



The goddess and the skull: some observations on group identity in Prepalatial Crete

Author(s): Jan Driessen

Source: *British School at Athens Studies*, Vol. 18, CRETAN OFFERINGS: Studies in honour of Peter Warren (2010), pp. 107-117

Published by: [British School at Athens](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23276768>

Accessed: 06/02/2014 08:46

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



British School at Athens is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *British School at Athens Studies*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

The goddess and the skull: some observations on group identity in Prepalatial Crete*

Jan Driessen

INTRODUCTION: THE SKULL AND THE GODDESS

Peter Warren's discovery, excavation and publication of Myrtos Fournou Korifi¹ remains to this day a heroic feat in the annals of Minoan archaeology and it is indeed the careful representation of the archaeological evidence which allowed our discipline to advance. Ironically, it is because of the detailed and exemplary publication that the interpretation of the site remains at the core of discussions, with interpretations of the social system represented by the complex wavering between more community versus family organised households.² In this Cretan offering, following earlier attempts to underline the importance of Minoan residential structures as social actors,³ I propose to examine whether, contrary to general assumptions that presume the prevalence of personal status in Prepalatial Crete,⁴ the available evidence instead suggests group-related rank. I want to start with a, perhaps rather flippant, remark made by Peter Warren on the excavation of room 89 of the EM II complex at Myrtos Fournou Korifi:⁵

just beside P[ot]574, to the south-west, lay the strangest find from the site, fragments (about a quarter in all) of a human skull. Like the pots the bone was burnt by the destruction fire, but the pieces were identifiable as those of a young adult male. ... No other bones, human or animal, were found. How is this skull to be interpreted? It was certainly not the remains of a burial, nor could it be a last inhabitant who had failed to escape at the moment of destruction; in both cases other bones would have survived. *The skull can only have been an object as such*, deliberately situated near the tripartite structure with central hearth. Thus the possibilities of ancestor worship (cf. the plastered skulls of Neolithic Jericho) or even human sacrifice cannot be ruled out.

Ten years later, the discovery at Knossos of a LM IB context with cut childrens' bones added ritual consumption as another possibility to explain *dissecta membra* in Minoan archaeological contexts.⁶ Although this interpretation has been attacked, it remains one of a series of possible explanations in view of practices elsewhere.⁷ Where the Myrtos Fournou Korifi skull is concerned, Warren's observation that the 'skull can only have been an object as such' I find interesting, since to

some degree the excavator *dehumanised* the original contributing body. The implication is that a skull was retained from a tomb and given a special place in the community of the living. About 2 m away, in room 92, on the other side of the wall, resting on a slab, was found the so-called Myrtos Goddess (FRONTISPIECE, FIG. 11.1), an object which has its only parallels in tombs at Mochlos, Malia, Koumasa and elsewhere.⁸ Although it can no longer be ascertained whether the two rooms 89 and 92 communicated via a window, it is my contention that this combination, a skull and an anthropomorphic ritual vase, two elements usually encountered in funerary contexts, is a meaningful one. To some degree, making a figurine was recreating the human figure.⁹ This essay examines whether circumstantial evidence exists to regard the skull as 'human', a body part indicative of or symbolising a specific individual rather than representing a more collective identity such as 'the ancestors'.¹⁰

Where skulls are concerned, Branigan and Soles have both commented upon the interference of bones and especially skulls within funerary contexts,¹¹ with Maggidis illustrating this eloquently with cases of

* It is with a profound pleasure that I offer this small contribution to somebody who means a lot to me personally: it was Peter Warren who invited me to join his excavations at Knossos in 1981 ('that boy gave me a cold!'), flattening my way into Minoan archaeology, a dream come true... The skull in the title of my paper was partly influenced by Damien Hirst's 'For The Love of God'. I thank T. McGeorge for information, M. Pomadere for a copy of her PhD, G. Cadogan for some unpublished papers, and our Sissi anthropologists, I. Crevecoeur and A. Schmitt, as well as C. J. Knappett for a critical reading.

1 Warren 1972.

2 Catapoti 2005, 168–88; Whitelaw 2007 for a recent review.

3 Driessen 2010 and forthcoming.

4 Soles 1988; 1992; most recently Colburn 2008.

5 Warren 1972, 83, 342, my italics; Panagiotopoulos 2002, 123.

6 Wall, Musgrave and Warren 1986.

7 Hurlbut 2000; Arnott 2003, 162.

8 Warren 1972, 266; Branigan 1969; most recently Jones 2008. [Ed. note: see also Cadogan, this volume, Chapter 5.]

9 Bailey 2005.

10 Talalay 2004, 155.

11 Branigan 1987; Soles 1992, 42.

certain skulls in Archanes Burial Building 19.¹² Apart from the Fournou Korifi example, it is, however, also not uncommon to encounter complete or fragmentary skulls or other human bones in domestic contexts on the island as in a MM IIIA level at Ayios Giorgos–Tourtoulou, in the LM IA Mansion I at Petras, in the LM IB villa at Epano Zakros, and in mansion B2 at Mochlos, as well as in Room 12 of the Zakros Palace.¹³ Moreover, in Palaikastro, Malia Quartier Nu and Kommos, to name just a few examples, fragmentary human material occasionally shows up in settlement contexts and, although we cannot be sure, it is not impossible that these represented specially curated skeletal remains.¹⁴ Talalay has surveyed the examples elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean, suggesting that bodily fragmentation may not have been linked to acts of violence but rather functioned within enchainment practices as reconstructed by Chapman.¹⁵

If we assume that all body fragments encountered in settlement context originate in funerary contexts and are not accidental (destruction victims only partly removed, for example), we may ask whether they, and especially the skulls, represent specific individuals selected to be re-introduced into domestic contexts or whether they refer to a more general category of *ancestors*.¹⁶ I will try to argue that funerary evidence for the Prepalatial period suggests surprisingly little attention to specific individuals and that, despite a recent claim by Colburn that funerary objects were mainly personal ‘emblems or identity markers’,¹⁷ having been used as adornments for the body during their life, it can be shown that they were more likely to have been gifts to a collective of group ancestors. My argument is that, once decomposed, the body lost its individuality, became indistinguishable from other bodies in the tomb and returned to the collectivity, which should be understood as a fractal personhood representing a person at a different scale in which the single person was a fractal equivalent of the ‘house’, a locus bound intergenerational extended social unit.¹⁸ As observed by Fowler:¹⁹ ‘People in past societies were not necessarily individualized in the same way as those of modern people, and past identities may have been temporary, contextual, and relational to specific events and interactions’.

THE TOMB AS A TEMPORARY REPOSITORY — A THREE-STAGE RITUAL?

Despite regional variation, funerary practices on Prepalatial Crete show a great similarity. Recent excavations in the EM II–MM II House Tomb cemetery at Sissi–Bouffo have shown that primary articulated burials represent only the first stage of a complex mortuary ritual during which each burial structure served continuously to deposit new bodies. Once decomposed, earlier depositions — and especially skulls and long bones — seem to have been removed to other structures to make room for new interments in

existing buildings.²⁰ Usually a few smaller bones of the earlier interments remain within the funerary structure together with the latest more or less articulated depositions but the mingling of bones at one and the same spot is common. This makes it very difficult to associate the few objects found in the tombs with specific depositions. What seems to be the case at Sissi, however, is that what we have been calling *tombs* are only temporary repositories, *places of transition*, structures that served the decomposition of the bodies, before specific parts were selected to be stored elsewhere. At Sissi, we have excavated two such *osteophulakia* (FIG. 11.2) presumed final resting places, again with very few associated objects, a few metres away from the preliminary burial structures.²¹ Similarly, the careful analysis of several of the Archanes burial structures and some other cases have made it clear that the normal Minoan mortuary practice consisted of the consecutive interment of articulated primary burials that were later interfered with.²² Maggidis, following Soles, gives a short list of the then known undisturbed primary articulated burials in Prepalatial tombs:²³ an incredibly small number in comparison to the thousands of secondary burials already known. There can be no doubt that most of these articulated skeletons are an aberration, only preserved because of coincidence. They too would eventually have been interfered with were it not for a decision to seal the funerary context by a layer of sand and to start anew, or because final collapse prevented continuation of mortuary use. Some, such as Maggidis,²⁴ see a growing individualism in the

12 Maggidis 1994, 31.

13 Driessen 2010, 47 for other examples.

14 Reese 1995, 194 mentions fragments of an adult mandible from a LM I context; human remains at Malia Nu were identified by Tina McGeorge, at Palaikastro by Shelagh Wall (pers. comm.).

15 Talalay 2004, 140; Chapman 2000.

16 Cf. Soles 2000; 2001.

17 Colburn 2008, 212.

18 Fowler 2004, 50; Knappett 2009; Driessen 2010 and forthcoming.

19 Fowler 2004, 3.

20 Crevecoeur and Schmitt (2009). They remark that not all bodies were displaced after decomposition and some reductions took place *in situ*. Moreover, certain displacements took place before decomposition was completed.

21 The question is, of course, whether the ossuaries represent a ritual and sacralising action or simply a management of place with the emptying of the tombs necessitated by the overcrowdings of the original spaces (Crevecoeur and Schmitt 2009).

22 Branigan 1970; 1984; 1992; 1998; Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997; Maggidis 1994; 1998; Panagiotopoulos 2002; Papadatos 2005.

23 Maggidis 1994, 66–7; Soles 1992.

24 Maggidis 1994, 45.



Fig. 11.2. Sissi Buffo, Zone 1. Ossuary (photo L. Manoussogiannaki. © Sarpedon).

deposition of skeletons within *larnakes* and *pithoi* since these helped to minimise confusion of skeletal remains and facilitated the attribution of grave goods to specific individuals. But since many of these vessels were also used for consecutive depositions, they too should primarily be identified as temporary containers, a place of transition and decomposition. It cannot be assumed that the final occupant was the original ‘owner’ of the coffin. From EM III onwards, however, primary burials within *pithoi* gradually become more common but secondary deposits remain the rule till the end of the Neopalatial period.

Partly because of the date of excavation and of pillaging, the situation is not always clear, but it seems that in several cases the tomb itself served as final or intermittent location for the skulls and long bones, whereas in other cases, the final resting place may have been elsewhere. In several cemeteries, skeletal material seems simply to have been dumped in the neighbourhood of the tombs, together with some of the grave offerings. Accepting Prepalatial tombs as temporary repositories for decomposition and not as final resting places also implies that they are initially not *communal* tombs in the strict sense of the word; they did not serve the simultaneous deposition of several individuals. What we encounter are consecutive *individual* depositions, followed, at some stage, by the sometimes *collective* selection and re-deposition of certain skeletal elements either in the tomb, or in a nearby structure.²⁵ This may imply that even if the

interment of the *first occupant* may have been a significant event, most of the Prepalatial burial structures were constructed *for a group by a group* and not for an individual. Alexiou and Warren have tried in the case of the Lebena tholoi to identify the ‘founder’ of the tomb,²⁶ and note how in several tombs prestigious objects such as Cycladic figurines or very fine vases were associated with one or two skulls and long bones which possibly belonged to the very first interment, but again these cases represent post-mortem interference and not primary burial ritual. Panagiotopoulos has shown how this two-stage process was recognised already early on in Minoan archaeology.²⁷ Indeed, even Evans, when digging the so-called Royal Tomb of Isopata, although pillaged, counted more than 40 skulls, which made him remark that ‘the tomb as used during the latest Minoan Age, would have been an ossuary’.²⁸ What I want to suggest here is, in fact, a *three-stage process*. Commenting on the pillaged tholos of Ayia Kyriaki, Blackman and Branigan hypothesise an original burial population of up to 500 individuals.²⁹ Only a mere 100 tiny skeletal

25 See also Crubézy *et al.* 2003, 309–10; also Keswani 2004, 51–4.

26 Alexiou and Warren 2004, 192.

27 Panagiotopoulos 2002, 121–2.

28 Evans 1906, 140.

29 Blackman and Branigan 1982.

fragments were recovered from the tomb, however. Since it is highly unlikely that the pillagers would have removed the skeletal material, we can only assume that these remains had already been cleared away and re-located elsewhere during the Bronze Age. One possibility would be removal to a special ossuary, perhaps similar to that recently excavated in the Ayios Charalambos Cave, where long bones were carefully stacked together forming a platform on which skulls were placed within a burial context which may have contained up to 1000 individuals.³⁰ The cave may represent such an ultimate resting place where the remains collected from tombs were deposited. Again this underlines that many of the burial structures were temporary repositories rather than final resting places.³¹ Still, it may also imply that the *final resting place* of some skeletal material has not yet been discovered and that certain body parts were selected to be *re-introduced* in settlements, as is the case for the Fournou Korifi skull and the other above mentioned cases. Goldstein and Schroeder have both argued that secondary, in contrast to primary, burial rites have in fact little to do with death and that secondary — and in our case tertiary — burial often asserts group associations rather than individual ties and is manipulated to characterise and maintain the group.³² Kuijt adds:³³

‘secondary mortuary rituals are often part of high-profile public ceremonies and can therefore be viewed as spiritual and symbolic acts that have social, political, and personal meanings. Finally, multistage secondary mortuary practices are planned in advance, are intergenerational, involve multiple households, and require extraordinary community involvement’.

STATUS AND SELECTION

Seeing Prepalatial tombs primarily as temporary repositories also implies that our main evidence for the reconstruction of individual status may have been removed: the skulls of important individuals, for example, may have been selected and retained elsewhere whereas it is the lesser important human and material evidence that remains. Assigning status to preserved skeletal remains becomes a difficult exercise under such conditions. I will argue that since the Minoans seem not to have attempted to show status distinctions within the funerary domain, neither should we and that once decomposed, skulls regained a collective aspect.

A first question that needs to be asked is whether *all* Prepalatial Minoans had the right to be buried formally and whether they passed through the same mortuary rite of passage of deposition, selection and relocation. Again, the absent evidence renders any conclusion fragile, but we may examine to what degree age groups and sexes are represented in the few cases in which anthropological studies have been performed. In his *Anthropologie archéologique de la Crète*, Charles

(1965), apart from giving a summary of the possible origin of the Minoans based on craniometric evidence, also presents a detailed discussion of determinations, modifying and correcting earlier work by Duckworth, Hawes, and von Luschan;³⁴ see TABLE 11.1.

The sample used for TABLE 11.1 is so limited as to be useless! For those skeletons of which both sex and age could be determined, he gave further results, presented here in TABLE 11.2.

Since Charles’ work more LM III funerary contexts have been examined, especially by Tina McGeorge.³⁵ In her study of the LM III Chania Palama Street burials, she was able to identify the sex of 29 people, 16 adults — nine females and seven males — and 13 children, many of the latter younger than five years. The high number (45%) of children at Chania was compared to the 31% in the LM III Armenoi sample;³⁶ and in both cases dietary conditions seem to have been worse for women than for men. McGeorge’s limited sample can be used with some care to suggest that by LM III, all members of society received formal burial. This may also have been the case before. Indeed, despite the scarcity of anthropological data, partly caused by the redeposition of skeletal material, partly by taphonomic processes, and the limitations of the sample, it is interesting to note that Charles’ data imply that during all main ceramic periods, there is at least some evidence for the burial of most if not all age groups and both sexes which, in general, would seem to suggest that Minoans did not practice selection based on sex or age. Unfortunately, it is not possible to be more precise but recent work such as that by Maggidis at Archanes presents a similar picture,³⁷ since Burial Building 19 comprised at least 22 child and infant burials against a total of 171 individuals; and at Sissi too, perinatals and children have been identified.³⁸ Still, we cannot exclude that the preserved burials only represent a segment of society. Moreover, regional variation seems to be the rule rather than the exception.

There is some scant evidence, however, that women received a more preferential treatment in the Prepalatial period. Triantaphyllou remarks:³⁹

Although both sexes are represented in the burial assemblage [of Archanes Gamma], females remarkably outnumber the males (13:8), but the sex could not be

30 Betancourt *et al.* 2008, 161, 163.

31 Blackman and Branigan 1982, 53, 55.

32 Goldstein 2000; Schroeder 2001.

33 Kuijt 2008, 175.

34 Charles 1965. Cf. Duckworth 1903; 1912; Hawes 1908; 1909; 1910; von Luschan 1913. See also Pomadere 2007.

35 McGeorge 1987; 2003.

36 Hallager and McGeorge 1992, 45, 46.

37 Maggidis 1994, 144.

38 Crevecoeur and Schmitt 2009.

39 Triantaphyllou 2005, 69.

TABLE 11.1: Sex identifications of Minoan skeletal material (after Charles 1965).

<i>Period</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
(Final) Neolithic (48)	31	12
EM (46)	25	13
MM (117)	75	36
LM I (Knossos, Sphoungaras) (16)	4	12
LM III (27)	14	11

TABLE 11.2: Sex and age identifications (Charles 1965, 208–09). ♀ = female ♂ = male

<i>Date</i>	<i>No. Individuals</i>	<i>Children</i>	<i>20–29</i>	<i>30–39</i>	<i>40–49</i>	<i>50–59</i>	<i>>60</i>
EM	21	1 (6 yrs)	1♀	1♂, 3♀	8♂	5♂	1♂
MM	89	2	2♀	8♂, 7♀	20♂, 10♀	24♂, 7♀	8♂, 1♀
LM	36	1	3♀	2♂, 7♀	5♂, 2♀	5♂, 7♀	2♂, 1♀

assigned to 5 adults. This picture of the female predominance does not agree with the overall distribution of sexes obtained from the few published Minoan skeletal assemblages. With the only exception of MM I Kato Zakros (Becker 1975), men usually outnumber women (Hallager and McGeorge 1992).

She is right in stressing the fact that recent study of LM III skeletal material shows that men outnumber women and had better dietary conditions, but our two published studies of Prepalatial skeletal material, Archanes and Zakros, suggest the opposite: women outnumber men and had better conditions. Where Zakros is concerned, Becker (1975), on the basis of cranial material of 74 individuals, identified 26 possible males, 40 possible females (including two adolescents) and eight unidentifiable specimens (including a single child and one adolescent).⁴⁰ As far as can be judged for the moment, women are also better represented at Sissi than men.⁴¹ One could argue for a higher mortality rate among women but this does not agree with the observation that some preferential treatment of women is also identifiable. Triantaphyllou, for example, observed a higher rate of *ante mortem* teeth loss as well as a higher incidence of wear and chipped teeth in men than in women, probably indicating a harder, coarser diet in the Archanes Tholos Gamma material.⁴² And, on the basis of her analysis of the Ayia Photia material, McGeorge has also noted a higher life expectancy for women in Prepalatial cemeteries than later,⁴³ suggestive of better living conditions and higher status. An associated question is whether the individuals buried within the same structure were related, either by common descent, by a combination of descent or marital ties, or by other parameters (status, function,

occasion).⁴⁴ The long-term investment and reuse of the buildings implies some stability which would rather point to kinship ties. The same may also be concluded from the fact that sometimes more than one burial structure is constructed and used simultaneously in a single site and that differences exist between the practices and material encountered. This seems to suggest that group-related distinctions were important. Elsewhere I have suggested the possibility of matrifocal social groupings as essential units of Minoan society;⁴⁵ and the present evidence goes some way in this direction.⁴⁶ It needs, however, to be substantiated in the field. It may be important, however, that the Myrtos Pyrgos House Tomb comprised a mixture of all age and sex groups during the Prepalatial and Protopalatial period, but that the Neopalatial depositions were all men.⁴⁷ This seems to suggest that a different set of selection criteria may have become operational at this stage and perhaps an evolution away from earlier practices which may have advantaged women. It may also be telling that, during the Prepalatial period, the most valuable grave offering consisted of gold diadems, a means of adornment for women.⁴⁸ Maggidis has also

40 Becker 1975.
41 Crevecoeur and Schmitt 2009.
42 Triantaphyllou 2005, 71.
43 McGeorge (pers. com.).
44 Cf. Keswani 2004, 54.
45 Driessen, forthcoming.
46 See also Cadogan 2009.
47 Cadogan, forthcoming.
48 Davaras 1975, 114; but see Soles 1988, 61, n. 3.

noted how ‘the evidence...indicates that almost all metal artefacts were associated with child or female adult burials’.⁴⁹

Next, whereas there is no doubt that evidence for social ranking exists in Prepalatial cemeteries,⁵⁰ we have to ask whether there is convincing evidence that *specific* individuals within the collectivity received special attention and finds? Most recently, Colburn has attempted to construct an argument on the basis of the exotica concentrated in only a few Prepalatial tombs (Tomb I–II–III at Mochlos, Burial Buildings 19, Gamma and Epsilon at Archanes, Tholos B at Koumasa), interpreting imported objects as individual, body adorning valuables, as symbols of power and elite identity.⁵¹ She argues that exotic objects were effectively used before ending up in Prepalatial tombs and should be considered as evidence of social ranking.⁵² That certain burial structures belonged to wealthier groups seems clear, but can we actually assume that individual rather than group-related status was important in Prepalatial society? In Archanes Burial Building 19 (MM IA), the very last burial of layer 2 consisted of an individual laid in a contracted position, head oriented north, resting on its right side, facing west; besides the skull were a steatite bead, an obsidian blade and a goblet and two jugs, one of which was covered by a conical cup, were placed by the feet.⁵³ Were these finds left behind by the people who buried the person or by those who sealed the burial layer with sand before adding a new series of burials? Similarly, the very last primary burial in the same tomb was disturbed so the objects found in association may only have been deposited when the skeleton was already decomposed.⁵⁴ Maggidis further notes how adults in Burial Building 19 were accompanied by one to five clay vases, one or more pieces of jewellery, one or more obsidian blades and sometimes a stone vase whereas children or infants not always received objects.⁵⁵ Traces of use on some of the objects show that the latter had been used in daily life before their deposition.⁵⁶ They are supposed to have been the personal objects of the deceased, sometimes giving information on his status or profession. Panagiotopoulos too argues for a funerary set, an assemblage accompanying the death at the moment of deposition.⁵⁷ Whereas I do not want to argue that the latter never happened, I think it was not standard practice. From Xanthoudides’ account in *The Vaulted Tombs of Mesará*, it is clear, for example, that the attention given to burials or depositions in general was considered as odd and interpreted as showing little respect. His account of the Koumasa burial is exemplary:⁵⁸

The thickness of the burial stratum and the mass of bones point to many hundreds of interments, but it was not possible to ascertain the manner and position of burial in any of the tholoi, for the state of the bones was such that no single skeleton could be recognised as complete *in situ*; and where bones were found not

entirely rotten they were not found in their original positions, but had obviously been disturbed and mixed up, perhaps moved and heaped together in various parts of the chamber to give space for later burials, or else thrown about when rifled of their valuables.

While re-investigating the Pseira tombs, Betancourt likewise stressed:⁵⁹

No vase can be specifically associated with any individual skeleton because no tomb was found with many pieces *in situ*, and those that were present could not be associated with any specific individual because the human bones were always found in disarray, with disarticulated bones in piles representing several individuals.

In another recent excavation, Serpetsidaki remarks that the Kyparissi rock tomb was first used for the burial of three articulated individuals that were not given objects and that later, during EM–MM IA, the cave received secondary depositions with objects, including five Cycladic figurines and 19 seals.⁶⁰ In this case, it seems clear that primary depositions were *not* accompanied by objects whereas secondary depositions were. The same is obvious from Maggidis’ careful analysis of Archanes MM IA Burial Building 19.⁶¹ He underlines how objects were intentionally placed near retained skulls, i.e. that it was a decision by those who *interfered* once the bodies had decomposed to attribute or relocate specific objects to specific skulls.

Very much the same thing was noted for the MM III tomb excavated by the British School on Gypsades. Hood underlines how the few vases found ‘may have been placed there, not at the time of burial, but to placate the dead when the remains of the body were deranged on the occasion of a later burial in the tomb’.⁶² A similar phenomenon was noted in the case of Lebena Zervou III tholos, where a skull was given a juglet but also ‘the strand of gold sheet...perhaps originally attached to the skull or to a diadem (none preserved) for the skull’, showing clearly how the adornment happened only afterwards.⁶³ Without neglecting the

49 Maggidis 1994, 81.

50 Soles 1988.

51 Colburn 2008.

52 Colburn 2008, 212, 219.

53 Maggidis 1994, 42.

54 Maggidis 1994, 62.

55 Maggidis 1994, 77.

56 Maggidis 1994, 75.

57 Panagiotopoulos 2002, 117–19.

58 Xanthoudides 1924, 7.

59 In Betancourt and Davaras 2003, 129.

60 Serpetsidaki 2006, 245–6.

61 Maggidis 1994, 31–2, 38.

62 Hood, Huxley and Sandars 1959, 223.

63 Alexiou and Warren 2004, 188.

possibility that individuals were accompanied by some personal objects when buried, the more common practice seems to have been to place objects near the skull once the body had decomposed and was relocated. Outside Burial Building 19 at Archanes, a flat stone interpreted as an altar was found with next to it three MM IB/IIA vases — a fruitstand, a jug and a goblet.⁶⁴ Also outside were found an inverted conical cup, a seal, a clay figurine, the head of a marble Cycladic figurine, one stone and four ivory pendants as well as shells. These offerings seem to have been made intentionally to the tomb as such and not to specific individuals. In contrast to the finds at Mochlos, first Seager and later Betancourt and Davaras deplored the absence of wealthy objects in the Pseira cemetery.⁶⁵ This scarcity has been observed elsewhere but has been appreciated differently: some interpret it as suggestive for a poor community, others have blamed Minoan plunderers;⁶⁶ others assume it is a result of cleaning and renewal operations with the dead, once decomposed, no longer being interested in objects.⁶⁷

Following Chapman,⁶⁸ it is also possible to interpret the removal as an *enchainment* practice in which body fragments and objects embody social relations. A re-introduction of both skeletal and funerary paraphernalia after a while within the realm of the living, allows us perhaps to understand the skull and the goddess found by Peter Warren at Myrtos Fournou Korifi: both were selected to maintain a lasting bond between objects, persons and the group. Who dedicated and eventually retrieved the bones and objects? In the present hypothesis, they are regarded as gifts left by members of the group 'as a feature of social integration, tracing many close ties between people...rather than the hoarding of wealth by powerful individuals'.⁶⁹ The fact that some objects show evident traces of use does not matter. The objects should not, as argued by Thomas,⁷⁰ be interpreted as, 'symbols of prestige sacrificed in order to express the status of the deceased [but as] a complex combination of ritual paraphernalia discarded at the conclusion of the funeral and gifts which mark out quite specific relationships between the dead person and those who survived'. Fowler continues: 'where people and gifts are interchangeable to some degree, bodies and objects do not belong to an individual but the community. Fragments of a body need not commemorate individuals; the same is true for relic remains of old objects, which may be inalienable from the community and offered to the death'.⁷¹

These different practices seem to imply that not only the construction of a burial building, but also the deposition of a corpse, the deposition of grave offerings in and outside a tomb, and the eventual selection of skeletal fragments for redeposition or removal are likely to have been collective acts, in each case accompanied by certain rites and ceremonies that served as 'powerful social regulators, intended to preserve community

cohesion and periodically to reaffirm social identities, kin-owned territory, or ancestral ties'.⁷² Or as mentioned by Kuijt:⁷³

After two or perhaps three generations, the memory of individuals becomes depersonalized and abstract. Rather than being conceptualized as known individuals, the dead are merged in an ancestral memory that is anonymous, homogenized, and collective... The process of forgetting the dead is linked to the decontextualization of the individual — the creation of a collective identity that is shared and experienced by others. There are clear practical reasons that the dead become depersonalized and forgotten in traditional societies. Among the living there is a deep personal and direct memory of the dead, creating a series of tangible links between personhood in life, death, and memorialization. At least initially, then, memory and commemoration are experiential—personal and direct.

This gradual depersonalisation of the memory of specific individuals allows them to rise to the general category of group ancestors. The similarity between the houses of the living and those of the dead (at least where House Tombs but also *mitata*-looking tholoi are concerned) underlines that the human landscape was one and that accessibility to ancestors was one of the reasons for constructing funerary buildings that were of intergenerational permanence.⁷⁴ Moreover, the relatively close association between domestic and funerary areas implies that the dead were never very distant and remained integrated in the community life.

THE SKULL AND THE GODDESS

Although there is plenty of evidence in tombs for repositioned skulls being closely associated with specific objects, it is doubtful that specific individuals were honoured rather than the ancestors in general. More and more indications are forthcoming that skulls were, on the one hand, considered as *pars pro toto* for the entire skeleton and, on the other hand, were not regarded as identifiable with the original person.⁷⁵ Evidence from the Near East suggests that skulls were

64 Maggidis 1994, 20.

65 References in Betancourt and Davaras 2003, 130, 134.

66 Branigan 1970, 110.

67 Panagiotopoulos 2002, 119, 124.

68 Chapman 2000; Chapman and Gaydarska 2007, 4.

69 A. Jones cited in Fowler 2004, 73.

70 Thomas 2000, 656.

71 Fowler 2004, 75.

72 Talalay 2004, 153.

73 Kuijt 2008, 174.

74 Cf. Thomas 2000, 656.

75 Panagiotopoulos 2002, 123.

selected regardless of age or sex.⁷⁶ Kuijt also notes that 'among the living there is no understanding of the acts, status and identity of people in the past and specific skeletal remains. Other than being viewed as respected ancestors...they have been transformed into a collective ancestry'.⁷⁷

It would be through the selection and retaining of skulls that the identity and memory from named persons was transferred to a symbolic collective.⁷⁸ Skulls represent at the same time a process of de-individualisation and an ascendance to a new status of collective ancestor. The selection, removal and re-introduction of a skull and goddess figurine at EM IIB Myrtos Fournou Korifi should be interpreted in the same vein, representing a type of fragmentation and bodily circulation that goes beyond the individual.

To conclude, in this paper I have explored whether solid evidence for personal prominence in Prepalatial Crete existed. I have argued that persons acquired status more through group identity than through individualised social roles and that the membership of a long living, matrifocal, stable group – a 'House' – formed one of the essential components of Minoan community organisation. I have suggested that objects were mainly deposited in funerary structures at an advanced moment of the mortuary process, at a stage when individuals were gradually depersonalised into a general category of ancestors and transforming him or her into the collective memory, a first step into an eventual re-incorporation into the society of the living. The selection and fragmentation of both skeletons and objects implied by the breaking up of the original body and the funerary gift assemblage operated a practice of enchainment in Prepalatial society, connecting living and dead members into a single group.

REFERENCES

- Alexiou, S., and P. M. Warren, 2004. *The Early Minoan Tombs of Lebena, Southern Crete*. SIMA 30. Sävedalen.
- Arnott, R., 2003. 'The human skeletal remains', in P. P. Betancourt and C. Davaras, *Pseira VII. The Pseira Cemetery 2. Excavation of the Tombs*. Prehistory Monographs 6. Philadelphia: 153–63.
- Bailey, D. W., 2005. *Prehistoric Figurines: Representation and corporeality in the Neolithic*. London and New York.
- Becker, M. J., 1975. 'Human skeletal remains from Kato Zakro', *AJA* 79: 271–6.
- Betancourt, P. P., and C. Davaras, 2003. *Pseira VII. The Pseira Cemetery 2. Excavation of the Tombs*. Prehistory Monographs 6. Philadelphia.
- Betancourt, P. P., D. S. Reese, L. L. Verstegen and S. C. Ferrence, 2008. 'Feasts for the dead: evidence from the ossuary at Hagios Charalambos', in L. Hitchcock, R. Laffineur and J. Crowley (eds.), *DAIS. The Aegean Feast*. Aegaeum 29. Liège and Austin: 161–6.
- Blackman, D., and K. Branigan, 1982. 'An Early Minoan tholos tomb at Ayia Kyriaki', *BSA* 77: 1–57.
- Bonogofsky, M., 2005. 'Anatolian plastered skulls in context: new discoveries and interpretations', in 20. *Arkeometri Sonuçları Toplantısı, 24–28 Mayıs 2004 Konya*. Ankara: 13–26.
- Branigan, K., 1969. 'The genesis of the household goddess', *SMEA* 8: 22–38.
- , 1970. *The Tombs of Mesara. A Study of Funerary Architecture and Ritual in Southern Crete, 2800–1700 B.C.* London.
- , 1984. 'Early Minoan society: the evidence of the Mesara tholoi revised', in *Aux origines de l'Hellénisme. La Crète et la Grèce. Hommage à Henri van Effenterre présenté par le Centre G. Glotz*. Paris: 29–37.
- , 1987. 'Ritual interference with human bones in the Mesara Tholoi', in R. Laffineur (ed.), *THANATOS. Les coutumes funéraires en Egée à l'Âge du Bronze*. Aegaeum 1. Liège: 43–50.
- , 1992. *Dancing with Death. Life and Death in Southern Crete c. 3000–2000 B.C.* Amsterdam.
- , 1998. 'The nearness of you: proximity and distance in Early Minoan funerary behaviour', in K. Branigan (ed.), *Cemetery and Society in the Aegean Bronze Age*. Sheffield Studies in Aegean Archaeology 1. Sheffield: 13–26.
- Catapoti, D., 2005. 'From power to paradigm: rethinking the emergence of the "palatial phenomenon" in Bronze Age Crete' (PhD thesis, University of Sheffield).
- Cadogan, G., 2009. 'Gender metaphors of social stratigraphy in pre-Linear B Crete. Or is "Minoan Gynaecocracy" (still) credible?', in K. Kopaka (ed.), *FYLO. Engendering Prehistoric 'Stratigraphies' in the Aegean and the Mediterranean*. Aegaeum 30: 225–32.
- , forthcoming. 'A power house of the dead: the functions and long life of the tomb at Myrtos-Pyrgos', in J. Murphy (ed.), *Regional and Diachronic Studies on Prehistoric Crete: Mortuary Systems*.
- Chapman, J., 2000. *Fragmentation in Archaeology: People, Places, and Broken Objects*. London.

76 Bonogofsky 2005, 15. Kuijt has also stressed how skulls could be involved in household rituals linking the living to the dead: 'The social construction of identity and memory can be expressed through public ritual. The organization of mortuary practices, the repetitive use of imagery and figurines, and the long-term reuse of human skulls in the Near Eastern Neolithic illustrate how household ritual linked the living to the dead. Secondary mortuary practices and the plastering and painting of human skulls as ritual heirlooms served as a form of memorialization and erasure of identity within communities. The deliberate focus on the face in both construction and decoration was part of a shared system of ritual practices. Skull caching and modification transcended the past, present, and future, reiterating the expectation of future mortuary events while simultaneously recognising continuity with the past through the crafting of memory. Collectively these patterns represent a complex web of interaction involving ritual knowledge, imagery, mortuary practices, and the creation of intergenerational memory and structures of authority' (Kuijt 2008, 185).

77 Kuijt 2008, 185.

78 Kuijt 2008, 177.

- Chapman, J., and B. Gaydarska, 2007. *Parts and Wholes: Fragmentation in Prehistoric Context*. Oxford.
- Charles, R.-P., 1965. *Anthropologie archéologique de la Crète*. Etudes Crétoises 14. Paris.
- Colburn, C. S., 2008. 'Exotica and the Early Minoan elite: eastern imports in Prepalatial Crete', *AJA* 112: 203–24.
- Crevecoeur, I., and A. Schmitt, 2009. 'Fouilles à Sissi. Zone 1. 2007–2008. Etude anthropologique', in J. Driessen *et al.*, *Excavations at Sissi. Preliminary Report on the 2007–2008 Campaigns*. Aegis 1. Louvain-la-Neuve: 57–94.
- Crubézy, E., J.-D. Vigne, J. Guilaine, T. Giraud, T. Gérardand and F. Briois, 2003. 'Aux origines des sépultures collectives: la structure 23 de Shillourokambos (Chypre, 7500 B.C.)', in J. Guilaine and A. Le Brun (eds.), *Le Néolithique de Chypre*. BCH Suppl. 43. Paris: 295–311.
- Davaras, C., 1975. 'Early Minoan jewellery from Mochlos', *BSA* 70: 101–14.
- Driessen, J., 2010. 'Spirit of Place. Minoan 'houses' as major actors', in D. J. Pullen (ed.), *Political Economies in the Aegean Bronze Age*. Oxford: 35–65.
- , forthcoming. 'A matrilineal house society in Pre-and Protopalatial Crete?', in I. Schoep, J. Driessen and P. D. Tomkins (eds.), *Back to the Beginning*. Proceedings of the Leuven Conference held in February 2008.
- Duckworth, W. L. H., 1903. 'Report on anthropological work in Athens and in Crete. Archaeological and ethnological researches in Crete', *Report of the 73rd Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science*. London: 405–52.
- , 1912. 'The craniology of the ancient inhabitants of Palaikastro and its neighbourhood', *Report of the 82nd Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science*. London: 224–68.
- Evans, A. J., 1906. 'The prehistoric tombs of Knossos', *Archaeologia* 49: 1–172.
- Fowler, C., 2004. *The Archaeology of Personhood: An Anthropological Approach*. London and New York.
- Goldstein, L., 2000. 'Mississippian Ritual as viewed through the practice of secondary disposal of the dead', in S. R. Ahler (ed.), *Mounds, Modoc, and Mesoamerica: Papers in honor of Melvin L. Fowler*. Illinois State Museum Scientific Papers 28. Springfield: 193–205.
- Hallager, B. P., and P. J. P. McGeorge, 1992. *Late Minoan III Burials at Khania. The Tombs, Finds and Deceased in Odos Palama*. SIMA 93. Göteborg.
- Hawes, C. H., 1908. 'Report on the Cretan anthropometry', *Report of the 78th Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science*. London: 345–50.
- , 1909. 'Report on the Cretan anthropometry', *Report of the 79th Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science*. London: 287–91.
- , 1910. 'Report on the Cretan anthropometry', *Report of the 80th Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science*. London: 228–36.
- Hood, M. S. F., G. Huxley and N. Sandars, 1959. 'A Minoan cemetery on Upper Gypsades (Knossos Survey 156)', *BSA* 53–54: 194–262.
- Hurlbut, S. A., 2000. 'The taphonomy of cannibalism: a review of anthropogenic bone modification in the American Southwest', *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology* 10: 4–26.
- Jones, B., 2008. 'Anthropomorphic vessels at the feast: evidence for dress or ornament?', in L. Hitchcock, R. Laffineur and J. Crowley (eds.), *DAIS. The Aegean Feast*. Aegaeum 29. Liège and Austin: 39–45.
- Keswani, P., 2004. *Mortuary Ritual and Society in Bronze Age Cyprus*. Monographs in Mediterranean Archaeology 9. London.
- Knappett, C. J., 2009. 'Scaling up. From household to state in Bronze Age Crete', in S. Owen and L. Preston (eds.), *Inside the City: Studies of Urbanism from the Bronze Age to the Hellenistic Period in the Greek World*. Oxford: 14–26.
- Kuijt, I., 2008. 'The regeneration of life. Neolithic structures of symbolic remembering and forgetting', *Current Anthropology* 49:2: 171–97.
- Luschan, F. von, 1913. 'Beiträge zur Anthropologie von Kreta', *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 45: 307–93.
- McGeorge, P. J. P., 1987. 'Biosocial evolution in Bronze Age Crete', in *Ειλαπίνη. Τόμος τιμητικός για τον Καθηγητή Νικόλαο Πλάτωνα*. Herakleion: 407–16.
- , 2003. 'Intramural infant burials in the Aegean', in E. Hallager and B. P. Hallager (eds.), *The Greek-Swedish Excavations at the Agia Aikaterini Square, Kastelli, Khania, 1970–1987 and 2001. Vol. III:1–2. The Late Minoan IIIB:2 Settlement*. Stockholm: 301–03.
- Maggidis, C. 1994. 'Burial Building 19 at Archanes: a study of Prepalatial and early Protopalatial funerary architecture and ritual' (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania).
- , 1998. 'From polis to necropolis: social ranking from architectural and mortuary evidence in the Minoan cemetery at Phourni, Archanes', in K. Branigan (ed.), *Cemetery and Society in the Aegean Bronze Age*. Sheffield Studies in Aegean Archaeology 1: 87–102.
- Papadatos, Y., 2005. *Tholos Tomb Gamma. A Prepalatial Tholos Tomb at Phourni, Archanes*. Prehistory Monographs 17. Philadelphia.
- Pomadere, M. 2007. 'Les enfants dans le monde égéen, du néolithique au début de l'âge du fer', Thèse Université de Paris I, Paris.
- Panagiotopoulos, D. 2002. *Das Tholosgrab E von Phourni bei Archanes. Studien zu einem frühkretischen Grabfund und seinem kulturellen Kontext*. BAR–IS 1014. Oxford.
- Reese, D. S., 1995. 'The Minoan Fauna', in J. Shaw and M. Shaw, *Kommos I. The Kommos Region and Houses of the Minoan Town. Part 1. The Kommos Region, Ecology, and Minoan Industries*. Princeton: 163–291.
- Sakellarakis, Y., and E. Sapouna-Sakellarakis, 1997. *Archanes. Minoan Crete in a New Light*. Athens.
- Schroeder, S., 2001. 'Secondary disposal of the dead: cross-cultural codes', *World Cultures* 12.1: 77–93.
- Serpetsidaki, I., 2006. 'Προανακτορικός σπηλαιώδης τάφος στο Κυπαρίσσι Τεμένους', in *Cretological* 9: A2, 243–58.
- Soles, J. S., 1988. 'Social ranking in Prepalatial cemeteries', in E. B. French and K. A. Wardle (eds.), *Problems in Greek Prehistory*. Bristol: 49–61.
- , 1992. *Prepalatial Cemeteries at Mochlos and Gournia and the House Tombs of Bronze Age Crete*. Hesperia Suppl. 24. Princeton.
- , 2000. 'Reverence for dead ancestors: four cases from Minoan, Mycenaean and Greek Dark Ages', *Journal of Prehistoric Religion* 14: 46–7.

- , 2001. 'Reverence for dead ancestors in prehistoric Crete', in R. Laffineur and R. Hägg (eds.), *POTNIA. Deities and Religion in the Aegean Bronze Age*. Aegaeum 22. Liège and Austin: 229–36.
- Talalay, S., 2004. 'Heady business: skulls, heads, and decapitation in Neolithic Anatolia and Greece', *JMA* 17.2: 139–63.
- Thomas, J., 2000. 'Death, identity and the body in Neolithic Britain', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Society* 6: 653–68.
- Triantaphyllou, S., 2005. 'Appendix: the human remains', in Y. Papadatos, *Tholos Tomb Gamma. A Prepalatial Tholos Tomb at Phourni, Archanes*. Prehistory Monographs 17. Philadelphia: 67–76.
- Wall, S. M., J. H. Musgrave and P. M. Warren, 1986. 'Human bones from a Late Minoan Ib house at Knossos', *BSA* 81: 333–88.
- Warren, P., 1972. *Myrtos: An Early Bronze Age Settlement in Crete*. BSA Suppl. 7. London.
- Whitelaw, T. M., 2007. 'House, households and community at Early Minoan Fournou Korifi: methods and models for interpretation', in R. Westgate, N. Fisher and J. Whitley (eds.), *Building Communities. House, Settlement and Society in the Aegean and Beyond*. BSA Studies 15. London: 65–76.
- Xanthoudides, S., 1924. *The Vaulted Tombs of Mesará*. London.