of Cultural

⁵ *LSJ*, entry δινωτός; Beekes 2010, entry δίνη. Beekes also cites the opposing opinion of García Ramón, who suggests that δινωτός has a separate meaning of “ornamental, enlivened” and is not related to δίνη. For the ornamental sense of δινωτός see also κλισία δινωτήν (*Od.* 19.56) or δινωτός λέχος (*Il.* 3.391). I assume that *LSJ* suggestion of ἀμφιδινέομαι describing a single stream of tin rolled around the edge is probably wrong if we take into consideration the decoration of Mycenaean gold breastplates.

III. SPIRALS AND FRAMES

III. 1 COSMOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF OKEANOS

In the depiction of the Shield (18.484-489), as elsewhere in the *Iliad*, the *cosmological* dimension of Okeanos is evoked by the fact that the sun, in addition to the moon and the stars, sets into it (*Il.* 8.485, 18.239-240) and rises out of its waters again (*Il.* 7.421-422; *Od.* 19.433-434).⁶ The only exception is the Bear, which “alone never sinks into the baths (λοετρά) of Okeanos” (*Il.* 18.489 = *Od.* 5.275).

Elsewhere in Homer, and in Hesiod, Okeanos is described through the imagery of its streams and whirls. Right before the description of the shield-making process, Hephaistos, the divine maker, describes how Thetis and Eurynome rescued him after his mother had thrown him down from Olympos: he depicts Okeanos as “going backwards” (ἄψορρός, *Il.* 18.399), a term known only from its connection to Okeanos.⁷ The same epithet is used in the *Odyssey*. In both poems, Okeanos is also literally “deep-eddying” (βαθυδίνης) or “deep-flowing” (βαθυρρός).⁸ In Hesiod, even though Okeanos is personified as a god with a secure place on the genealogical tree of the Greek divinities, as one of the Titans born from the intercourse of Uranos and Gaia (*Theog.* 132-138), he also possesses some cosmological attributes not very different from their depiction in Homer: in *Theogony*, Okeanos is “going backwards” and “deep-eddying”, and his children are described as “eddying”.⁹ Nine-tenths of Okeanos’s water mass (the remainder being the Styx) is “flowing around the Earth and the broad back of the sea in silver whirls” (*Theog.* 790-791).

III. 2 THE ABSENCE OF A COSMOGONIC DIMENSION OF OKEANOS

Because Hesiod also portrays Okeanos as the “perfect” river (*Theog.* 240, 959: Ὠκεανοῖο τελήεντος ποταμοῖο), and as perfection was later associated with circular motion in Plato and also in Alcmaeon (DK 24 B 2), it has generally been assumed that Okeanos must encircle the Earth as it must encircle the Shield as its rim, which must *thus* be circular. The combination of the image of whirling with the assumption of circulation around the Earth (ἄψορρός) led to a further suggestion that the primordial Okeanos allegedly developed into the more complex image of the cosmologic or even cosmogonic whirl known from Empedocles and later Greek philosophy;¹⁰ this notion has largely been abandoned now (e.g., Gregory 2007, 29ff; Couprie 2011).

⁶ West (1997, 144-148), in searching for foreign models for this passage, suggested as a parallel the Ugaritic poem (*KTU* 1.23.30-54) which describes El coming “to the shore of the sea, to the shore of the deep (*thm*)”. This led to the birth of two sons, Dawn and Night. However, the *thm* may only be here a poetic parallelism (Segert 1983) to the previous term “sea”; I am grateful to František Válek for this observation.

⁷ I use Beekes’s (2010) translation here. *LSJ* and West (1997, 148) translate as “flowing back into itself”. The frequent translation as “encircling” is probably already influenced by the assumption that the shape of the Shield is circular; see below.

⁸ *Od.* 20.65 (ἄψορρός); *Od.* 10. 511 (βαθυδίνης); *Il.* 7.422, 21.195, *Od.* 11.13 (βαθυρρός).

⁹ *Theog.* 776 (ἄψορρός); *Theog.* 133, *Op.* 171 (βαθυδίνης); *Theog.* 337-345 (Ὠκεανῶ Ποταμοὺς τέκε δινήεντας).

¹⁰ For Okeanos as a freshwater river encircling the circular Earth, which as such has to be adopted from Egyptian or Mesopotamian civilisation, see KRS (2003, 11). Ferguson (1971, 113) argued that the later Greek image of cosmologic and cosmogonic δῖνος or δίνη coined first by Empedocles is a genuinely Greek model, which might already have its origins in the Homeric image of encircling Okeanos, from where it might have been adopted by Thales. West (1994, 300-305) suggested a cosmologic vortex as early as in Thales (thus excluding Homer) and argued that the image was

Furthermore, there is a passage called the “Deception of Zeus”, containing a cluster of mentions describing Okeanos, accompanied by the otherwise almost unknown “mother” Tethys, as the “origin of the gods” (Ὠκεανός τε θεῶν γένεσιν; *Il.* 14.200, 14.301), or simply as the “origin of all” (Ὠκεανοῦ, ὃς περ γένεσις πάντεσσι τέτυκται; *Il.* 14.244), which has often been understood as the first Greek cosmogonic or at least theogonic construction (and Homer's only one), an alternative scheme to Hesiod.¹¹ However, the place of this passage (including the division of the cosmos into three parts in Poseidon's subsequent speech; *Il.* 15.187) in the original oral composition has repeatedly been questioned on the basis of its poetic means *and* subject theme. Walter Burkert argued that placing divinity in naturalistic and cosmic settings is something entirely different from well-known Homeric anthropomorphism.¹² Thus, I suggest that these assumptions of the circular shape of Okeanos, its image of a single stream and its possible temporal aspect are either anachronistic or in themselves circular.

III. 3 EKPHRASTIC TOPOGRAPHY OF OKEANOS

Neither Homer nor Hesiod specify where Okeanos is supposed to meet the Earth: is it near Tartarus (*Il.* 8.478-481; *Theog.* 729-792), the Elysian plain (*Od.* 4.563), or the “dank house of Hades” (*Od.* 10.508-512, 11.13-22)? Are there Pygmies, spending their lives fighting cranes (*Il.* 3.1-7), the Cimmerians, wrapped in mist and cloud (*Od.* 11.14-15), Aethiopians sacrificing hekatombs (*Il.* 23.205-206), Hesperides (*Theog.* 215-216), the three-headed giant Geryon (*Theog.* 287-299), the three Gorgons (*Theog.* 274) or Knossian dancing youths? These are places where the boundaries, or “limits” (*peirata*) of the Earth are located (*Od.* 4.563, 11.13; *Il.* 8.478; *Il.* 14.200=301), but Earth is also limitless, *apeiron* (*Il.* 7.446, *Od.* 1.98, 5.46, 15.79, 17.386, 19.107).¹³ Okeanos is thus essentially liminal; for humans, it is spatially and cognitively unapproachable.

If, instead of temporal aspects, we focus on the visual qualities of Okeanos as the ekphrastic description of the Shield invites us to, we can discern some logic in the connection with the neighbouring image of Knossian dance. Like other rivers in the Epics, the continuity of rippling waters offers a possible pattern for Okeanos's ornamental quality.¹⁴ In the washing scene with Nausikaa, the “washing pools”, which probably actually operate as whirls, are described without using the verb *dineuō*, as flowing “in streams and bubbles from the underneath” (*Od.* 6.85-88), whereas at the same time, the mules are driven to graze “*alongside* [my emphasis] the eddying river” (ποταμὸν πάρα δινέεντα; *Od.* 6.89). Elsewhere, when Hephaistos fights with the Trojan river Skamandros and sets up a conflagration, the distressed fish in its eddies (κατὰ δίνας)

adopted from the original Near Eastern conception of the primordial whirl as the cosmogonic tradition transmitted by Philo of Byblos reveals.

¹¹ E.g., Gregory 2007, 21. The cosmogonic sense of this passage was first implied by Plato, *Tht.* 152e and then Aristotle, *Met.* I.3.983b27.

¹² Following earlier suggestions, Burkert takes the plot as a “young” borrowing from another Near Eastern source, the beginning of the Babylonian poem *Enuma Elish*, in which a primordial couple, Apsu and Tiamat, mix their fresh and salt waters before being replaced by later generations of gods (1992, 89-93 and 201, n. 9 for condensed bibliography of the discussion). For the opposing view that “The Deception of Zeus” is a genuine passage, see e.g., Janko 1994, 168.

¹³ For the whole argument of Okeanos' unapproachability with regards to the mapping-like and frameless quality of the Shield see Valentinová 2021, 64-102.

¹⁴ Okeanos is considered to be a river, although of a specific kind (*Il.* 20.7; Bremmer 2019).

are “performing acrobatics” (κυβίστων) *along* its stream (κατὰ ῥέεθρα), very similar to the two acrobats whirling (δοιῶ δὲ κυβιστητῆρε ἐδίνευον) among the Knossian dancers (*Il.* 21.353; cf. *Il.* 18.605). The imagery of the Knossian dance and that of Okeanos spill into each other.

If, in Archaic Greece, two types of world description existed side by side – the ekphrastic Homeric description (even when placed within the extensive tissue of the deeds of warriors, combats, and skirmishes with gods) and Hesiodic theogonic or cosmogonic explanations demanding the idea of a distant past – we may still see traces of it in the doctrine of Pherecydes of Syros. When he discusses the origins of the world he states: “Beginning [of his book] is: Zas [Ζ] and Chronos were always, and Chthonie was. But the name of Chthonie became Earth (Γῆ) when Zas gave her the earth as a present.” This wedding gift was a robe Zeus had made himself, “great and beautiful, and on it he embroiders (*poikillei*) Earth, Ogenos [Okeanos] and the houses of Ogenos.”¹⁵

The two names of Earth / Chthonie allow us to differentiate between its chthonic aspect, alluding to the depth and the past, and to its landscape quality, alluding to the surface of the Earth and the Homeric “cartographic” view of the world in the *Iliad* (Purves 2010, 101). The verb *poikillei*, although partially restored here, also introduces the depiction of the Knossian scene on the Shield. Besides the impression of shimmering things and fickleness, employed by the poet to stress the impression of incessant movement, it preserves the meaning of “stitch”, “knit”, or “weave” and alludes to textile production. The prominent role of luxury textile art, the dominant Minoan craft, in cultural transmission may be alluded to not only here, but also in another Homeric ekphrasis, the Tapestry of Helen (*Il.* 3.121-128).

III. 4 MINOAN SPIRAL FRAMES

Minoan spiral bands, together with other decorative friezes (ivy chains, horizontal bands of assorted colours or Minoan rosettes) and architectonic socles, were depicted so often that Immerwahr called them “perhaps the most conservative features in Aegean painting, with surprisingly little change” (1990, 166-167). Spiral frames not only traversed the walls accompanying persons moving through the passageway, as in the *Fresco of Figure-of-Eight Shields*, but were also employed as a kind of partial frame enclosing frescoes with figural or landscape motifs, as was the case with the above partial frame of the *Monkeys Fresco* from Room 6 in Building Beta at Akrotiri. Here the spiral band forms what Irene Nikolakopoulou and Carl Knappett call, following Verity Platt and Michael Squire, the intra-compositional frame, that is, the frame executed in the same medium (2022, 204). I do not agree that the existence of the upper border frame may itself create the sense of detachment for the viewer, as in my view Minoan painting deliberately did not use the fixed point of viewer, choosing instead to place the viewer very close to the picture’s surface; it however may contribute to the immersion-detachment dynamic, in a similar manner to the elusive bordering Okeanos in the case of the Shield.¹⁶

¹⁵ DK 7 B1 and B2, transl. Laks and Most 2016: 173, 175.

¹⁶ For the absorption-distance dynamic on Minoan frescoes see Valentinová 2022, 188-189. It is also noteworthy that even in the case of some Akrotiri frescoes, the carefully measured geometric templates of the linear spiral and four hyperbolae were quite surprisingly used to depict the contours of human figures (Tsakalidou et al. 2018, 579-589). Such distinctive decoration has no attested parallels in the Aegean, and even though it does not disclose the same type of self-referentiality as the Shield of Achilles of Euphorbus plate, it also builds upon some kind of ornamentality-figural blending.



Fig. 4. *Sacred Grove and Dance Fresco*. Knossos, LM I, photograph by Olaf Tausch, Inv. no. T25. Archaeological Museum of Heraklion, Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports, Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development [HOCRED].

IV. OKEANOS ON THE SHIELD OF ACHILLES AS A VISUAL IMAGE OF MINOAN BACKGROUND

Preserved in the earliest layers of Archaic Greek visual representations, the two contextual connections visible in Minoan visual culture discussed so far – the association of spirals with shields and their usage as ornamental bands with framing quality – need to be complemented by the last and possibly most obvious one. The Knossian miniatures *Sacred Grove and Dance Fresco* and *Grandstand Fresco* (Figures 4 and 5), connected to the Knossian scene on the Shield



Fig. 5. *Grandstand Fresco*. Knossos, LM I (photograph by Olaf Tausch. Inv. no. T26. Archaeological Museum of Heraklion, Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports, Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development [HOCRED]).



Fig. 6. *Quadruple Spiral Relief Fresco*. Knossos, LM I, watercolour T. Fyfe. Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford (Evans 1930, pl. xv).

by the themes of dance, viewing and their representational strategies,¹⁷ were found together with fragments of painted relief of interlocking spirals with rosettes. Evans (1930, 30-31, pl XV) had them restored into the ceiling *Quadruple Spiral Relief Fresco* (Figure 6), which was accepted by Cameron (1975, 690-693) and suggested by Shaw and Chapin (2016, 117-120) as being the imitation of the more luxurious textile covering, as seems to be confirmed by the carved ceiling in the *Treasury of Minyas* at Orchomenos and geometric patterns also used to decorate floor frescoes at Knossos. The spirals may however also belong to the wall, as assumed by Bernd

¹⁷ For the whole comparison with the representational strategies of the Shield see Valentinová 2021. For the detailed and more systematic analysis of these two frescoes see Valentinová 2022.

Kaiser, possibly with another subdivision of space, as Lyvia Morgan has suggested (2020, 367) regarding the different upper border bands of both frescoes.

And finally, even though entirely hypothetical, given that no consensual etymology for Okeanos has been found so far, in discussing the alternatives Ὠγήν and Ὠγενός, Robert Beekes concludes that the word must be a loan from an Aegean pre-Greek non-Indo-European substrate language or closely related dialects or languages, which spread through the pre-Greek Mediterranean and Western Anatolia (Beekes 2010, xiii-xvi; and entry Ὠκεάνος). This might be strengthened by the fact that toponyms and landscape terms were often borrowed from the substrate language (Beekes 2010, xv; xlii). Beekes also suggests an etymological connection between *dinē* and Mycenaean *qe-qi-no-to*, meaning “endowed with life” (Beekes 2010, entry δίνη), which may allude – convincingly for the shields – to protecting life, but also to movement. And so Homer tells us that the lame Hephaistos, who has spent nine years in the cave rounded by the Okeanos stream (*Il.* 18.398ff), has the inexhaustible potential to create self-moving things (*Il.* 18.369-420).

V. CONCLUSION: ORNAMENT AS A VEHICLE OF CULTURAL MEMORY

In the case of ornaments, it is difficult to tell whether they belong more to the representing medium or the represented content. In the depiction of the Shield of Achilles, they help to structure what we see, or imagine, but similarly to what happens on the Euphorbus plate, they spill significantly into the level of the represented object. Thus, the ornamental enlarges the meaning of the representation and strengthens the “visual dialogue” between its particular scenes (Grethlein 2018: 85). It thus helps us to give fuller meaning to what Squire calls “internal visual resonance” (2018: 9), in our case between the dance and Okeanos.

At the same time, because the represented objects cannot be dissolved from the representing medium and the form of their representation is inextricably bound up with its content, the ornamental, as a kind of in-between quality, is a suitable vehicle of cultural transmission. It is its very essence of structuring which can transmit the original contexts of spiral decorations and which, according to Grethlein (1996: 213) following Jean-Claude Bonne, allows it to cross all genres. Thus, it may function as an accessible vehicle for the transference of cultural contexts across the cultural seams when no stable preferred medium of representation (such as painting or poetry) is at hand. In this process, the three original contexts of Minoan spiral decorations – the proximity to Knossian miniatures, their connection to the shields and their occurrence as ornamental bands – may crystallise in the ekphrastic view of the poet into one visual thematic element of whirling Okeanos.

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- LSJ. Henry G. Liddell and Robert A., *A Greek–English Lexicon*
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