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# Women and Sport in the Minoan Civilization

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The term Minoan was used to describe the people who lived on the island of Crete during the Bronze Age, from roughly 3000 to 1200 B.C.

Women held a unique position in Minoan society, never equalled in the other major ancient western civilizations. The importance of the Mother goddess is seen by the number of artifacts in which she is depicted. The astonishing representations are those of women spectators, such as in the fresco "The Sacred Grove and Dance." Men are seen crowded together with indistinguishable features, while the women occupy the best seats and are clearly drawn. They apparently had a superior position in the society.

Women in Minoan times are depicted hunting, though a goddess is normally depicted using a bow and arrows. One fragment is felt to depict a woman fishing. Board games have likewise been found, and the Royal Game Board from Knossos, for example, doubtless was utilized by women as well as men. Dancing is seen in many artifacts, and we see group as well as individualistic dances. In one terra-cotta artifact from Palaikastro three female votaries dance with outstretched arms, in a semi-circle, around a central figure playing the lyre. "The Sacred Grove and Dance" miniature fresco shows dancers, and it appears to be a ceremonial dance, with some five hundred spectators. Individual-type dances are those of ecstatic possession and orgiastic dances.

The one activity that is unique in the ancient world depicting women is bull-vaulting. In the "Taureador Fresco," one woman is shown on the horns of a charging bull while a man is depicted somersaulting over the back of the bull. Another girl taumador is presumably assisting the landing of the vaulter. Close examination of the women athletes in this highly dangerous activity shows them wearing the Lubyian sheath for protection of the groin, a leather binding that also encircled the waist. Moreover, the athletes wore pointed shoes like gymnastic shoes and sox or binding on the calves. The hands of the taureadors have leather on them, like the Greek boxing glove, presumably to prevent slipping on the horn. Examination of the bodies of these female performers shows a remarkable athleticism - we see athletes performing a difficult and dangerous task.

The activities participated in by the women, then, are fishing and hunting, board games, dancing and bull games. Moreover, the spectator scenes clearly attest to the unusual status of women in Minoan society.