

ART, CULTURE AND MEMORY: A CASE STUDY

'Memory' is currently a key topic in the humanities and social sciences, the focus being on shared, social memories that shape the cultural identities of communities.¹ 'Art', in the sense of visual images that are created, express ideas, and have a life cycle of interaction, has the power to harness and stimulate memory.

Images and Memory

Three-dimensional images have the power to encapsulate memory through the notion of embodiment. Ancestral memory is often sculptural. Plastering and painting a human skull, as in ancient Jericho, literally turns the ancestral body into a mnemonic image, as do Egyptian mummy cases and masks, interring the physical remains of a person into an outer skin of expression of the self. While portraits freeze moments in life, plastered skulls and death masks consolidate post-mortem memory.

In many cultures, the life essence of the deceased is magically preserved through ritual animation. The Egyptian rite of 'Opening of the Mouth' gave breath to the mummy and to the statue of the *ka*, the spiritual double of a person, the statue providing a link between the living and the dead.² In a different way, the deposition of funerary masks is also a form of memory consolidator. The gold masks of the Mycenae Shaft Graves have sufficient individuation in their features to be classified as memorials of identity. Yet once interred with the burial, they disappeared from view. For the immediate descendants (and only for them), the *memory* of the image would recall the deceased at interment, triggering a range of associations from life that were no doubt recalled during rituals of death.

Images left behind in potent places may have a similar function as carriers of memory, but of the living. Figurines of disembodied heads and limbs tucked into rock crevices on Cretan peak sanctuaries no doubt were thought of as pathways of communication between divine power and the supplicant, who would hold the memory of the deposition of the object in mind in anticipation of a positive outcome. This is how modern Greek *tamata* work, wax figures or metal cut-outs of heads, limbs and eyes placed at the altar of a church as a supplication for a healthy body. It is the *memory* of the image in its ritual context that is efficacious.

¹ The theoretical literature on memory is extensive. Maurice HALBWACHS put forward the notion of 'collective memory' as formulated through social groups (*La mémoire collective / On Collective Memory* (1950/1992), a concept that was developed by Paul CONNERTON in *How Societies Remember* (1989), in which he used the term 'social memory'. Jan ASSMANN's influential work distinguishes 'cultural memory' – expressed through ceremonies, festivals, images and texts – as encompassing a wider time frame than social memory by establishing group coherence through the context of tradition (*Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen / Cultural Memory and Early Civilization. Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (1992/2011)). On memory in relation to archaeology, material culture, and the ancient world, see in particular: J. FENTRESS and C. WICKHAM, *Social Memory. New Perspectives on the Past* (1992); S.E. ALCOCK, *Archaeologies of the Greek Past. Landscape, Monuments, and Memories* (2002); J. MACK, *The Museum of the Mind. Art and Memory in World Cultures* (2003); A.M. JONES, *Memory and Material Culture* (2007); D. BORIĆ, *Archaeology and Memory* (2010); A. ERLI, *Memory in Culture* (2011); and the papers in R.M. VAN DYKE and S.E. ALCOCK (eds), *Archaeologies of Memory* (2003); N. YOFFEE (ed.), *Negotiating the Past in the Past. Identity, Memory, and Landscape in Archaeological Research* (2007); A. ERLI, A. NÜNNING and S.B. YOUNG (eds), *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (2008); B.J. MILLS and W.H. WALKER (eds), *Memory Work. Archaeologies of Material Practices* (2008); I. BARBIERA, A.M. CHOYKE and J.A. RASSON (eds), *Materializing Memory. Archaeological Material Culture and the Semantics of the Past* (2009); D. NADALI (ed.), *Envisioning the Past Through Memories. How Memory Shaped Ancient Near Eastern Societies* (2016).

² E. OTTO, *Das Ägyptische Mundöffnungsritual* (1960).

Memory is negotiable, manipulative and capable of being manipulated. In the Egyptian Books of the Dead, each gate leading to the afterlife was a trial of memory. Fearsome gatekeepers exhort the deceased to “remember” the esoteric knowledge of their names, their images a stimulus for the anticipated memory.³

Memory is also highly selective. It orders the past in ways that shape our perceptions of self and other, now and then. Historical memory legitimizes power and validates aspirations. In ancient Egyptian art, notably on the pylons of New Kingdom temples, images of the king smiting his enemies were the stimulus for created memories of royal triumphs.⁴ But here historical and cosmic memory is indistinguishable, as the king’s duty was to maintain cosmic order. The staging of memory in such images is ideological.

Memory is above all *interactive*, an active flow between persons, spaces, senses and actions. Memories are inscribed and mediated through monuments, images and texts that draw on the past to legitimize the present social order and validate future aspirations. Mural art, in particular, is shaped by time and space, images in dialogue with architectural settings and the movements of the viewer – through doorways, round corners, up, down, and around. Through the interaction of image, structure and performative action, art, like ritual, has the power to manipulate memory.

All mural and sculptural art of ancient cultures is referential. Articulation of space is crucial to response. Some murals surround the viewer within the pictorial space (as in the Spring Fresco from Thera or the Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii); some rely on thematic elements or narrative sequence, notably in the format of the frieze (as in the miniatures of Thera and Kea); and some work through culmination, in paintings (as in the goddess in Xesté 3), or interactions between painting and sculpture (*ka* statues in Egyptian tombs). In this sense, memory is allied to the articulation of space, with images in context drawing on established memories while formulating new ones through relationships. Visual narratives draw together networks of ideas, building structures that are instrumental in embedding memories into the minds of viewers.

How one defines the role of memory in mural images depends on one’s perception of the role of human response. Paul Connerton’s influential work distinguished between ‘performative’ and ‘inscribed’ social memory.⁵ ‘Performative’ memory refers to the enactment of rituals, dialogues with places, and sensations of sound and other stimuli, whereas ‘inscribed’ memories are transmitted through monuments, pictures and texts, drawing on the past to legitimize the present and future social order. Yet distinctions between ‘performative’ and ‘inscribed’ memory are permeable. Monuments and pictures convey their meanings within the context of viewing, an active participation that is as much bodily as cognitive. Paintings are inscribed in their positions on walls, but responded to through performative human action, in a flow of what I call ‘interactive memory’. What is remembered in the social domain is what is shared, transcribed into ideas and images that connect the viewer to cultural heritage.

A Case Study from Kea

The life of the Miniature Frieze from Ayia Irini on Kea was short-lived, yet both the scenes and the context of their architectural space are striking reflections of socio-cultural memory.⁶ References to the

³ The names, such as “He whose face is inverted”, are as esoteric as the images of the guardians are bizarre, but to each gatekeeper the deceased is obliged to claim “I know you and I know your name.” See Spell 144, R.O. FAULKNER, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead* (1990), 133-135; cf. E. HORNUNG, *The Valley of the Kings. Horizon of Eternity* (1990) 65, figs 30-32.

⁴ E. SWAN HALL, *The Pharaoh Smites his Enemies* (1986); M.M. LUISELLI, “The Ancient Egyptian Scene of ‘Pharaoh Smiting his Enemies’: an Attempt to Visualize Cultural Memory?”, in M. BOMMAS (ed.), *Cultural Memory and Identity in Ancient Societies* (2013) 10-25.

⁵ CONNERTON (*supra* n. 1). Contrast Jan ASSMANN (*supra* n. 1) on cultural memory as disseminated through festivals, ceremonies, pictures and texts.

⁶ This notion is fully explored and the wall paintings fully illustrated in L. MORGAN, *Ayia Irini. The Wall Paintings from the Northeast Bastion: Social Context and the Miniature Frieze* (in press). Preliminary publications: L.

social dynamics of feasting, processions, gift exchange, and particularized landscape provide a potent example of the relationship between images and memory, both in terms of the fundamentals of spatial structure and in the complexity of socio-cultural allusion within the iconographic programme.

Murals are as long or as short as the designated wall. But no matter their length, murals always abbreviate the story. Choosing which parts are most resonant of the whole is the key to eliciting response, as through their ability to structure and consolidate memory, images have the power to affect and legitimize social order.

Crucially, the Northeast Bastion, built as an extension to the fortification wall in Late Cycladic I (Period VI), strategically overlooked the approach to the town from the marshy coast to the east, the main Gateway into the town to the south and, beyond, ships arriving from the open sea (Pl. CXXXIX). Between the Bastion and the Gateway lay an open area suitable for community gatherings. The architecture (which included a drain in N20), finds (pottery associated with drinking and eating, but no household industries), and the iconography of the wall paintings all indicate that the Bastion was used for elite gatherings and banqueting.⁷

One entered the Bastion rooms through N18, in which we may imagine a single window looking out towards the east onto the approach from the harbour and the coast (Pl. CXLa). This room had several large-scale paintings of plants. Depictions of grasses and reeds refer the viewer to a wider world outside and link the iconography of the two painted rooms through topography, while paintings of myrtle and bramble are resonant of feasting and ceremonial drinking.⁸ Both plants are commonly used in meat stews and blackberries are used for wine. The paintings may well have referenced the interior social interaction of the rooms through drinking and eating.

A doorway in the south wall of N18 led through to N20, the room with the Miniature Frieze. The windows in N20 would have looked both to the east, towards the marshy coast, and to the south, overlooking the public area before the Gateway and the sea beyond.

Envisaging looking from N18, with its Plant Panels, through to N20 with the Miniature Frieze, we glimpse a sense of the participatory nature of the wall paintings and an awareness of orientation (Pl. CXLa).⁹ Walking through painted spaces, a relationship is formed between images, the body and memory.

Landscape in the Miniature Frieze provides the environment for the action. On the north wall of N20 was a town by a river with three of only five women in the frieze.¹⁰ Along the east wall ran a marsh.¹¹ The alignment of images within architectural space is crucial to the structuring of experience, and beneath that part of the frieze windows would have looked out on the approach to the town from the sea, along

MORGAN, "The Wall Paintings of Kea," *BICS* 40 (1995) 243-244; "The Wall Paintings of the North East Bastion at Ayia Irini, Kea," in L.G. MENDONI and A. MAZARAKIS AINIAN (eds), *Kea-Kythnos. History and Archaeology. Proceedings of an International Symposium Kea-Kythnos. 22-25 June 1994* (1998) 201-210; "The Power of Paint: Kea and Beyond," *BICS* 56.1 (2013) 126-127.

⁷ MORGAN (*supra* n. 6, 1995) 243; 1998, 202; in press, Ch. 12; E. GOROGIANNI and R. FITZSIMONS, "Dining on the Fringe Again? The Northeast Bastion as a Minoan-Style Banquet Hall at Ayia Irini, Kea – the Ceramic Evidence," Paper given at the 113th Annual Meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America, Philadelphia, PA, January 5-8, 2012.

⁸ MORGAN (*supra* n. 6, in press) figs 8.1-8.4 (myrtle and bramble), 8.5-8.8 (grasses and reeds), and for discussion on feasting: Ch. 12. Also, L. MORGAN, "Inspiration and Innovation: The Creation of Wall Paintings in the Absence of Pictorial Pottery at Ayia Irini, Kea," in A. VLACHOPOULOS (ed.), *XPΩΣTHPEΣ. Paintbrushes: Wall-Painting and Vase-Painting of the 2nd Millennium BC in Dialogue. Workshop held at Akrotiri, Thera, 24-26 May 2013* (2018) 276-291, fig. 11 (myrtle and bramble).

⁹ In MORGAN (*supra* n. 6, in press) figs 7.27, 8.9, this relationship is illustrated through reconstructions of the rooms with their paintings *in situ*. The windows on the east and south walls are assumed (the upper storey not having survived beyond a few stones), by analogy with the West House at Akrotiri, Thera (C. PALYVOU, *Akrotiri Thera. An Architecture of Affluence 3,500 Years Old* [2005] 47, fig. 46, First Floor) and on the assumption that a room with wall paintings necessitates light.

¹⁰ MORGAN (*supra* n. 6, in press) fig. 7.1; MORGAN (*supra* note 8) 276 and fig. 5.

¹¹ MORGAN (*supra* n. 6, in press) figs 7.19-7.24, 7.27.

what is today marshy coast with a dried up riverbed. Landscape settings such as these act as spatial cues to memory.

Landscape – real landscape – defines relationships between people and places and is therefore an important stimulus for social memory.¹² As such, the depiction of landscapes in paintings has a crucial mnemonic role. Some engage with cultural memory through references to other paintings. But in the Kea frieze there are also unique portrayals. Sea dotted with white highlights of spume appears throughout the frieze, while parts of the painting delineate the sky, grey and cloudy or shot with pink. These unique allusions to time, place and weather engage the viewer by drawing on fleeting but memorable moments.

Men (not women) were depicted on the south wall engaged in ritualized action. Movements, gestures, and clothing create a definable choreography of action and response, effective in their power to elicit socio-cultural memory. The scenes resonate with one another: men in robes meet by a river, exchanging ritualized gestures and bringing produce in containers, most likely as a form of gift-exchange; men cook in cauldrons by the sea shore; a hunter brings back the prey from a hunt, referencing a scene on the adjacent west wall with deer hunted by dogs.¹³ Along with these scenes, ships on the sea and horses and a chariot on land point to ceremonial events within a public festival.¹⁴ Preparations for a feast and ceremonial moments of display are appropriate images for the walls of an elite banqueting hall.

Festivals, processions, gift-exchange and feasting are commemorative events that promote communal allegiance. They structure collective time, separate routine from intensified social experience, and ensure continuity of cultural knowledge. In preparations for the feast (hunting, bringing produce, cooking), as in the experience of the pageantry (processions on foot and in prestige vehicles) and subsequently in the feast itself, the senses are stimulated in ways that activate memories that promote communal solidarity.

Representing such events in room N20 of the Bastion, both internalizes memory through the events of meeting, eating and drinking that went on *within* the rooms, and externalizes it through the view beyond, a space in which we might imagine cooking in cauldrons to have taken place on special occasions. Cooking meat in a public place, especially when the animal has been hunted, is a memorable, theatrical experience for the community.

With its strategic views and its context as a banqueting hall, the Northeast Bastion demonstrates how paintings, architecture and location are inextricably linked. The paintings are resonant of community experience and its social implications, both as memory and anticipation. Each scene reflects social milieu and community cohesion: elite male prowess (the hunt), social relations (processions, gift-exchange and community cooking), prestige and pageantry (chariots), and seafaring (the ships). In addition, the urban settlement inhabited by women grounds the paintings in community life, while striking depictions of marsh, sea and sky draw on significant aspects of place and time.

These images, situated in their strategic location, are framed within the context of overseas relations. Such images, in consolidating and constructing memory, have the power to legitimize and affect social order.

In 2012, as I watched the Queen's Jubilee in London, I saw all the elements of ancient festivals – feasts, display, ceremonies, procession, local and foreign dignitaries. The event was inspired by Canaletto's paintings of regattas in London and Venice.¹⁵ Canaletto's *ca*1735 Venice painting (Pl. CXLb), symbolic of

¹² See especially: B. BENDER, *Landscape Politics and Perspectives* (1993); B. BENDER, "Place and Landscape," in C. TILLEY, W. KEANE, S. KÜCHLER, M. ROWLANDS and P. SPYER (eds), *Handbook of Material Culture* (2006) 303-314; T. INGOLD, "The Temporality of Landscape," *World Archaeology* 25 (1993) 152-174; C. TILLEY, *A Phenomenology of Landscape. Places, Paths and Monuments* (1994); S. SCHAMA, *Landscape and Memory* (1996); W. ASHMORE and A.B. KNAPP (eds), *Archaeologies of Landscape. Contemporary Perspectives* (1999).

¹³ MORGAN (*supra* n. 6, in press) figs 7.12 (men by a river), 7.8 (cooking in cauldrons), 7.16 (hunter), 7.17 (deer and dogs).

¹⁴ MORGAN (*supra* n. 6, in press) figs 7.8, 7.26 (ships), 7.6, 7.10 (horses and chariot).

¹⁵ D. STARKEY, *Royal River. Power, Pageantry and the Thames* (2012) 92-94, cat. no 52: 'London: The Thames on Lord Mayor's Day', Lobkowicz Collections, Prague (LR5516); C. BAKER and T. HENRY, *The National*

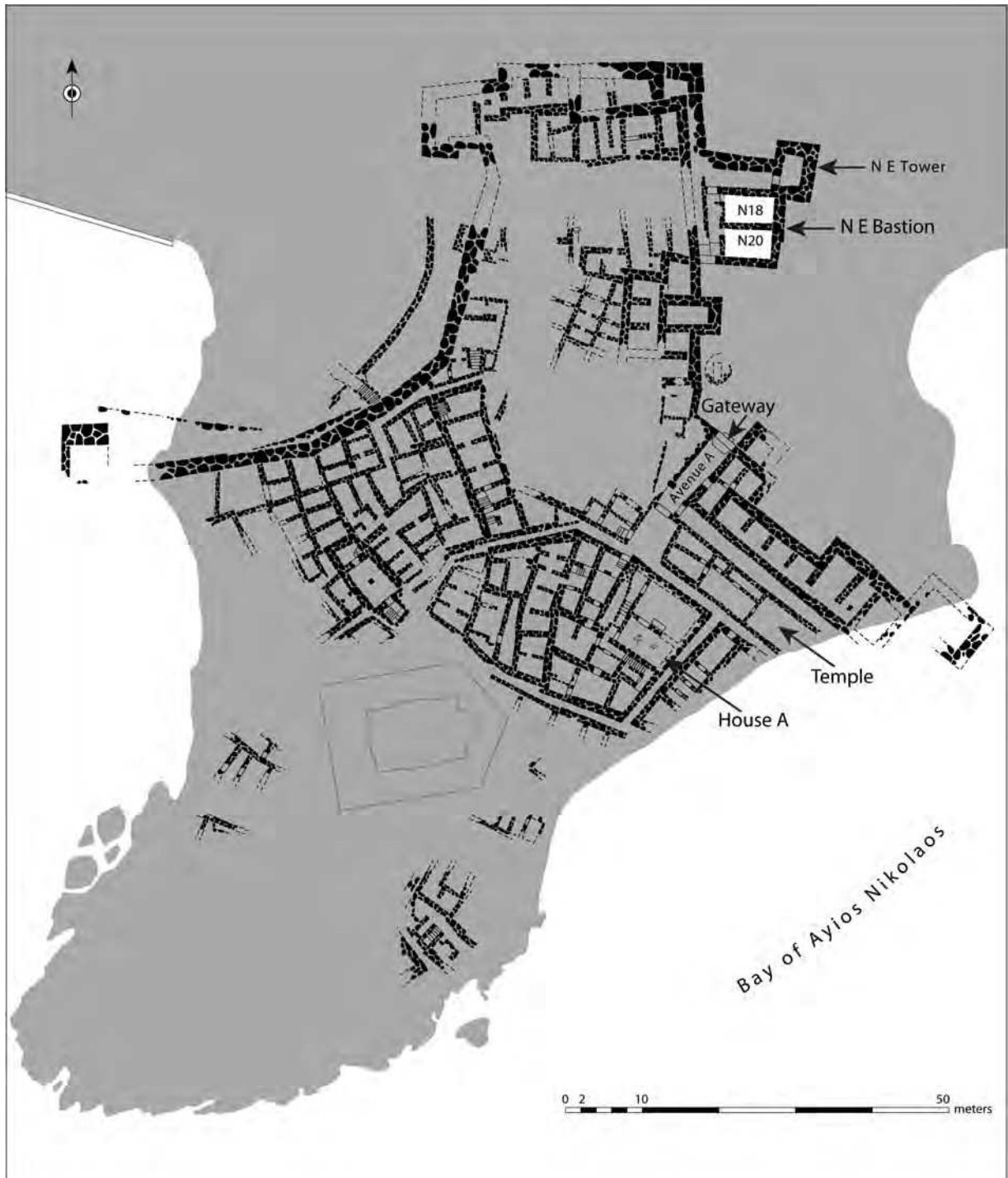
the power of Venetian maritime commerce and drawing on cultural alliances, was commissioned to be shown to prestigious visitors in order that they could witness through art the impressive pageantry of the city state. Though far from ancient Kea, the painting provides a striking echo of the relationship between art, culture and memory.

Lyvia MORGAN

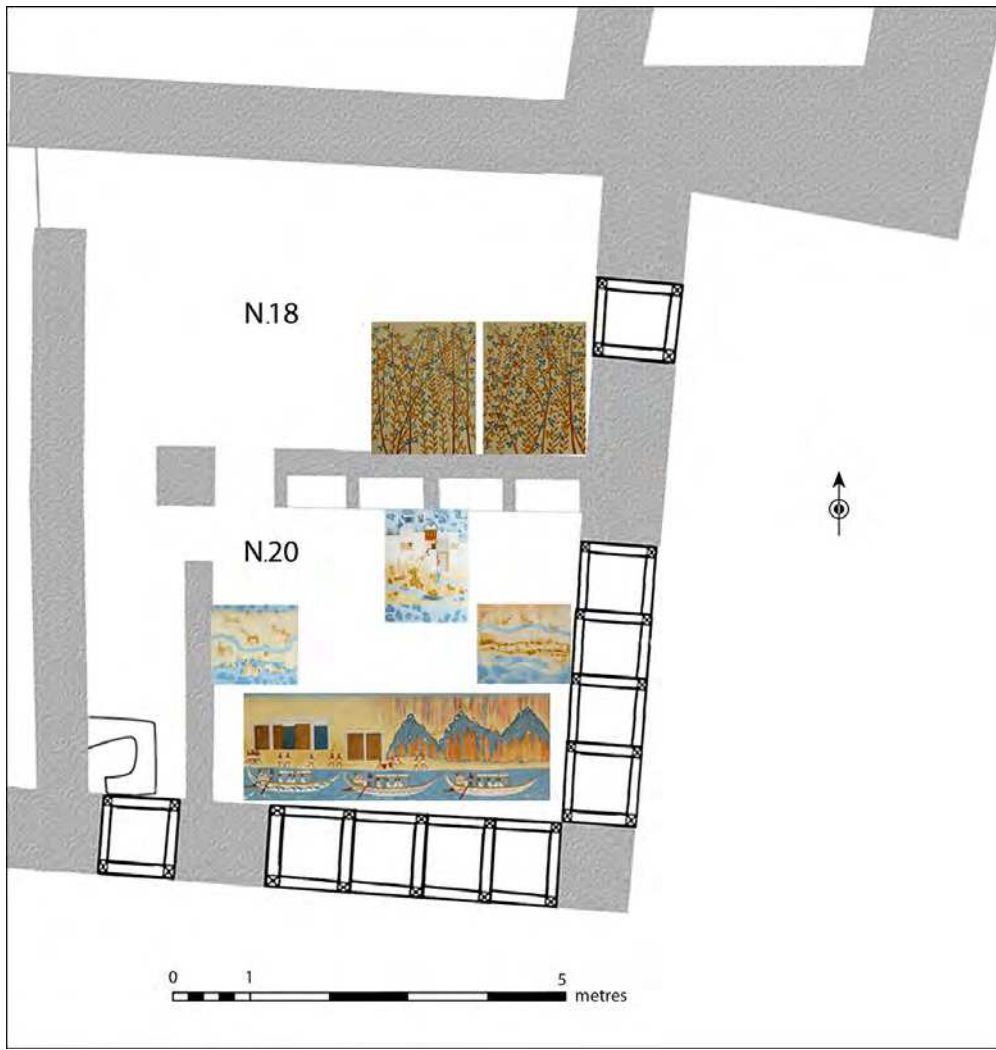
Gallery Complete Illustrated Catalogue (2001) 87-88: 'Venice: A Regatta on the Grand Canal' (NG 938) (cf. NG 4454).

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Pl. CXXXIX Ayia Irini, Kea, showing the relationship between the Northeast Bastion and the approach to the town. Adapted from the site plan (R.L. Holzen).
- Pl. CXLa The Northeast Bastion, proposed upper storey showing the relative positions of some of the painted scenes (L. Morgan).
- Pl. CXLb Canaletto, 'Venice: A Regatta on the Grand Canal', *ca* 1735, oil on canvas, 117.2 x 186.7cm, National Gallery (NG938). © The National Gallery, London. Wyn Ellis Bequest, 1876.



CXL



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