

THE ARTS OF BRONZE AGE CRETE AND THE
EUROPEAN MODERN STYLE:
REFLECTING AND SHAPING DIFFERENT IDENTITIES

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ABSTRACT

The contemporaneity of the rediscovery of Aegean Bronze Age art and of the emergence of the Modern Style in Europe has often led scholars to suggest a double connection between them. It was assumed that, on the one hand, Minoan and Mycenaean artefacts exerted a certain influence on modern artistic forms and, on the other, the reconstructions and restorations of Aegean artefacts and architecture were influenced by contemporary artistic trends. In this paper, examples of both types of connection are reviewed: it is suggested that they provide only a partial explanation for the features shared by both artistic styles. Many structural parallels and similar visual/compositional principles are common to both Bronze Age and modern artistic languages, and these may often be explained only as 'coincidences', in the sense of similarities and convergences of certain stylistic features occurring independently. In their 'anti-classical revolution', Modern Style artists took up artistic trends from Byzantium, the Orient, and Africa. Likewise, they used Aegean Bronze Age arts against the 'tyranny of the Renaissance and of Classical Greece', which had dominated 19th-century Europe. Minoan art was often perceived as a 'non-European art', which harmonised with the artistic intentions of 'primitivism' and 'exoticism' during the fin de siècle.