MONUMENTS OF MINOS
RETHINKING THE MINOAN PALACES

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PAST FACTIONS AND PRESENT FICTIONS:  
PALACES IN THE STUDY OF MINOAN CRETE

These are interesting times in Minoan studies. Many of our preconceptions concerning the world of Bronze Age Crete are being challenged, both by innovative ways of marshalling and interpreting existing material, and by the wealth of new archaeological evidence revealed by excavation.

Of course, it has been coming for quite a while, this gradual erosion of our ideas, of what has been assumed to be the basis of both our understanding of the Minoan past and, presumably, a fulcrum of the Minoans' own world – the palace\(^1\) (and its royal inhabitants). Having suffered the indignity of a reappraisal of its own offspring, the Minoan Villa,\(^2\) the parent itself is now under scrutiny. Before it even has its status properly reassessed, it has suffered a change of identity from which it may never recover dignity; it has been labelled a *Court Compound*.\(^3\)

In commenting on the meeting organised in Louvain-la-Neuve, we would like to focus on three sets of observations: the wealth of new data that was presented and discussed; some immediate problems which emerged from discussion; and a few key areas of inquiry which offer the possibility of progress in the important debate encapsulated by the presentations, discussions and disagreements of the workshop.

The emergence of a new picture

The faith of the organisers was repaid many times over, in the meeting’s concentration on basic information regarding the phasing, chronology, architecture and material culture of a variety of sites to which we may apply the label ‘palatial.’ In a

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\(^*\) We are grateful to the conference organisers for their efforts in providing us with the opportunity and attractive venue for a stimulating workshop. This paper was written in response to the organisers’ invitation to session chairs to comment about the discussions at the workshop. We thank the editors for their encouragement and patience in the paper’s gestation. For financial support in attending the conference, PD is grateful to the European Commission, through the GÉOPRO TMR Network (ERB FMRX CT 98-0165), and MR acknowledges the support of the Learned Societies Fund of the University of Sheffield. We have benefited from discussion with Jan Driessen, Yannis Hamilakis, Yannis Papadatos, and Ilse Schoep. We are indebted to Despina Catapoti for comments on an earlier draft of this paper. Driessen and Hamilakis kindly provided advance copies of their papers. Any faults, deviations from a sound empirical basis and theoretical musings are, however, our own responsibility.

\(^1\) Here, in keeping with much of the discussion at the workshop, the term ‘palace’ has been retained over other alternatives for ease of reference.

\(^2\) *Function Villa.*

\(^3\) J. DRIESSSEN, this volume; also “History and Hierarchy. Preliminary Observations on the Settlement Pattern of Minoan Crete,” in *Urbanism*, 51-71. While we appreciate the logic behind this formulation, the word compound gives an impression of an enclosed space that is separate and delimited. Perhaps *Court Complex* would give a more neutral impression of variability in the relative open or closed nature of these buildings.
perhaps unprecedented series of detailed accounts of these major sites, the audience witnessed the emergence of a very new picture of life in Crete during the mid-second millennium BC. One of the most striking new results was the fact that within specific areas, such as the Mesara\textsuperscript{4} and North Central Crete,\textsuperscript{5} major Central Buildings at different sites rose and declined in importance almost in turn. While this pattern was observed on a local scale, there were also some recurrent patterns on an island-wide basis.

At many sites there seemed to be three broad phases in these changes of the Neopalatial period, which do not appear simply to be a product of our pottery chronologies. In a first stage the rebuilding of some of the ‘palaces’ occurs during the MM III B period. During LM IA these are often modified, while many other ‘palatial’ sites are founded. The third phase seems to be associated with either very late LM IA or LM IB building activity.

Another broad pattern that emerges from the meeting is the detail in which we now understand the restriction of access to the Central Court that develops in many of these palaces or \textit{court compounds}. This seems to be related to changes during LM IA, and perhaps reflects the introduction of new functions or the modification of existing activities taking place in the ‘palatial’ buildings.

In a way that is familiar from the Pre- and Postpalatial period,\textsuperscript{6} the workshop also made it clear that there is no room for chronological ‘fuzziness’ in considering the Neopalatial period.\textsuperscript{7} Treating it as a unitary division of time, in which a specific political system was dominant, is to do the complexity of the period an injustice. Our umbrella term covers a time of change at nearly every site, with the construction, destruction, intensive use and abandonment of major architectural complexes. Indeed, within Neopalatial, it appears that many of the architectural plans or distributions of material culture thought representative of the period have questionable relevance to the whole time span or to all areas of Crete at any one time.

\textsuperscript{4} Cf. V. LA ROSA, this volume; J.W. SHAW, this volume; also J.W. SHAW and M.C. SHAW (eds), \textit{A Great Minoan Triangle in Southcentral Crete: Kommos, Hagia Triada, Phaistos} (1985).
\textsuperscript{5} See G. RETHEMIOTAKIS, this volume; C. MACDONALD, this volume.
\textsuperscript{7} The same broad characterisation often has been true of the Neopalatial period, but the detailed chronological work rehearsed at the workshop is paving the way for a thorough understanding of the sequence of what are clearly complex local histories: see also Van de Moortel’s discussion with extensive references in J.W. SHAW, A. VAN DE MOORTEL, P.M. DAY and V. KILIKOGLOU, \textit{A LM IA Ceramic Kiln in South-Central Crete: function and pottery production} (2001); A. VAN DE MOORTEL, “Pottery as a barometer of economic change: From the Protopalatial to the Neopalatial society in Central Crete,” in Y. HAMILAKIS (ed.), \textit{Labyrinth Revisited. Rethinking ‘Minoan’ Archaeology} (2002) 189-211.
Rather than the image of stability over time and place, we are thus faced with a picture of change. These edifices that we label 'palatial' seem to have been created through substantial investment, only to be abandoned or have their use changed dramatically. Even though this could be viewed as the result of political turbulence, we should perhaps devise more flexible accounts, which allow for the fluidity of archaeological patterns to emerge in our interpretations.

Old Terms, New Terms, Same Problems?

Much of the debate or refutation of ideas in the workshop seemed often to have stemmed from alternative understandings of specific terms or from an inconsistent use of such terms. Of course, there is no space here to list and discuss all key terms and concepts around which discussion seemed to revolve, but it is worth dwelling briefly on a few.

Palaces and Function

Much of the discussion in the workshop about the function of the different palaces brought about a polarisation between ritual/religious functions and political/economic functions. In the same way, views about the nature of the occupants of 'palaces' or 'courts compounds' were divided into at least two groups; one favouring a central authority in the form of a single ruler ('king'); another maintaining that the 'palaces' were ruled by competing power-hungry groups ('factions'). The common element in this debate was that the function of the 'palaces' is sometimes perceived by both groups in an either/or manner; either religious or economic.

However, if the palaces show us one thing, it is how closely knit and interrelated are the activities that were enacted there. Even though it is possible to recognise different functions of these structures, it seems almost impossible to separate out the political, economic or religious counterparts of each of these functions.

Yet these are not problems, they are precisely the point: that palaces acted as the location of diverse activities that encompassed a range of 'functions.' While there seems to be some sort of consensus regarding the combination of roles that a palace

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may have played in Minoan society, combining the political, economic and ritual, we would do well to acknowledge the way in which they may be combined, rather than separating them and examining each in turn. Although many of these different functions can be taken as alternative ‘explanations’ of the palatial compounds, in many cases it actually matters little which one we prefer.

As became common consent at Louvain, the Minoan Palace performed different functions at different stages of its history, the distinction being more pronounced between First and Second Palaces. This could only mean that the activities taking place in the Palace were called on to adjust to different needs. Different needs created changing contexts for action and interaction, and by consequence they gave rise to a whole series of new practices that came to be associated with the already established edifices. Therefore changes in the activities accommodated in the Palaces ascribed different meanings to the physical and institutional structures. Through transformations in their use, the Palaces came to be different places, representing altered values and fulfilling different needs, even though their physical appearance might have not changed dramatically (although architectural arrangements of the Neopalatial period attest to some such transformations).

An understanding of the various palatial ‘functions’ is closely related to issues of time. Clearly the ‘functions’ of the palaces would have had different significance, according to context. These must surely have varied widely in different stages of a palace’s existence. What would the meaning and performance of a specific function be on different occasions? To risk a modern analogy: in the same fashion that the palaces have been described as performing the functions of ‘Palais de Sport,’ ‘Palais de Justice’ etc. all at the same time, consider the function of modern sport stadiums. At different times they may serve as gathering places for sporting events, musical concerts or even political campaigns. However, such ‘functions’ need not succeed each other in a long, evolutionary time span; on the contrary they may all become prominent at different instances within a single phase of the palace’s existence, even in the course of a single event.

What was clear in Louvain was that the emphases and significance of palaces were varied during the Neopalatial period, let alone outside the chronological boundaries that had been set for discussion. It seems therefore that there are more productive ways of understanding the operation of the ‘palaces’ rather than debating the exclusivity of their different functions.


10 C. KNAPPETT, “Mind the gap: between pots and politics in Minoan studies,” in HAMILAKIS (supra n. 7) 167-188.

11 HALSTEAD (supra n. 9); J. DRIESSEN, this volume.
Palaces, towns and territories

These observations apply equally to towns, palatial territories and any kind of archaeological site that we recognise. The activities that took place in specific locations may acquire different meanings over time (diachronically), but also in the course of a single event or during different occasions (synchronously). Significantly, the relations between towns and ‘palaces’ or the extent of ‘palatial’ territories are not static phenomena, rather they depend on a variety of relevant circumstances.

The main point to return to is that this is an issue of practice. We may indeed indicate structural elements of palaces that were emulated in smaller centres or towns, but it is important to ask how this emulation was performed in practice, to ask what needs it served. In a similar fashion, we need to be more specific about the criteria that served to differentiate such sites from one another. Some examples may illustrate this suggestion. Sometimes the very physical limits of town and palace are difficult to establish, the best example being that of Zakros, but perhaps also Gournia. Palyvou has commented on the ways in which roads and causeways from the town reach as far as the Central Court of some sites; a penetration of the palace itself. In contrast, those defined as ‘non typical’ palatial sites have very clear distinctions between the town and the ‘palatial building,’ such as the muraglione distinguishing the environs of the villa from the rest of the town at Aghia Triada and the huge wall with large blocks forming the perimeter of monumental Building T at Kommos. Such contrasts serve to demonstrate that the relation between palace and town is in no way circumscribed. When we envisage these relations within a framework of rigid hierarchy, the above examples come to represent ‘anomalies.’ According to a spatial hierarchy we would expect the ‘palace’ to be more clearly distinguished from its surrounding buildings; on the contrary, very often it is the ‘lower order’ centres that invested more in such a distinction. Such ambiguities of design and access patterns show that we cannot envisage a static hierarchy embedded in architectural forms; rather, the significance of the spatial patterns we recognise lies in the ways built forms were manipulated according to local conditions and specific historical circumstances.

The concept of a hierarchy of space is central to most current explanations of political structure. One of the most common ways to examine this issue has been the construction of a “settlement hierarchy,” which has always run the risk of ranking sites in terms of size and asserting from that a fairly unproblematic path to political organisation. But attempts to work through settlement prove to be rife with problems: as more palatial structures or court compounds are discovered, the criteria for identifying palaces and constructing a site hierarchy become more controversial. Our ‘palaces’ and other forms of building lower down a putative hierarchy are classified according to architectural features that seem not to make valid distinctions about the political position of some centres. As a consequence, they fail to provide useful guidance as to the reach and the operation of political authorities in some sort of hinterland or territory.

12 C. Palyvou, this volume.
In general, the construction of a settlement hierarchy is based on structural criteria such as ‘monumentality,’ size, and the quantity and nature of finds. However, many if not all of these features can be found on sites that are a priori categorised as non-palatial or as sites subordinate to palaces, such as rural villas and urban mansions. Equally, in many cases, the typical assumed functions of the palaces can be found in buildings of their towns, the cases of Malia and Zakros being notable. There have also been suggestions that some second or third order centres may be found to have performed political functions ascribed to the palaces, as for example in the case of the Neopalatial villas.

A central court - for long the trademark of a ‘proper palace’ - is no longer enough to establish the palatial ‘functions’ of a building. Newly discovered sites such as Archanes, Petras, Galatas and Chania, which may encompass many of the distinctive palatial features, are often situated within the “established” territory of known (and larger) palaces (Knossos, Zakros etc.); or, in the case of Chania, the ‘palatial’ functions seem to be accommodated without an explicitly palatial format. In the case of both Chania and Palaikastro, the sheer size of the settlements persuades many that we should ‘expect’ to find palaces there. In this way, the problematic matter of political supremacy of one centre over another becomes even more pronounced. By this logic, political organisation is hypothesised according to settlement size and, presumably, a concomitant politico-economic influence. We find ourselves working with a mixed set of criteria, and with a gradually diminishing size of putative territories, as we continue to discover substantial buildings and settlements in the landscape.

In addition to gaining a better appreciation of settlement size and population, we must look towards describing activities that were undertaken in different locations, in palaces, towns, villages etc. Are they different and to what extent? Moreover, if they are related, by what means and according to which logic are such activities connected? Size and architectural type alone prove insufficient criteria for the explanation and meaningful interpretation of political structure.

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14 CHERRY (supra n. 9); K. BRANIGAN “Aspects of Minoan Urbanism,” in Urbanism, 38-50; DRIESSEN (supra n. 3); Y. TZEDAKIS, S. CHRYSOULAKIS, S. VOUTSAKI and Y. VENIERI, “Les routes minoennes: rapport préliminaire. Défense de la circulation ou circulation de la défense,” BCH 113 43-76.

15 For such a contention, as well as alternative viewpoints see papers in Function Villa.

16 Criteria used to form territories have been many and varied. Early work concentrated on examples from Central Place Theory, e.g. CHERRY (supra n. 9) fig 2.2; C. RENFREW, The Emergence of Civilisation: the Cyclades and the Aegean in the Third Millennium BC (1972): Natural topography has also been emphasised (e.g. J. DRIESSEN and J.A. MACGILLIVRAY, “The Neopalatial Period in East Crete,” in R. LAFFINEUR (ed.), Transition, Le monde Égéen du Bronze moyen au Bronze récent. Actes de la deuxième Rencontre Égéenne internationale de l’Université de Liége, 18-20 avril 1988 (Aegaeum 3) (1989) 99-111; as have historical patterns: J. BENNET, “Knossos in Context: Comparative Perspectives on the Linear B Administration of LM II-III Crete,” A JA 94(2) 193-212. In contrast, the discussion of a Malia-centred “Lasithi state” in the first palace period has focused on discussion of shared material culture: C. KNAPPET, “Assessing a Polity in Protopalatial Crete: The Malia-Lasithi State,” AJA 105(4) (1999) 615-639 (see references).

Settlements, whether considered first or second order centres, clearly changed through time, most probably with a consequent change in the size and nature of their territories (if such a multi-layered system of non-coincident boundaries can be considered in this way). Consequently the relationships between different centres will change. In this respect, seeking to construct site hierarchies often obstructs us from appreciating how the political relations between different sites were played out and transformed. There are perhaps two areas of Crete in which we can observe such transformations more clearly; the western Mesara Plain of South-central Crete and East Crete.

The Western Mesara:
Once described as a ‘Great Minoan Triangle,’ the Western Mesara, and its three major sites of the palatial period: Phaistos, Aghia Triada and Kommos, represent an area where power relations seem to have been in flux during all phases of the palatial period. Moreover, following on from the First Palace at Phaistos, during the Neopalatial period, the initial hierarchy seems to have been reversed, with Aghia Triada perhaps assuming a more politically significant role and Kommos following closely in the power race. Although Phaistos may have retained a status of powerful authority, this may have drawn more on different activities and resources than those manipulated by the First Palace. With ambitious building programmes such as that at Kommos Building T being abandoned during LM IA and a formerly public place becoming a place for craft production, what are we to read into these substantial swings in the uses of monumental architecture at different sites?

What kind of territory or territories might we envisage for this area? How are we to define them, with respect to the accepted palatial complex of the time or based on the actual dominant political authority? If we judge there to be competing centres, then whose is the ‘territory’ that surrounds them? Is there some sort of distance-decay of the reach of political authority over the landscape? Perhaps our approaches should allow more flexibility in the ways by which political organisation is described and explained.

East Crete:
Here the relationship between palaces, their territories and important towns is even more unclear. How do we understand the function of palatial structures in an area so clearly dominated by urban centres? How are the different territories defined in this area; does the previous existence of major towns play a part in this definition or is the political landscape merely dependent upon the reaches of the newly established

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18 SHAW and SHAW (supra n. 3).
20 SHAW et al. (supra n. 7).
palatial authorities? Does the lack of a Palace at Palaikastro, in our present state of
knowledge, affect our judgement?\textsuperscript{21} Where does the Palace excavated at Petras fit
in? What awaits excavation at Xerokampos and Diaskari/Makrygiolos? Some simple
pointers have been laid down by recent work. Day’s pottery analysis of 18 Neopalatial
sites on the Siteia Peninsula\textsuperscript{22} suggested that an over-simplistic view of the dominance
of palace sites in either local production or coastal transportation was untenable and
that instead there seemed to be a number of production centres which coincided with
most of the major coastal towns. Equally Cunningham has made a detailed assessment
of the diversity and differences between Petras, Palaikastro and Zakros suggesting,
among other points, that while they seem not to have wielded power over one another
in matters of social production, they seem to have more in common in matters of
social reproduction and the ‘imaginary means of production.’\textsuperscript{23} The palace of Zakros
alone, imposed on the town during LM IA raises a barrage of questions regarding the
implications of the appearance of a palace well into the period when other settlements
already had palace structures (e.g. Petras).\textsuperscript{24}

Thus, that which we take to be the reflection of a certain social order, namely
the distribution in the landscape of palatial buildings or court compounds, palatial
mansions and towns, is not a static phenomenon, but a multifaceted and constantly
transforming process. As with the palatial functions, the relations between ‘palaces’
and other sites cannot be adequately approached from a single angle. Such fluid and
complex phenomena require rather more spherical and diverse consideration.

\textit{Factions}

During discussion ‘factions’ were often put forward as the alternative to seeing
Neopalatial Crete as a centralised state organisation with a clear hierarchical structure.
Factional competition and its role in the processes of competitive emulation have
been discussed within a variety of contexts.\textsuperscript{25} Hamilakis points out that they are
“vertical, structurally and functionally similar, leader-focused social groupings" and
that the aim of much of their activity is the recruitment and retention of retinue in
order to gain social power.\textsuperscript{26} There are indeed many attractive aspects to the idea that
we may be dealing with factional competition in the Minoan world and especially in

\textsuperscript{21} T. CUNNINGHAM, “Variations on a theme: divergence in settlement patterns and spatial
organisation in the Far East of Crete during the Proto- and Neopalatial periods,” in \textit{Urbanism},
72-86.

\textsuperscript{22} P.M. DAY, “Ceramic exchange between towns and outlying settlements in Neopalatial East Crete,”
in \textit{Function Villa}, 219-27; ID., “Pottery production and consumption in the Siteia Bay area during
the New Palace period,” in M. TSIPPOPOLOU and L. VAGNETTI, \textit{Achladia: Scavi e ricerche della
Misione Greco-Italiana in Creta Orientale (1991-1993)} (1995); ID., \textit{A Petrographic Approach to the

\textsuperscript{23} For this see KNAPPETT (supra n. 16).

\textsuperscript{24} M. TSIPPOPOLOU, “Before, during, after: the architectural phases of the palatial building at
Petras, Siteia,” in \textit{MELETEMATA} 847-855.

\textsuperscript{25} E. BRUMFIEL and J.W. FOX, \textit{Factional competition and political development in the New World}
(1994).

\textsuperscript{26} Y. HAMILAKIS, this volume.
the Neopalatial period. This would fit well with the picture of instability, of the rise and fall of particular centres and buildings, indeed the very fluidity that the meeting in Louvain so successfully identified.

Nevertheless, during discussion, factions were used in a variety of ways. There was often a lack of clarity as to whether the factional theory was being used to explain the process of political change that we assume accompanies the rise of the palaces, or the workings of the system which we see as an end product. From this derived another issue, with alternative perceptions: some considering that factions acted out their competitive emulation in separate palaces and settlements, while others considered the arena of action of different factions to be one palace.

While we may understand that architecture and material culture would have to be compatible in order to provide a common “language” of emulation and competition within an established system, it may be more difficult to explain how diverse, fragmented and factional processes would lead to the same end result (i.e. the construction of palaces) in a variety of locations on the island. This needs clarification.

In the case of the second inconsistency, the evidence of a variety of sites in the landscape which appear to have buildings at least in part devoted to drinking ceremonies or feasting would seem consistent with the activities of rival factions. Such monumental buildings could be thus viewed as arenas for competition where different factions enacted ceremonies that bolstered and displayed the support of their followers. However, to suggest that the palatial buildings played a unifying role among different competing factions is hardly an explanation; we need to specify on what basis this unification was possible. Since drinking and eating events may have been a quite popular social practice in earlier periods of Minoan history without being accommodated by palatial institutions, we need to elucidate the social contexts within which the monumentalization of such activities could be used as a means for political competition and the establishment of palatial authority.

If factions, in their most popular definition, are spontaneous, informal leader-follower groups that are organised for specific purposes and disbanded when that purpose is achieved or defeated, we cannot expect to trace the same factions throughout all the phases of palatial development. On the contrary, we need to allow for the dismantling and reformation of such groups within appropriate circumstances.

27 This has been discussed eloquently in CHERRY (supra n. 9).
28 There is a danger in making such a distinction —using factions either to examine the rise of the palace, or to explain the workings of the palace — in that the nature of palaces is taken for granted (i.e. they represent "centralised authority"), simply favouring different processes for the emergence of the structures. This runs the risk of reproducing the image of the palace as a static phenomenon, whereas the concept of factions mainly aims to illuminate the different dynamics that are at play at any one point of the palaces' history.
29 G. RETHEMIOTAKIS, this volume, M. VLASAKI, this volume. Also refer to papers by HAMILAKIS (supra n. 6), P.M. DAY and D.E. WILSON, “Consuming power: Kamares Ware in Protopalatial Knossos,” Antiquity 72 (1998) 350-358; WILSON and DÁY (supra n. 6).
30 DAY and WILSON (supra n. 8).
Therefore, it seems that the most productive way of including factional competition into a discussion of Minoan political formation is by identifying the precise contexts that would allow the recurrent creation of such groupings and, more significantly, the contexts that would provide the means and the reasons for competition.

Ritual ceremonies have been a very popular answer to the above problems (and indeed the source of much of the polarisation of opinion atmosphere that we witnessed at the meeting). However, ritual is a very general term and can assume a variety of forms and roles. Rituals can be as much unifying, as they can be discriminating. Large-scale ceremonies of conspicuous consumption, as much as they can fulfil legitimising tactics, must however be considered within the precise historical and political framework that would make their operation successful. In other words, why would such large-scale consumption ceremonies be relevant or appealing to the different social groups partaking in them? In this respect, what we need to explore is what makes these social strategies effective as legitimating means within the particular socio-temporal framework.

Clearly, however, the concept of factions indicates that many levels of activity can be at work simultaneously. We can look further afiel in everyday life to see the complex web of exploitation of resources at different levels and in different circumstances. The recent work of Killen and Halstead, while strictly pertaining only to the time of the Linear B tablets, may offer insight into the flexible nature, at different levels of society, of the exploitation of one particular resource; in this case sheep. An informed reading of the tablets shows that the palace indeed was concerned with its flocks and their control via the herders over the island, but that the palatial flocks were not self-sustaining. There may have been several hundred substantial ‘private flocks’ that restocked ‘palatial’ wool flocks with castrated wethers. These ‘private’ herds may have comprised a substantial resource and a sign of prosperity. Halstead suggests that the large-scale removal of ‘palatial’ weathers may show a concentration on the role of these animals in feasting and sacrifice not only for palatial elites, but also in social competition within the population in rural areas.

Although this is an example later than the Neopalatial period, it comprises an important illustration. Within these rural populations, it seems unlikely that such an opportunity for high protein and presumably prestigious food would be used simply in “family subsistence.” Rather, it can be suggested that the individuals with access to these sources of meat may themselves have consumed them in acts of feasting. The opportunities for alliance building and the potential for social and political power in


such a circumstance seem obvious. We are faced, therefore, with the likelihood that all aspects of social and political power operated on a great number of levels, a situation that may fit well with ideas of the existence of factions.

**Heterarchy and Hierarchy**

The concept of heterarchy introduces alternative political structures that may pertain to our reconstruction of the Minoan past. A debate stretching well beyond the realms of Aegean archaeology, this seems to encapsulate a new, holistic view of the way in which power in society is reproduced and contested. However, since the concept and its debate are fairly new to Minoan archaeology, some inconsistencies in the way the term was used were inevitable. During discussion in the meeting, heterarchy was often taken as an equivalent of a pro-factional stance, while a hierarchical system was understood to represent centralisation of power in Neopalatial Crete, perhaps with Knossos as the ‘top of the pile.’

Yet an appreciation of heterarchy goes well beyond this dichotomy. Heterarchy as defined by Crumley describes a social system within which “each element is either unranked relative to other elements or possesses the potential for being ranked in a number of different ways.” The popularity of such models lies mainly in their ability to account for heterogeneous and semi-autonomous political formations. Within heterarchical models, emphasis is placed more on the role that different agencies can play in the establishment of political authority, and on socio-political interactions on a local and regional level. Coupled with theories of factional competition, we can see why models of heterarchy can be so appealing for alternative interpretations of Minoan social and political organisation.

While the concept of heterarchy may open up promising explanatory routes, in that it rightly brings forth aspects of Minoan society that cannot be easily described or accounted for within hierarchical systems, its precise meaning in the workshop discussion remained rather vague. The generalised way that the term was used (merely as a reflection of the enormous variety in which social power can be negotiated and achieved) entails a risk of confusion.

If the concept of heterarchy is introduced in Minoan archaeology simply to describe the immense heterogeneity that exists within the particular society, then it hardly constitutes a novelty. The Peer Polity Interaction model proposed by Renfrew and Cherry several years ago serves this purpose quite adequately. It is not enough just to recognise diversity; it is important to account for it and the various meanings that it has in different instances. Moreover, approaches focusing on hierarchy are not to be dismissed simply because they have been around for a substantial time. Perhaps

a better way of integrating such perspectives into our new concerns would be to redirect our efforts into understanding how hierarchical structures can emerge in the course of specific occasions, and similarly, what becomes of their role when such circumstances become obsolete. Whether we think that the structures we examine are hierarchical or heterarchical, they are intrinsically timely, in that they relate to specific contexts of action; they become prominent or fade according to specific socio-political circumstances. Considerations of heterarchy can certainly be illuminating if such a historical perspective is taken into account.

Material Culture and its interpretation

The other main issue raised at the Louvain workshop was the way in which we use very different interpretations of material culture, whether they are the structures or the portable objects which are placed in relation to them. It suffices to use two examples: those of architecture and ceramics.

Architecture

In the course of the meeting, architecture was used as a cultural marker, as a reflection of political hierarchy, an indicator of deliberate and competitive emulation, as well as an arena for everyday and ceremonial action. Most influential have been interpretations of architecture as a direct result and an indicator of social complexity. Although the organisers emphasised that the ‘multiplicity, density and proximity’ of palatial centres has created a rather convoluted palatial landscape that requires new frameworks for interpretation, the subsequent discussion suggested that this was a path not easily followed. It was often acknowledged that the repetition of certain ‘palatial’ architectural features in smaller sites must have had a more complex meaning than merely indicating the rank of centres in a putative site hierarchy. Yet, at times, architectural types were seen as embodying some kind of intrinsic meaning that did not change from place to place or according to the different contexts of use.

However, it is becoming increasingly evident that architectural similarities do not necessarily indicate the existence of common social structures. The Minoan palaces themselves, as well as the ‘lesser’ sites are testimony to the variety of patterns of use that were possible within a single building. As Cherry rightly noted, despite their many similarities no two Minoan Palaces are identical. Even though we may argue for the compatibility of activities taking place in the Central Courts, for example, there still exists a variety of open or closed spaces within the palaces the specific use of which rather eludes us. This is hardly a reason for pessimism, though. The potential that the examination of local circumstances holds for understanding how architectural solutions were manipulated to serve different purposes is encouraging. The Minoan Hall system should be mentioned here as a clear example of the above, as it is thought to carry with it specifically ‘palatial’ connotations. It is generally

37 E.g. the case of Galatas discussed by G. RETHEMIOTAKIS, this volume.
38 CHERRY (supra n. 9).
assumed that wherever this spatial arrangement is found outside the ‘palaces,’ we are encountering palatial functions on a smaller scale. However, this system has been incorporated in a number of different buildings throughout the island in a variety of ways that create a diversity of contexts for action. Thus it is clear that variations of design are not merely structural anomalies, but rather conscious social choices in order to provide for different needs and accommodate a variety of practices. The sophistication of this architectural arrangement, drawing upon ambiguities in the use of open and closed space, allows for the successful manipulation not only of space but also of time. On the one hand, the opening or closing of doors creates different circumstances of use (e.g. inclusion/exclusion); on the other hand, the very same action controls the timing of circulation within such spaces. It is clear, therefore, that this architectural form does not have a fixed meaning. On the contrary, it operates as a powerful resource for the negotiation of social power.

Pottery

In a similar fashion, pottery was cited in the meeting in support of a spectrum of arguments, mainly as a chronological diagnostic, alternatively as a cultural indicator, as a reflection of political economy or as an expression of status, the latter usually through the ability to access high quality products or products obtained from a distance.

These are all meanings that have been ascribed to pottery both within Crete and beyond, and yet they are not always compatible alternatives. We are not merely free to choose whichever emphasis suits a particular argument: to claim that the distribution of a given type of pottery is indicative of economic domination, with centralized production and broad movement; and in the next breath to talk of a cultural koine or of status and consumption. On the contrary, these are issues that are beginning to be discussed with an increased sophistication.

In this endeavour, let us not forget the basics of how people make pots and that they have a very rich potential as witnesses to the complex human-material interactions that drive our research on the past. It is notable that, despite the many political and social changes that characterise the period under consideration, still there exists a remarkable continuity in many regional ceramic traditions. The intricate ways of making pottery in specific areas often continue in one of the almost countless possible combinations of pottery manufacture. Pottery production itself epitomises a rather complex creative path. The occurrence of the same choices over a long period of time despite major changes in the economic or political sphere of life, show us that there exists an intricate interplay between broad diachronic patterns and the experience of everyday life of major craft producers. Such a repetition of complex


40 E.g. KNAPPET (supra n. 10).
choices, in areas such as the Isthmus of Ierapetra and the Western Mesara Plain, serve to emphasise the place of pottery production within the everyday routine and identity-construction of a number of locations, no doubt associated with pottery over several centuries, if not millennia.

What was the role of succeeding generations of potters in, for example, the Mesara in the rise and fall of monumental buildings at different settlements within the plain? What is the significance of the intensely competitive ceramic production activity of the Neopalatial period (all three major sites have new pottery kilns, and almost all of them are found in ‘properly’ residential areas) for the political power race within the Mesara?

To ask these questions is not to deny the role that ceramics and their production play in facilitating our understanding of the Minoan world, but perhaps to temper an over-simplistic view of the production and consumption of ceramic material culture as a reflection of power and political change.

There have been a number of recent works that stress the, sometimes problematic, relationship between archaeological ceramics and our reconstructions of matters political from them.\textsuperscript{41} We are guilty in our consideration of pottery, just as we are with architecture, of concentrating on what are presumed indicators of the highest échelons of power. Pottery that is worthy of our consideration is thought be that which epitomises low-bulk/high-value objects. These are the realms of prestige material culture and technology.

Such material from Protopalatial and Neopalatial contexts undoubtedly repays our attention. Recently, analytical work has shown that some of the finest pottery of the first palaces has a similarity that is rooted in a shared source and subsequent distribution, rather than the faithful imitation of a cultural formula.\textsuperscript{42} Similar concerns of provenance versus imitation lay behind previous work on Neopalatial Marine Style pottery,\textsuperscript{43} yet often the interpretation and even the pottery reference groups,\textsuperscript{44} were heavily affected by the expectations that palaces, being at the top of a putative settlement hierarchy, were the centres of production of all prestige goods found within their “territories,” and especially within the confines of their own structures. Yet well before the palaces, high quality ceramics were moving, although on a smaller scale.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{41} See KNAPPETT (\textit{supra} n. 10); A. VAN DE MOORTEL (\textit{supra} n. 7); ID., “Pottery as a barometer of economic change: From the Protopalatial to the Neopalatial society in Central Crete,” in HAMILAKIS (\textit{supra} n. 7) 189-211; C. MORGAN and T.M. WHITELAW, “Pots and politics: ceramics evidence for the rise of the Argive State,” \textit{AJA} 95 (1991) 79-108.


To a certain extent, therefore, finding the provenance of certain types of pottery is even more important in examining the great changes of the Neopalatial period. Are the splendid examples of Marine style pottery at Zakros and Makrygialos\textsuperscript{46} made in the central part of the island? Do they comprise the products of imitation or wholesale importation? This matters greatly to our arguments.

We are familiar now with the fact that it is not only the finest ceramic vessels that travel over the Cretan landscape. Commodities are moving in amphorae from outside the island and within the island from at least the Early Minoan IIA period,\textsuperscript{47} a process which continues at greater pace in terms of intra-island movement during the palatial periods. In the Neopalatial it appears commonplace for pithoi to travel around the coasts, probably as containers, and recent analyses show that one fabric occurring in pithoi, pithoid jars and cups at Zakros is brought there in some numbers from the Myrtos area.

We suggest here that such everyday movements of ceramic material culture, combined with the long traditions of production in certain areas, make for a very complex world of pottery goods. We have underestimated constantly the great number of factors behind the way such crafts are performed, as well as the frequency of and myriad motivations for transactions and acts of consumption. Just as with architecture, pottery has the ability to change in meaning according to its locations and observer. All these aspects have to be taken into account when considering the ceramic evidence as a key to detailed and changing world of Neopalatial Crete.

Discussion

The meeting at Louvain was an enlightening and surely encouraging experience. Our knowledge of many different aspects of Minoan civilisation, of the Palatial period in particular, reached substantial levels of sophistication and detail. Even though the great complexity of the emerging picture at times seemed overwhelming, we should feel rather lucky that we have at our disposal such breadth and depth of information with which to produce more informed interpretations of the Minoan past.

In our short summary of issues that emerged during discussion, we have tried to highlight some of the new elements and questions that came out from the meeting and also suggest some ways to think more productively about certain problems. Although in many respects our terms and analytic categories still need clarification and scrutiny, if we are to better communicate our ideas, the general feeling was that considerable progress has been made in agreement on several aspects of palatial


structures. The necessity to employ greater chronological detail when we talk of the Neopalatial period; the importance of regional patterns; the dynamic relations that can exist between towns and palaces as well as the fluidity of palatial territories; the diversity of activities taking place within the palaces; all these are aspects of the Second Palaces on which the majority of participants reached a level of common understanding.

Certainly there remain many issues on which disagreement was strong. As discussed here, however, we feel that with regard to many of these issues, a more effective stance involves the adoption of more flexible models, especially when we avoid the polarisation of either/or approaches. In many cases it seemed clear that the confrontation between hierarchy and heterarchy, or economy versus religion was not productive. Instead, an understanding of the multiplicity of ‘functions’ and meanings that the palaces as architectural and institutional entities could attain would be more illuminating and thought-provoking. While we always need to simplify in order to describe and analyse, we must be wary of reducing the complexity of these structures to over-simplified and exclusive categories. The hundred years or so of research in Minoan archaeology have, if anything, taught us not to underestimate the diversity and heterogeneity of the evidence available to us.

Key future directions in Minoan studies

Many of the themes that emerged during the discussion indicate promising perspectives for the future. In the course of our brief analysis, it became apparent that the essential components are the need for a historical perspective and the necessity for integrative scales of analysis. In a sense, these are issues that stem from each other and, therefore, we will examine them in conjunction.

Even though the framework for discussion at the meeting had been defined with respect to the Neopalatial period, two observations slightly transform our present spectrum: on the one hand, it became clear that the Neopalatial was not as homogeneous as we thought, but rather characterised by a great deal of spatial and temporal diversity. Such heterogeneity can be proven to draw upon the local social contexts into which the ‘palaces’ emerged and operated. On the other hand, since the similarity of many material and institutional features of the ‘palaces’ cannot be overlooked, the key point remains to find ways to integrate these dimensions in our approaches. Hence the scope of our discussion should be modified in order to sufficiently tackle such issues.

“Regional paths to complexity” occupied a paramount position in the concerns of most participants at the Louvain Meeting. One model that has been useful and influential in envisaging how separate political units might use similar or identical architecture and material culture, the Peer Polity Interaction model,48 is certainly not new. Even so, there still exists some confusion regarding the particular ways in which local trajectories can be seen to bear upon wider regional, or inter-regional processes. The most pressing among such problems is how to account for the many

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48 CHERRY (supra n. 9).
elements the palaces have in common, as well as their differences. The inconsistencies in our discussions of factions and heterarchy, with respect to such matters, have been pointed out already. However, such problems should not steer us away from the importance of producing such integrative approaches.

When we understand local variation as a deviation from a largely homogeneous material culture common for the whole of the island, we are left in confusion regarding how to explain such variability. On the contrary, when we appreciate that there may exist particular conditions within which resources are manipulated to fit local needs, we acquire a more illuminating perspective. It is no coincidence that ‘palaces’ or ‘court compounds’ appear almost simultaneously around the island and seem to be making use of similar resources. This shows us that there exists a body of common beliefs to which the majority of people are making reference. However, we should not overlook that these apparently similar structures also differ from each other in a number of ways. The most significant differences are not to be found in their appearance or architectural layout, but in the diverse practices associated with such differential use of space.

It is such practices that should be placed at the centre of our analysis, for the primary reason that they are space, and time, specific. They allow us, in other words, to adopt a concrete historical perspective in our approaches; to understand the particular social circumstances that made the appearance and operation of the ‘palaces’ necessary and effective. Nevertheless, having a historical perspective should be contrasted strongly with tracing the evolution of the particular structures back in time. On the contrary, we should be concerned with appreciating how the past might have operated as a powerful resource under certain circumstances and in appropriate situations. It is the contexts of action that brought about such institutions, maintained them, or transformed them. It is these contexts that should be at the centre of our considerations.

The essential factor of such analysis is a focus on practice, on the nature of activities taking place in the ‘palaces’ or associated with them in any way. Architecture and material culture generate a range of possibilities for use and action. However, it was only some of these possibilities that were pursued by social actors, at different stages of Minoan history and under a variety of circumstances. Such preferences indicate that particular practices were more appealing or acceptable to people on appropriate occasions. They are part of a network of reference that the majority of the population seeks to be connected with. Such a network generates the homogeneity that puzzles us, but at the same time, it allows local perspectives to penetrate it and either reproduce or modify it according to local needs. The central court has been recognised as the most prominent common element of all ‘palaces.’ In this respect, it is part of an ideology of space shared by almost every site on the island. However, we have come to admit that not all the buildings with central courts had the same function, or the same significance. This is not to imply that there might have existed more powerful political centres than others, but rather to pinpoint that the activities associated with each of these places pertained to varied circumstances that more often than not were locally constructed.
We are faced thus with an intense relationship not only between local and regional (island-wide), but also between diverse scales of action; temporary and lasting; occasion-specific and based on tradition. Such diverse scales of action can only be integrated if we place historical (time- and place-specific) practices at the focus of our analysis. We do not advise against looking at the broader picture. However, our point is that large scale patterning is difficult to interpret if we do not understand how it is affected by local conditions.

This entails another parameter in adopting integrative scales of analysis. The material grandeur and institutional sophistication of the palaces very often blinds us to the more mundane aspects of their existence. Large-scale ceremonial occasions might have played a significant part in reproducing the authority of the palace, but another important dimension of that reproduction is encompassed in daily, ordinary practices. By that we mean that our integrative analytic scale must be temporal as well as spatial. It does not suffice to look at diversity across the island; we should also examine how different everyday contexts of action, whether inside or outside the ‘palace’ perceived and reproduced its authority. After all, the ceremonial occasions that so impress us were only temporary events. The authority of the ‘palace’ on the contrary was felt in the long run. It is essential, therefore, that we bring forth the ways in which the maintenance and reproduction of such authority was possible and effective.

These issues are not resolved within the limits of this paper. However we hope that, in response to the editors’ invitation, we have provided some commentary on the very important results of the Louvain workshop. At the same time we have attempted to highlight some potentially productive questions to guide future research. The workshop was very stimulating, brimming with new data and ideas. The message from this meeting certainly should be optimistic and forward looking, with respect to the unique nature of our archaeological evidence.

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