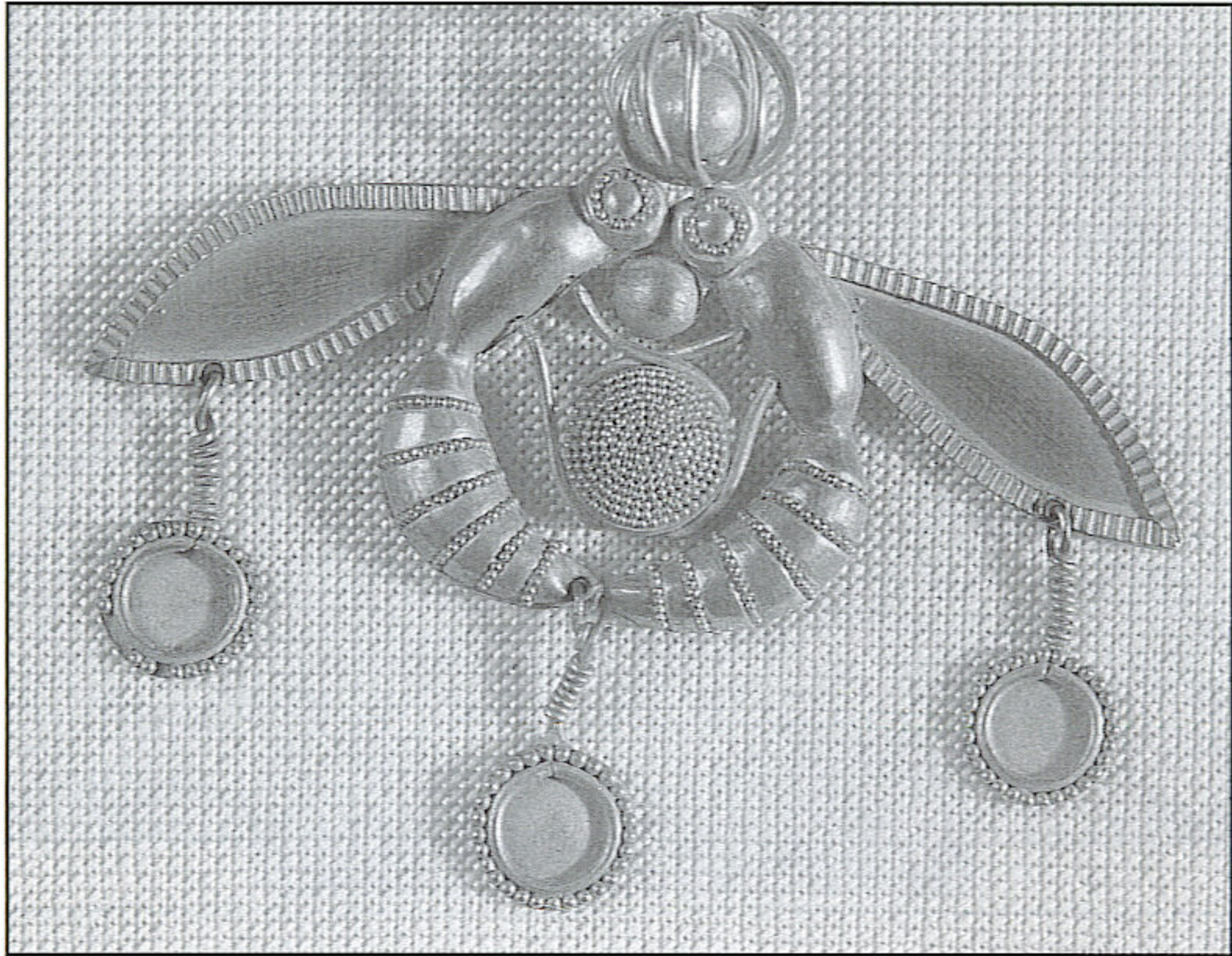
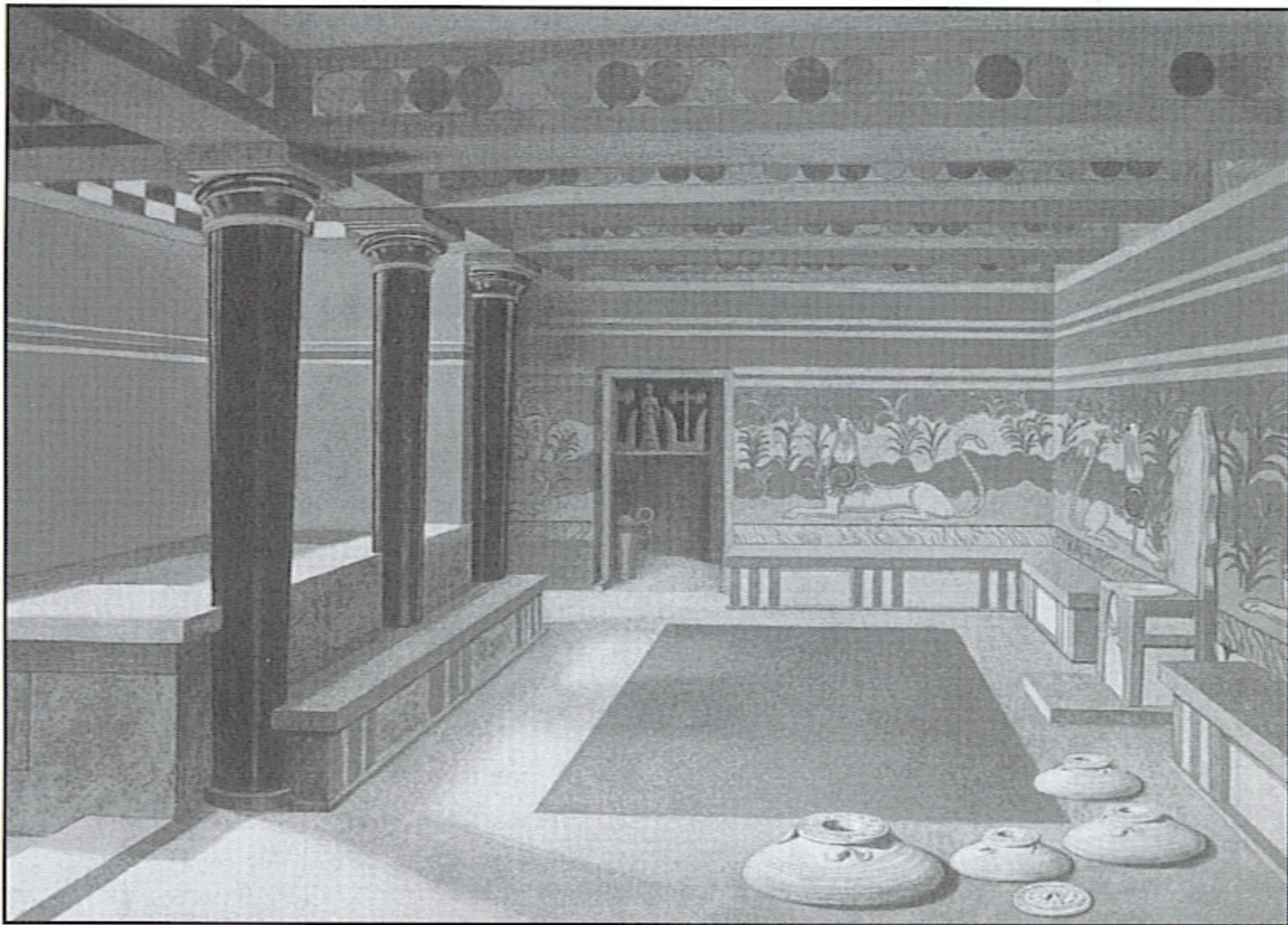


Minoan Artifacts



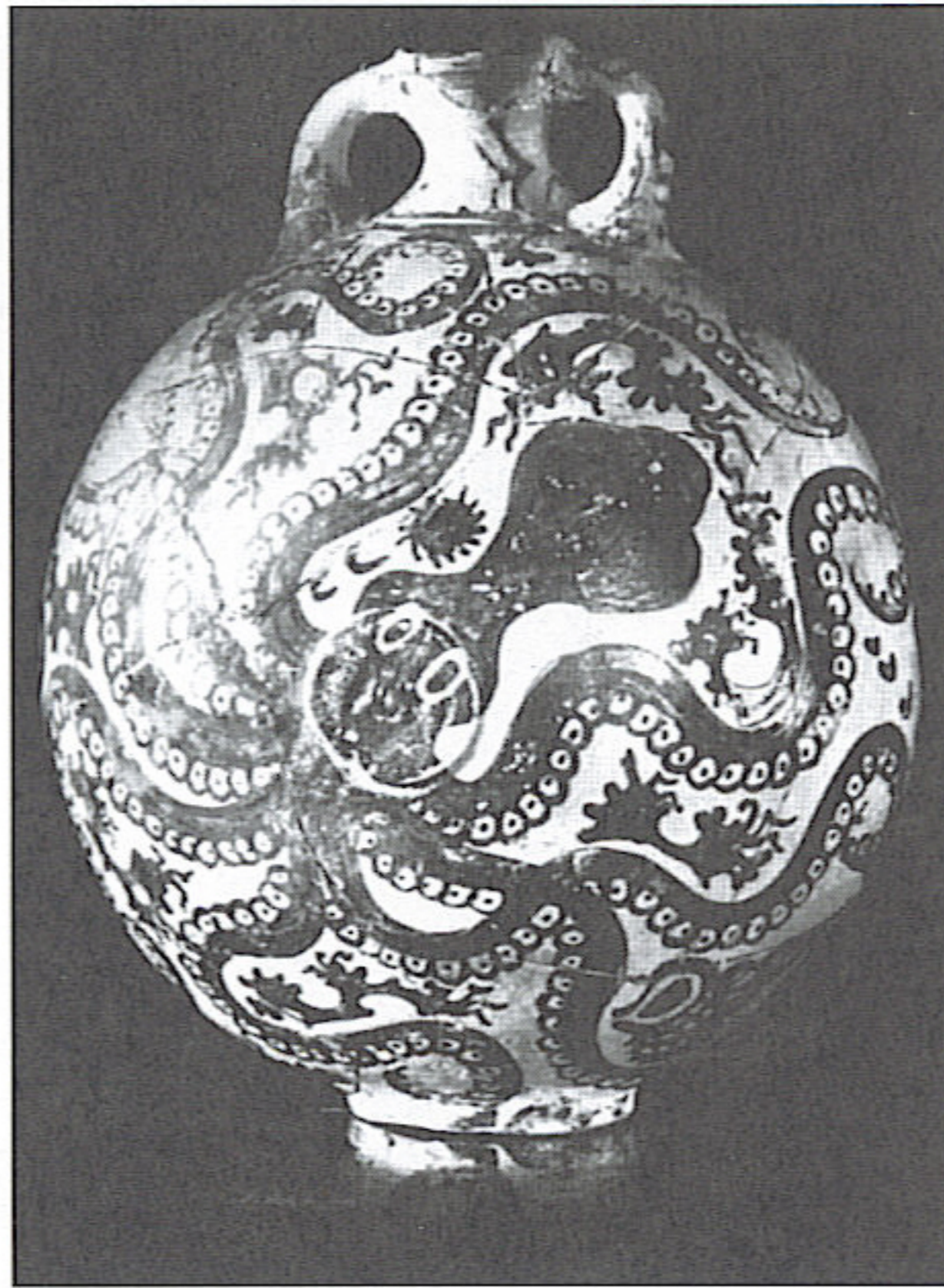
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According to legend, the ancient architect Daedalus (pronounced DEH-dah-luss), who built part of the Minoan Palace of Knossos (pronounced NO-sohs), once crafted a perfect honeycomb out of gold. He presented it to the Goddess Aphrodite (pronounced AFF-roh-DY-tee) as an offering, and it delighted her. Metalworkers at the palace on Crete were as talented as Daedalus and used a variety of metals. The tools they created for farmers, carpenters, gem-cutters, and shipbuilders were made of *bronze*, a mixture of copper and tin. They also fashioned fish-hooks made of copper for fishing poles. Their most delicate and beautiful work was done with gold. Minoan metalworkers made golden seals for documents and golden jewelry for the Minoan nobles. The gold pendant pictured here was made to be worn on a necklace chain, or as a decoration in a Minoan noblewoman's hair. It depicts two bees holding a honeycomb between them, and sharing a drop of its honey. It was said that honey was often used in offerings to the Gods at Knossos, in honor of Aphrodite and Daedalus.



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Palaces on ancient Crete were accessible to all members of Minoan society. The Palace of Knossos (pronounced NO-sohs), located on the north coast of Crete, was a large, rambling collection of rooms. It was made of stone and had wooden roofs. Besides housing the royal family, Knossos contained religious sanctuaries, a theater, and workshops for craftspeople such as jewelers, leatherworkers, metalworkers, painters, potters, sculptors, and shipbuilders. Non-royal Minoans lived in 2- and 3-story mud-brick and stone houses that lined the roads leading to the palace. Enormous storerooms in the palace were stocked with grains, oil, and wine for the whole community. The cooking rooms held hundreds of clay pots filled with foods including olives, lemons, and a particular kind of juicy cactus that the Minoans loved to eat. Palace rooms and stairways contained downward-tapering pillars, a design the Minoans seem to have originated. There is no evidence that the Minoans ever prepared their palaces for warfare. Minoan palace doors did not have locks or bolts, and the outside of the palaces did not have high, protective walls, gates, or battlements. The room pictured here, like all of the rooms at Knossos, was painted with colorful murals of animals and plants and had decorative borders around the windows and doors. It is considered the throne room, and may have been used by an ancient priest-king for religious rituals. Oil burners and figurines believed to be sacred symbols were excavated here. There is also evidence of a sunken pit in this room that may have been used for ritual baths.



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Minoan artists created pottery of many shapes and sizes. Potters formed vases, bowls, cups, and other objects by hand or on a potter's wheel. Storage vessels were made of baked clay but were not painted. They were kept in underground storerooms, on the lowest level of the Palace of Knossos (pronounced NO-sohs). Enormous unpainted clay pots have been excavated from the storerooms at Knossos—still filled with olive oil and grains! The Minoans created other clay vessels decorated with colors and designs. Early pots were colored with red or white glazes, but later potters used other vibrant colors, such as yellow and green. Minoan potters also carefully copied plants, animals, and fish from the natural world onto their pottery. Archeologists have found Minoan clay pots, bowls, cups, and large two-handled jugs painted with starfish, seashells, and seahorses among the ruins of Crete. Similarly decorated pieces have been excavated in Spain and Egypt, suggesting that the Minoans traded their wares far from their island home. The vase pictured here is illustrated with a large-eyed octopus, surrounded by his eight swirling legs, or *tentacles*. Sea plants and jellyfish can be seen around the octopus. The vase was excavated among the ruins of a palace on the eastern tip of Crete and dates from 1500 B.C.E. It was probably used to transport wine, or water from near by rivers.



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Early Minoans looked to nature for religious inspiration. They did not build magnificent temples, but worshipped outside in natural caves or at small altars set up in their homes. No life-size statues were ever excavated from Minoan sites. Instead, Minoan statues and figurines were small, so they could be carried easily. During musical religious festivals, the Minoans worshipped their peaceful Mother Goddess, and may have carried figurines of her image in processions through their palaces. Minoans believed that the Mother Goddess was the guardian of animals, birds, and fish. They believed she provided the seasonal harvests of produce, and that in her presence plants would flower and trees would bear fruit. Her sacred symbols were the lion, representing strength; the bull, representing the creation of life; and the snake, representing rebirth when it shed its skin. This image shows a detailed figurine of the Mother Goddess holding two snakes in her hands. On her headdress is a figure of a lion. The apron on the front of her gown is in the shape of a bull's horns.



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Modern archeologists are amazed by the sophisticated Minoan water-management systems. Minoan farmers, stone masons, and plumbers worked together to build many stone and clay drains that carried water to and from the Palace of Knossos (pronounced NO-sohs) on Crete. Many of these drain pipes, like the two pictured here, ran alongside the roads leading from the palace, which were the first paved roads in the western world. There is evidence that the rooms for preparing food had running water, like faucets in modern kitchens. Rooms for religious rituals were supplied with basins of water. Bedrooms often contained small fountains in the corners to keep the rooms cool. The Palace of Knossos also had several bathrooms. All of them had lavishly tiled floors, with lively murals of dolphins and other sea creatures painted on the walls. Bathrooms also had deep bathtubs, which were decorated in colorful tiles and gemstones. Bathers would heat jugs of water over a fire and then fill the tubs. After their baths, bathers tipped the tubs to empty the water through a drainpipe in the floor. Minoan bathtubs were contoured to fit the body comfortably, and could be moved from room to room. Another extraordinary find in Minoan bathrooms was evidence of flushing toilets—over 3,000 years before they were developed in Europe!



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Four types of writing existed in ancient Crete. One of these, the oldest script, was named “Linear A” by archeologists, because it is seemingly written in *linear* arrangement, or in straight lines. Linear A has not yet been translated. It is a written language that is made up of simple drawings, or *pictographs*, used to represent words or simple ideas. Linear A may be the ancient written language of the Minoan priest-kings, and may have been used in religious ceremonies. Linear A tablets have been found at sites of Cretan altars, next to Goddess figurines and carvings of the sacred Minoan bull. The tablets bear a carved symbol, or *inscription*, in Linear A that is similar to the Hittite word for “Goddess.” Until this written language of the early Minoans is deciphered, scholars can only wonder if these tablets explain the mysteries of the Minoan religion and culture.