

The snake goddess essay sample



The Snake Goddess, a voluptuous, divine figure with bare breasts, and snakes in both hands, is one of the most well known female deity's and faïence figurines in Minoan culture (Patron). The actual representation of the Snake Goddess is unknown; however, a majority of perceptions would all agree that the Snake Goddess is an important female deity in Minoan civilization. By analyzing the importance of symbolism, the role of women in Minoan civilization and The Snake Goddesses role in Minoan culture, it will become evident that The Snake Goddess plays a significant role in Minoan art, religion and society (Witcombe). Discovered in 1903, by British archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans, at The Temple Repositories, The Snake Goddess dates back to approximately 1600 BCE (Evans 495). Today little is known about the actual representation of the faïence figurine, however evidence supports that The Snake Goddess symbolizes fertility, holiness, and life and death (Flamee). The most prominent way The Snake Goddess represents fertility is by her appearance. Standing at 13½ inches in the Herakleion Museum at Crete, The Snake Goddess holds a snake in each hand, wears a hat with a sitting cat on top and has exposed bare breasts (Witcombe).

The fact that she is depicted partially nude, with her breasts uncovered is interpreted as a sign of fertility mostly relating to the growth of crops. The cat which sits on the hat is acknowledged as a symbol of sex or fertility which provides evidence that she is not only a fertility deity but also a mother deity (Joe). In Minoan religion, snakes often signify protection of the house and life, “ To my own knowledge in Herzegovina and the Serbian lands, East of the Adriatic, it was not an uncommon thing for snakes, who

had sought such human hospitality, to be fed with milk and treated as domestic pets. Such as household snake is known, indeed, as domachilsa or housemother” (Evans 509). This is because snakes are generally related to healing and therefore The Snake Goddess sometimes is believed to represent a motherly figure that stands for protection and guidance. On the opposite end, sometimes snakes can be related to death, for snakes can easily take the life of a human with their poison, and therefore, The Snake Goddess is sometimes considered a goddess of death (Joe). Underneath her exposed breasts, she wears a girdle with a bodice that has a knot which has been given the name, the sacral knot by The Snake Goddesses founder, Sir Arthur Evans.

The sacral knot is significant because it symbolizes holiness towards humans and objects that are of important value to Minoan culture (Evans 506). The fact that The Snake Goddess represents such symbols as fertility, holiness, and life and death reflects greatly on the Minoan civilization through religion and through actions made based on their beliefs. It is without doubt that through the examination of The Snake Goddess’ appearance and her significance as a prominent deity in Minoan culture, symbolism is one of the main contributors to how The Snake Goddess plays a significant role in Minoan art, religion and society. In a time when men were considered to have a higher ranking in society than women, the Minoan civilization tested these waters, and worshiped not gods, but goddesses. One goddess in particular is said to be one of the main goddesses worshiped in Minoan religion, The Snake Goddess. As acknowledged before, it is unclear The Snake Goddesses actual purpose in Minoan civilization, however the idea

that she was a female figure worshiped in Minoan religion seems to be a strong assumption for many archaeologists including Sir Arthur Evans, “ These figures have been sometimes referred to as ‘ Snake charmers,’ but the whole associations in which they were found show that they were of a religious character, and formed in fact the central objects of a shrine” (Evans 507).

Women also played an important part in Minoan culture; they were dominant and given the same rights as men were if not more responsibility, “ Images of women occur more frequently than men in the Minoan archaeological record” (Witcombe 10). Women acted as priestesses, made official decisions in and amongst the community, and were responsible for organizing commune functions (Witcombe 10). These responsibilities and duties were not often jobs of men in Minoan civilization, “ Moreover men are rarely seen in commanding positions, despite attempts to identify them in such positions” (Witcombe 10). It is suggested that the reason why women played such a huge role in Minoan civilization was due to the fact that in Minoan religion they worshiped goddesses and they were greatly influenced by them. It is believed that The Snake Goddess was an important figure in Crete at this time, and was worshiped along side of the Huntress, and The Mountain Mother. Mainly focusing on The Snake Goddess she represented a strong, powerful female deity, who overall acted as an icon for women. The influence The Snake Goddess had on women was substantial.

Women became more than just members of the community, and gained a place in society. It was no longer a man’s world but a world run by women. Even ancient frescoes and other forms of Minoan artwork provide evidence

<https://assignbuster.com/the-snake-goddess-essay-sample/>

of women being more vital than men, because depictions of women were more common than men (Witcombe 10). After examining women's key roles in Minoan civilization it becomes apparent that The Snake Goddess influenced women in Crete in many different ways and played a significant part in Minoan civilization. Just like the statuette of The Snake Goddess, not a whole lot of information is known about Minoan culture and civilization, because there is not enough archaeological evidence that remains today. However, because Minoan culture is one that is not fully understood yet, a key way of determining Minoan past is by the physical remains of the Minoans and their appearance. Often The Snake Goddess is believed to share similar characteristics as the Minoans. For example, In Minoan civilization and religion it has been proposed by Sir Arthur Evans that Minoans worshiped a dominant female deity, perhaps a prominent figure such as The Snake Goddess, Evans states, " Its special religious significance can hardly be a subject of doubt" (Evans 517).

It is believed that those who worshiped the Snake Goddess were greatly influenced by her, and practiced the art of snake charming, " So far, indeed, as the attendants or votaries of the Goddess here worshiped are concerned this is really ' a distinction without a difference,' for the practice of snake-charming would clearly have been part of their priestly functions" (Evans 507). Through ancient artwork like frescoes, statues and paintings, goddesses became a central recurring theme and prominent figures in the Minoan civilization. Besides the reoccurring depiction of goddesses in artwork, The Snake Goddess shows enormous similarities with the Minoans. From what is predicted, the Snake Goddess was portrayed wearing elaborate garments

and clothing accessories much like Minoan civilization would have worn. Evans supports this idea by stating, “ Two features that mark Late Minoan fashions are her absent – the chemise, the upper border of which is seen beneath the neck, and the V-shaped arrangement of the flounces” (Evans 503).

Minoans were also believed to have had a strong respect for nature, crops and animals, which makes a considerable amount of sense because The Snake Goddess symbolizes fertility. By connecting the Snake Goddess to Minoan culture, it is also appropriate to say that women in Minoan civilization were greatly impacted by this female figure and based many life decisions around The Snake Goddess including their beliefs, their roles in the community, and their appearances. When total devotion is given to inanimate object it is obvious why The Snake Goddess played such an important role in Minoan society.

Controversy regarding the literal meaning and representation of The Snake Goddess has been in dispute since the discovery of the statuette on the Island of Crete (Witcombe 1). By not knowing the true significance of The Snake Goddess, readers are given the opportunity to build their own interpretations and opinions; however all these different ideas resolve around one central idea, that The Snake Goddess was a prominent female deity to Minoan civilization. Like Sir Arthur Evans, the idea that The Snake Goddess was an important female deity in Minoan culture, this essay perceives the goddess in the same light. And by examining critical aspects such as; symbolism, the role of women in Minoan civilization and culture, it is

clear that The Snake Goddesses plays a significant role in Minoan art, religion and society.