Young Girl Gathering Saffron Crocus Flowers

In the recent excavations of Akrotiri, ancient Thera, there have been many frescoes discovered. Akrotiri is in the chain of islands located south-east of mainland Greece. The frescoes found in the palace have been preserved in great condition due to the explosion of the volcano on the island of Santorini, which preserved the paintings under a thick coating of ash. A Fresco is made by applying paint to wet plaster, forming a permanent painting. Frescoes were used to decorate walls of buildings of wealthy, upper class families. They were usually very large and sometimes covered a whole wall. The frescoes were used to tell stories or to depict daily life. The finding of these paintings in Akrotiri helped archaeologists learn about the life and culture of the Minoans.

The Young Girl Gathering Saffron Crocus Flowers is a detail from a large wall painting found in room 3 of House Xeste. It was painted on fresco as a large wall mural. The fresco was painted before 1630 BCE. The painting was done in a traditional Minoan style; free and loose with no rigid lines or strokes. Minoan art perfectly captured scenes of daily life like no other art period had done before.
The young girl in the detail is a very typical depiction of Minoan women. She wears a long, flouncy skirt with a short sleeved, open-breasted bodice. She is decorated with large earrings and many bracelets. Her outfit shows that Minoan women dressed very femininely, further differentiating themselves from the men. The girl’s scalp is painted blue, giving more insight to Minoan tradition. Minoan children wore shaved heads with one long ponytail. In the painting, the girl’s scalp is painted blue, implying the growing of hair, or the aging of a child. Growing out the shaved hair of childhood indicated an important transition of life, becoming a woman. This portrait is a fine example of the importance to detail recognized by artists of the Aegean Period. Without these details, we would not be able to identify the meanings of these spectacular pieces of art.

The painting of the young girl gives a clear insight to the coming of age culture of the Minoans. The saffron crocus flowers had many uses back then, including dye or food flavoring. However, its biggest use was that of a pain reliever for menstruation. Found in an entire room covered with murals of women, it is clear that Minoan culture valued coming of age and treated it as something to be celebrated.
Young Girl Gathering Saffron Crocus Flowers
Ancient Theran Wall Mural
1630 BCE
Fresco