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A Matrilocal House Society in Pre-and Protopalatial Crete?

Jan Driessen

Introduction: Pre-and Protopalatial funerary and settlement data

In *Approaches to Social Archaeology*, Colin Renfrew (1984: 10-11) noted that ‘the size of the social unit, its political organisation, its relations with its neighbours, and the range of roles and statuses held within it’ and how these were reflected by material culture and landscape, were elements that needed urgent attention by archaeologists studying ancient societies. In a similar vein, it may be argued that the social and political structures of Minoan Crete, at the different moments of its history and within the different regions and sub-regions that constitute the island and islands under its influence (Wiener 1984), remain key-issues for research. Where the Prepalatial and early Protopalatial periods are concerned, the specific time frames explored in this volume, we are fortunate in having a large body of settlement and mortuary data at our disposal, but it is rather disappointing that no agreement exists on the reconstruction of the society from which these data originate. Moreover, although both types of data have been occasionally treated together (Whitelaw 1983; Dabney 1989; Dabney & Wright 1990; Catapoti 2005), they are usually discussed separately. Before exploring alternative ways of looking at this evidence, I will briefly review these data for their relevance to the reconstruction of social structures.

Funerary data and social structure

Where mortuary evidence is concerned, a difference is usually made between data used for the reconstruction of social relations and those used to estimate the size of the contributing population, although both approaches often coincide. Estimates of the size of the contributing population are usually made on the basis of skeletal material, but sometimes also have used artefactual data (*e.g.*, sealstones or daggers; Soles 1992: 251; Panagiotopoulos 2002: 128-129). Others have turned the argument around, assuming that a nuclear family of five or six persons would contribute about 20 corpses a century and then hypothetically estimating the total duration of tomb use and the number of interments (Bintliff 1977: 639-641; Whitelaw 1983: 337). Soles, using only skulls, comes to a slightly different result, suggesting that in several cases ‘a population unit somewhat larger than a nuclear family used these tombs....It might be identified as an extended family or perhaps a fraternal organization such as a priesthood or warrior elite’ (Soles 1992: 253), a hypothesis certain authors accept (Ten Wolde 1994). Both approaches are fraught with danger, however, because of insufficient data. Panagiotopoulos (2002: 175) has insisted on the ‘methodological inconsistency of previous attempts to define according to numerical data the social group using each tomb...[because] the sample of skeletal remains and grave goods found during excavation represents mainly the

traces of the burial activity from the very last years of the tomb and is not proportionally distributed over the entire period of its use'. Indeed, where duration of tomb use is concerned, some carefully excavated tombs such as those at Archanes (Tholos Epsilon) and Lebena, show that interruptions occur, skewing the precise time linkages (Sakkellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997; Alexiou and Warren 2004; Legarra Herrero 2009: fig. 11). In most cases the estimated number of interments is almost impossible to reconstruct for various reasons: first of all, mortuary ritual could potentially comprise a variety of different stages and treatments (*i.e.*, primary and secondary burial, cleaning and removal, skull retention) that make it impossible to decide whether the situation encountered by the archaeologist reflects a totality of funerary activity over the duration of the tomb or simply the final use of the tomb obscured by a few freeze-frames of certain punctuated moments throughout the use of the tomb. Hence, we may wonder if primary and secondary burial were consecutive and/or parallel rituals.

For Ayia Photia, for example, Day, Wilson and Kiriatzi (1998: 146), following Whitelaw (1983) and Bintliff (1977), have suggested that the 252 excavated tombs (of an estimated total of 300) or so EM I tombs would have been the result of a large community of 15 families (*i.e.*, $15 \times 20 = 300$). The lack of information on skeletal data, however, prevents us from saying that all family members equally received formal burial. Moreover, while some of the Ayia Photia burials were individual interments, many held more (2-11 interments; Davaras and Betancourt 2004). Since no detailed information exists on the sex and age of the burial population, we do not know unfortunately whether the organisation of the burial area was structured by time or along lines of kinship or status.

More disturbing is that, although Morris' (1989) work on Athenian burial habits has by now become a standard work in our field, few (if any) commentators have taken into account the potential existence of selection criteria which might have defined which members of society had the right to receive formal burial. Indeed, the few Prepalatial funerary contexts in which skeletal material has been sexed represent contrasting evidence. Maggidis (1998: 92), for example, has argued that Archanes Burial Building 19 should be seen as a family tomb because of a reasonably well proportioned sample of men (4), women (2) and children (8) as well as ages, but his reconstruction only takes 14 articulated skeletons into account out of an entire burial population of 193 people. The EM II/III burials of the Ayios Charalambos Cave, excavated in the 1970's by Davaras (see also Betancourt this volume) may have had a 1:1 sex ratio since McGeorge (1988: 15) mentions 58 male and 54 female skeletons. The Myrtos Pyrgos tomb, used from EM II to LM I, only contained male skeletal material in its latest phase (Cadogan forthcoming a) and in Branigan's 1970 synthesis women represented only about 1/4 of the 104 skeletons sexed (1970: 115). On the other hand, Triantaphyllou, who studied the cranial material of Tholos Gamma at Archanes (Sevi Triantaphyllou in Papadatos 2005, 69) notes that amongst the estimated 30 individuals that can be identified females outnumber males. Becker's study of the saved skeletal material from the Zakros house-tombs also stressed a larger female proportion with a low presence of children (Becker 1975). In their recent publication of the Lebena tombs, Alexiou and Warren (2004: 191) mention the presence of infant burials, but in advance of the full publication of the corpus of human skeletal material, no generalizations can be made.

Often the accompanying objects are used by archaeologists as straightforward indicators of gender, even though recent studies have shown that we should not take grave offerings at face-value and that gender and sex identification should be dissociated (Parker Pearson 1993; Driessen forthcoming b) and that it is only in cases where proper anthropological studies have been performed that we can try to reconstruct selection criteria and following this kinship relations. This is for the moment impossible for Minoan Crete, but the few examples mentioned above warn against making generalizations, at least on the basis of skewed skeletal data.

Some have also tried to infer the existence of primarily hierarchical structures by assuming a link between the existence of more elaborate and wealthy tombs (Whitelaw 1983: 337; Soles 1988; Colburn 2008) and the presence of groups of differential status within a community. This relies on the assumption that both the tombs and the objects found in them were the personal property of the dead rather than the group who built the tomb and deposited the objects (Driessen forthcoming b). Parker Pearson (1993) has emphasised that the dead do not bury themselves and Fowler (2004: 75) that ‘the mortuary process was part of a community strategy’. Soles’ main argument for seeing the Mochlos house-tombs as reflecting a family group rather than another type of social grouping is the high number of tombs (between 20 and 30) and the likelihood that ‘the settlement area could probably not have accommodated many more than 300 individuals, or about ten individuals per tomb, each used by an extended family’ (Soles 1992: 254). This remark is evidently based on the assumption that the people buried in the tombs came from the immediate environs of the cemetery and that no epidemic, war or natural catastrophe had skewed the averages. Since only in the case of Tomb I at Mochlos is it known that ‘at least 30 skulls’ were found, with little or no information available from the remaining again, it is risky to generalize. Similarly, Panagiotopoulos (2002: 175) has argued that we should only consider the latest use moment of a tomb as representative of the contributing group. In the case of Tholos Epsilon at Archanes, there were 32 larnakes and two pithoi in the MM I-II level: ‘Looking at the tombs from this short-term perspective, and judging by their size, we may assume that the group using a Minoan tholos such as tholos tomb E[psilon] comprised the entire community and not just an extended family’ (Panagiotopoulos 2002: 175). But again for Archanes Phourni, Maggidis has suggested that Burial Building 19 was used by a lineage during some 450 years ‘descending either from two nuclear families of five individuals, or from an extended family of 10 individuals; it seems, therefore, to be comparable to several house tombs in East Crete...but rather different from the Mesara tholos tombs, which have been viewed as tribal or clans tombs...’ (Maggidis 1998: 95). Dabney (in Dabney & Wright 1990, 46) has argued for the existence of strong local kin groups in the Mesara, who expressed their cohesion by communal tombs of a monumental nature. She goes on to contrast this with the Knossos area, where, she argues, such kin relations were already broken up by the time of the First Palace. Warren is likewise extremely sceptical about the value of funerary evidence for demographic reconstructions, but when it comes to interpreting the contributing group, he comments that the ‘fact of collective burial suggests...cohesive, *relatively* egalitarian or socially undifferentiated units such as a clan or an extended family’, explaining the adding of a tomb next to an existing one as being

for ‘a branch of the same, but by now much widening clan, extended family or group of related nuclear families’ (his italics, P.M. Warren in Alexiou and Warren 2004: 191-192). Add to this Glotz’s opinion that Prepalatial tombs related to tribes and the opinion of Hutchinson, Branigan (cited in Panagiotopoulos 2002: 124) and Sbonias (1999: 27) that they belonged to community segments such as clans, and it becomes more than obvious that no agreement exists on the group that used the tombs. To cite Oliver Dickinson (1999: 133):

“this takes us to another crucial question: what was this group? What do we mean when we speak (as many authors do) of one or more families using a tomb? A nuclear family is definable in one generation, as a pair of parents and their children; but with reasonable luck it will surely replace itself over the generations, as seems to be implied by the calculation, cited several times, of 20 burials to a century. Rather, a number of lines of descent from the ‘founders’ of the tomb will become established, which over a very long period, such as those postulated for the Mesara tombs, could become numerous and the number of people entitled to burial in a particular tomb correspondingly large. This surely makes it likely that access to burial in a multiple burial tomb was determined on grounds other than simple descent”.

Settlement data and social structure

Where settlement data are concerned, archaeologists have become more and more interested in recent years in what is called the *archaeology of the household*, concentrating on the link between the people and the structure they occupied (Allison 1999). It is a well-known fact that house plans and room arrangement differ according to the relations between the people that inhabit them (Banning 2003; Flannery 2002) and using house forms to reconstruct social structure is a common archaeological aspiration, albeit not always a successful one. Whereas anthropologists have tried to identify kinship relations on the basis of architecture, most archaeologists limit themselves to the reconstruction of households, of the ‘groups of people, often, but not always, co-residents, who share (not necessarily equally) in economic production, distribution and the consumption of food, who reproduce themselves, and who transmit property from one generation to the next’ (Banning 2003: 13). Neolithic and Minoan households have received plenty of attention by people such as Halstead (1999), Tomkins (2004), Whitelaw (2001) and Glowacki (2004) as well as in a series of papers in the proceedings of the STEGA-conference (Glowacki and Vogeikoff-Brogan forthcoming). Halstead, seconded by Tomkins, concentrating on Neolithic material, notes that ‘the progressive isolation of the household can be observed over three to four millennia in architectural form, in the monumentality of building materials, in the location of cooking facilities, in the symbolic elaboration of table ware and in the changing importance of wild animal resources’ (Halstead 1999: 90; Tomkins 2004). Whereas most observers assume that nuclear families only became more important after EM II (e.g. Warren 1987: 53), the differences between residential structures on Crete and the Greek mainland should be emphasized. During the Neolithic, in contrast to Crete, free-standing constructions and small clusters of spaces, identified as household residences, are the rule on the Greek mainland (Halstead 1999, 79). Halstead (1999, 80) stresses how ‘most free-standing structures range

between c. 20 m² and c. 70 m² in floor area...suggesting occupation by some sort of family group'. He leaves open the possibility 'that basic domestic units were sometimes comprised of *groups* of buildings' (his italics: 80) .

Turning to the Early Bronze Age, it is inevitable that the well preserved and excavated EM II settlement of Myrtos Fournou Korifi should lie at the core of this discussion, mainly because of its extremely well published assemblage. Other Prepalatial structures such as those at Vasiliki, Malia (south of the Palace), Knossos, Debla, Trypeti, Ayia Triada, Tylissos, Palaikastro, Agia Photia, Mochlos have received much less attention, partly because their remains are fragmentary, they lack movable finds or were excavated under less good conditions. It is telling, however, how such a well published site as Fournou Korifi has given rise to a variety of different interpretations: Whitelaw's recent paper (2007) conveniently summarizes hypotheses by Warren (1972; 1983), Branigan (1970), Ten Wolde (1992), Sanders (1984) and Whitelaw (1979, 1983, 2001; see now also Catapoti 2005). Whitelaw has concluded, on the basis of Fournou Korifi that "*nuclear families* or 'minimally-extended stem families of about 4-5 individuals or so' (Whitelaw 2001: 18, 21) formed the basic social and residential unit of Crete. Larger architectural units were, following this line of thinking, seen as wealthier households, containing more specialized and larger rooms, but not necessarily more people, or as multi-family residences. In his most recent paper, however, Whitelaw (2007) has also presented data that might be seen as reflecting more communal aspects of organisation for Fournou Korifi, including the limited access to the settlement, a solid perimeter wall, communal spaces used for possible ritual integration and signs for economic co-operation between households. To this may be added the differential distribution of south coast tradition ceramics and the so-called Myrtos Goddess. These signs may imply that the different nuclear families still formed a single household, something which has been argued for Neopalatial Malia (Romanou 2007).

What we still lack, however, is a proper methodological and theoretical framework to identify non-co-resident members of a single household group archaeologically. Proving or disproving that several, proximate housing units did or did not function as a single household may be suggested by complementarities in room functions and a series of other analyses, including access analysis, as done by Romanou (2007; see also Driessen and Fiasse in press; Driessen *et al.* 2008). A settlement consisting of several (separate) architectural structures, such as EM IIA Debla or LM III Quartier Nu at Malia, for instance, can still have represented a single group with several submerged households. Kanta (1983: 156) has stressed how, in more recent times, traditional Cretan villages were arranged in neighbourhoods that were scattered over a considerable area with each neighbourhood being occupied by a clan or an extended family. Moore (2005: 9-48) has used *soundscapes* and the link between voice and social cohesion in non-hierarchical societies to explain the make-up of certain architectural plans. I have explored the possibility for the existence of an intermediate level, between the nuclear family unit and the community, at Neopalatial Gournia, Palaikastro and Malia (Driessen forthcoming a), a hypothesis based on the size of the architectural units, the absence of double walls and the presence of communal architectural features, including outdoor activity areas, the repetition of certain features and the absence of others, the presence of movable finds, etc.

(see also Privitera 2005: 197; Keith 2003: 58; Catapoti 2005: 172-175). It is, in any case, hard to imagine that members of a single nuclear family occupied a single residence (or a single tomb for that matter) for several hundreds of years (as noted by Younger 2001: 193). So another scenario is here explored in which the focus is the building itself.

The Established House

This short and obviously incomplete introduction on Pre-and Protopalatial social structure underlines one thing: there is no unanimity in interpretation. My main objection to Whitelaw's reconstruction is that if the nuclear family household was the main and most important social component of Minoan society, why is it so difficult to identify, why are most Minoan residential structures of a size and a complexity lacking in societies where such a nuclear family household is the rule, such as Mainland Greece? Myrtos Fournou Korifi is, despite its exemplary publication, not so different from Vasiliki or the Houses south of the Malia palace, but also from Middle Minoan complexes such as Monastiraki or Apodulu. Maria Shaw, for example, comments on Middle Minoan Kommos that 'the problem between 'aggregations of rooms' and 'multiroomed houses' seems to be endemic to small MM towns or hamlets' and 'it is almost impossible to isolate individual dwellings' (M. Shaw in Shaw & Shaw 1996: 361; see also Wright 1996: 191ff and Wright 2007).

So perhaps it is better to start anew and look at the evidence from another angle. What if we tried looking at domestic and funerary structures as closely related, as reflections of the same? The relationship between the living and the dead is a complicated one and funerary buildings can still constitute an important feature in the landscape long after the group which originally constructed the structures had disappeared, a phenomenon which may, in some cases, explain the reactivation of some tombs after the removal and sealing of older burials. This may simply be practical, it may also be ideological and a means of appropriation, either of land or ancestors (Levy 1989: 157; Dabney 1995). Monuments 'remind' and have an intergenerational power which humans do not have. Branigan (1993: 82) for example, calls the Mesara tombs 'Monuments of a millennium' because many of them stayed in use for several centuries (but see Panagiotopoulos 2002: 129). But isn't this also the case for the settlements? In the remaining of this paper I will try to argue that an intimate relationship existed between Minoan *buildings*, both funerary and domestic, and Minoan *people*, and that both serve as signifiers of the same social group. In this way these buildings form, together with their occupants, a single body with an impressive intergenerational quality which made them socially relevant to a *succession* of people. Together they formed what is now often called a *House*, in the Levi-Straussian sense (Levi-Strauss 1982), but which I have decided to call an *Established House* to distinguish the term from the mere architectural structure (Driessen forthcoming a). Crete, whether in the Pre-, Proto-, Neo- or Postpalatial period, abounds with residential complexes that are over several hundreds of square meters large with heirlooms, valuables and integrative ritual spaces, occupying prominent physical locations in spatial networks, but also serving socially as loci within an arrangement of multiple other relationships. These complexes are almost always rebuilds of earlier constructions

emphasising a longevity difficult to agree with nuclear families. Within these complexes we may try to identify a separate nuclear family unit but the question is whether this is useful and whether we should not simply accept at face-value that the elaborate structures were indeed reflections of larger social groups. I have discussed the possibility that these architectural groupings should be seen as potential social actors in more detail in another paper (Driessen forthcoming a; also Knappett 2009), where I have stressed that both the intergenerational and locus-bound aspects of *Established Houses* constitute fundamental differences between the *House* and what Yannis Hamilakis (2002) and Jim Wright (2004: 70-75) have called *Factions*.

First coined by Claude Levi-Strauss (1982, 174; Gillespie 2000b), the concept of the *House* was actualised first by anthropologists (see Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995; see also Joyce and Gillespie 2000; Beck 2007) and may be defined thus:

‘Groups referred to by the term ‘house’ are corporate bodies, sometimes quite large, organized by their shared residence, subsistence, means of production, origin, ritual actions, or metaphysical essence, all of which entail a commitment to a corpus of house property, which in turn can be said to materialize the social group. Houses define and socially reproduce themselves by the actions involved with the preservation of their joint property, as a form of material reproduction that objectifies their existence as a group and serves to configure their status vis-à-vis other houses within the larger society’ (Gillespie 2000a: 1-2).

It should immediately be added that the term *House* covers a varied assemblage of societies and it is futile to look for a trait list that can be applied straightforward. The following is hence a discussion of characteristics, some of which occur in anthropologically attested *House societies* and find parallels in Minoan Crete, and others which seem to be specifically Cretan. Foremost stands the observation that Minoan *Established Houses* are intergenerational, locus-bound, social groupings centred upon an architectural structure. The *House* should then not be seen primarily or solely as an architectural form but as the objectification or materialization of an ‘enduring social group that is materially represented by a physical structure and the objects that go with it – furnishings, curated heirlooms, and graves – within a designated locus in the landscape’ (Gillespie 2000a, 2-3). Heirlooms and rituals not only serve in-house integration but also support claims to more elevated status. They function to construct and reinforce relationships between members of the House but also between different Houses. By definition, a *House* is multigenerational, its survival depending on the consolidation and maintenance of the estate and its own social reproduction. This historical dimension is evidently one of the aspects most easily detected by archaeologists. The bottom line is that local, or spatial, attachment was the source of identification. The main archaeological correlate of *House societies* is a major investment in residential structures and the consciousness that ‘houses [are] an arena for social competition ... reflected in monumentality and in prestige materials associated to houses’ and also that they ‘have to be the focus of all ordinary and extraordinary activities, but especially of rituals and sacrifices, thus displaying defining material features pointing at their symbolic relevance’, comprising ‘heirlooms and elements of rank’ (González-Ruibal 2005: 5). There are several other symbolic correlates, which need not concern us here, but a close link between the houses of the living and the

dead, a feature evident also for Crete, has also been stressed for a series of other *House societies* such as the Maya (Gillespie 2000c) or that of the Iron Age Iberians (González-Ruibal 2005: 6).

If spatial attachment is important, the main aim for *Established Houses* will evidently be how to objectify this attachment and creating a sense of perpetuity (Moore 2005: 183). On Crete, the links between the past and the present were maintained by different mechanisms, highlighted by a series of parallels in the funerary and residential domains. Hence, it has been stressed that settlements are often closely linked with their cemeteries (or was it the other way around?) (Vavouranakis 2007). The most eloquent example is Myrtos-Pyrgos where the house tomb forms an integral part of the settlement's urban scenario. However, this close link is more than evident at all known Prepalatial sites, (e.g. Malia, Palaikastro and now also Sissi; Driessen et alii, 2009). In the Mesara, most tholoi are less than 200m from the habitation site, some less than 10m (Branigan 1998a: 17-18). There is a clear link between these places and the surrounding landscape, in which the buildings, both funerary and residential, serve as the localizing hub of a social network. Moreover, it is essentially through the exercising of ties to the land and the locality that an *Established House* creates ties of kinship (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995a, 16).

It also worth observing how *House societies* define themselves by palimpsests of place. This renewal of permanence is perhaps their most readily identifiable archaeological characteristic, with houses often replacing earlier structures on the same spot. This rebuilding time and time again reinforces the localization of the group and a continuity of place as well as creating a *House* genealogy. Elsewhere (Driessen forthcoming a) I have given a series of Cretan cases but the best example of both vertical superimposition and horizontal displacement of subsequent constructions is of course later Neolithic Knossos where residential units were frequently constructed along the lines of their predecessors. But Fournou Korifi, Vasiliki, Malia, Mochlos and many other Prepalatial sites were continually occupied, sometimes only for a few generations, sometimes for several centuries (e.g., 6-10 generations at Myrtos Fournou Korifi). It is of course well known that many Minoan tombs were used for more than 1000 years. This intergenerational aspect and the constant reuse of the same building are features that are difficult to accommodate in a model where the principal social unit is the nuclear family.

Rather, it may be argued that both residential structures and tombs might profitably be considered to function as living bodies, the cycle of which differed from that of the life cycle of the individuals that happen to live or were buried in them during a particular generation (Preston Blier 1987, 118-130). The architectural container of a tomb or residence represents stability even if it is modified, embellished, enlarged or even moved from one spot to another. Humans die, the *House* does not and in this way the *House* offers its inhabitants a sense of immortality. It thus becomes important to trace the biography of a residential structure or of a tomb. Moreover, even a destroyed or abandoned residential or funerary building may continue to live on as a mnemonic device. Interestingly, parallels can be found in the anthropological literature for buildings being fed through the placing of offerings, often at the base of pillars

representing the ancestors. In this regard one might point to cases where Prepalatial tombs host structured depositions that lack a clear associations with particular interments of human skeletal material or, in the case of residential structures, where there are deposits of inverted conical cups (sometimes around pillars), baetyls or vessels set in the floor, perhaps serving to ‘feed’ the house directly or, as in the case of Neopalatial Building B2 at Mochlos, “a small altar .. set ... above the area of the Prepalatial building” in (Soles and Davaras 1996: 178; Soles 2004: 159). The levelling or destruction of a tomb or residential structure, often by fire or through the addition of a layer of *calcestruzzo*, fine sand or plaster, may in this sense be interpreted as a ritual act and a ‘burial rite’ symbolically accompanying the death of one house and the establishment of a new one (Tringham 2000: 124; Verhoeven 2007). Examples of this vary greatly in time and scale, from Early Neolithic houses at Knossos (Tomkins 2007) to the EM IIB Red House at Vasiliki or parts of the West Magazines at Malia or the sealing with *calcestruzzo* of the MM I-II Palace at Phaistos.

One criterion, upon which the size of the occupying group has been reconstructed, is, of course, the size of the structure concerned. Prepalatial tombs are often large with diameters of tholoi averaging around 6m and the largest reaching 14m in diameter. These are considered to have been collective tombs, with most remains coming from consecutive interments within the same container, which in some cases could imply several hundred individuals, even if this was only their skulls (Driessen forthcoming b). Hence the scale of the building seems accentuated by the expected number of people that the tomb eventually was meant to contain, clearly underlining that magnitude and multitude were looked for. In general, it has been argued that, whenever a structure exceeds 70m², its residents probably derive from an extended family, the size of the structure reflecting more the size rather than the wealth of the group occupying it (Cutting 2006: 231, 241). In an Aegean context, Halstead (1999) and Whitelaw (2001) independently also consider 70m² as a relevant maximum size for a single contributing nuclear family. Yet many Neolithic, EM and MM residential complexes appear to have covered a larger area. The LN I house at Katsambas (>65m²), the only partially excavated LN II house below the West Court at Knossos (>50m²), the FN I and FN IV houses below the Central Court at Knossos (up to 100m²) were all large, multi-roomed structures. Some time ago Branigan (1972) drew attention to the size of the EM structures beneath the later constructions at Tylissos and Palaikastro (block Chi). Large EM II buildings exist beneath the West Court at Knossos (Evans 1972: 127), at Vasiliki (the Red House) and perhaps now also at Mochlos (Soles and Davaras 1996: 178). Middle Bronze Age Crete is especially rich in large, agglutinative residential compounds. Although it is sometime possible to identify separate residential units within such complexes, their internal boundaries are rarely conclusive and often fuzzy. At Malia, there are several examples, such as Quartier Mu, the houses south of the Palace, Villa Alpha and Quartier Gamma etc. Similar large-scale residential structures exist at Monastiraki, Phaistos, Apesokari and Apodoulou in south Crete and at Ayia Photia, Palaikastro and Chamaizi in east Crete. Interpreting these structures as the seats of *Established Houses* with a remarkable longevity allows their identification as loci for major social, political and economic actions and as the proprietors of perpetual rights and duties.

Another relevant parallel between funerary and residential structures is the presence of foundation deposits, recently termed building deposits (Herva 2005; see also Boulotis 1982; La Rosa 2002). In residences, these are often hidden beneath the floors or within walls and were not always retrieved, but the *tea-pot* found in the EM II/III building beneath the Malia palace or the vases found at Palaikastro (MacGillivray *et al.* 1999) suggest that this was a widespread practice. We may wonder whether the Cycladic or Cycladic type figurines found in some tombs functioned in a similar way. In Tholos Epsilon at Archanes, a Cycladic Koumasa type limestone figurine, a pyxis and seals accompanied the earliest EM IIA burial(s) (Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997). In the Koumasa tholos, six Cycladic idols were found, almost evenly distributed between each of the different funerary structures: two in Tholos B, one in Tholos A, another in square tomb G, with two more in space AB. For Lebena, Warren notes how ‘three of the five tombs...offer the tantalizing possibility of what may be termed founder burials. In [Papoura] Tomb Ib the evidence is the proximal location, on the floor, of two objects to which special value...may be ascribed, [a] marble figurine.. and [an] incised stone vase.., together with [an] incised Fine Grey Ware pyxis’ (Alexiou and Warren 2004: 192). Likewise marble figurines may also have formed part of the burials of the initial burial assemblages in Lebena-Gerokampos II and Lebena-Zervos III, especially since such marble idols are otherwise very rare at Lebena.

A sixth feature which both funerary and domestic structures have in common is the presence of imports, both from within the island and from regions outside, be it pottery, stone vases, ivory or gold, or the occasional scarab or Cycladic object. Indeed, in the early 1890s, even before the wave of excavations started on Crete, Evans (1895) had already assumed an Egyptian connection in the partially robbed Ayios Onouphrios tomb. The concentration of value is a common feature of *established houses*. Indeed the cache of valuable material objects within structures (funerary or residential) ‘thereby taking them out of normal circulation and rendering them non-transactable’ (Gillespie 2000c: 151) shows a focus on material objects which is in fact also reflected by the size and elaboration of the architectural structures since both serve, in an intergenerational way, to consolidate relations between people. Apart from portable material wealth and immaterial richness or privileges (names, songs etc.), this is also often shown by the preponderance given to storage areas – clear evidence for corporate wealth. This wealth (including the heirlooms, for which see below) would especially during EM II-MM I end up in tombs but afterwards more commonly within residences.

The materialization of the historical memory of the *house* often happens through the incorporation of older structural elements within a new building (e.g. the EM III Northwest terrace wall at Knossos; EM II walls in the Magazines at Malia) and the continuous rebuilding on the same spot as discussed above but sometimes it also takes the form of heirlooms of various kinds, including the bones or skulls of ancestors, and often kept in specific spaces that are charged, including ritual places, tombs and residential structures (Warren 1968: 190; Driessen forthcoming b). Intra-mural burial is not very common on Crete, the most obvious examples being Neolithic in date (Evans 1964: 136-141; Triantaphyllou 2008), although McGeorge (2003: 301-302) mentions the discovery of an EM II child in a pithos at Nopigia

and a series of later examples. To these can now be added an example from LM I Sissi. Skull retention, as recently stressed by Soles (2001) is, however, relatively common both in Prepalatial tholoi and house tombs and part of a skull of a young adult male in his twenties to thirties (Warren 1972, 342, Appendix XIII) received special attention in room 89 at EM IIB Myrtos-Fournou Korifi. Such 'heirlooms' may have been shown on occasion of ceremonies and processions, or worn during sacred dances (Warren 2006; Moore 2005, 129-137). I have given a series of later, palatial examples elsewhere (Driessen forthcoming a, b), but the presence of EM sealstones in Protopalatial or later tombs (Karytinos 1998, 84; Krzyszkowska 2005, 81, 84, 104-105) may be mentioned as well as the incorporation of axes, mortars, burned mud bricks and querns in EN and EM buildings (Evans 1972: 117). A proper study of heirlooms for Minoan Crete is as yet lacking (but see Whitley 2002).

Was the Minoan *Established House* matrilineal and matrilocal?

If it is accepted that groups, which were intergenerationally focused on specific fixed loci in the landscape, formed the principal social unit in EM and MM society, it still remains to be seen how these groups might have been internally organised. After all,

“Kinship in all non-state societies structures social relations. It defines who a person is, who their leaders are, what resources they have access to, whom they may marry, where they may live, what occupations are available to them, and spiritual practices they will follow. Kinship influences, bounds, and shapes all aspects of life. One reason archaeologists may shy away from the discussion of kinship in the societies we study is because kinship is not material in nature” (Peregrine 2001: 38).

The reconstruction of social relations is, nevertheless, a challenge we as archaeologists need to take on, however difficult or impossible it might seem. It is important to find out how social relations were traced (bilateral, matrilineal or patrilineal), not least because land ownership is controlled by lineages, not by nuclear families (Holden and Mace 2003). What follows is a simple attempt to see whether one can move from Minoan material culture towards an appreciation of descent.

The presence of tombs and buildings that stand out, either because of their plan, size, architectural embellishment or associated finds, clearly suggests that some kind of hierarchy was present between the different Minoan *Houses*, with both high-ranking and lower-ranking *Houses* identifiable in the data. This hierarchy may at least in part be a result of the success with which alliances were forged. Such alliances may have been largely economic in nature, but in many societies they are overtly social, often involving wife-taking or wife-giving practices depending on descent rules. Anthropologists distinguish mainly between bilateral, patrilineal and matrilineal descent. In societies that practise bilateral descent, group membership is traced through males and females, in the second only through males, in the third only through females. In modern western society descent is conventionally bilateral and the nuclear family serves as the basic social and economic unit. However, of all the world's

known societies, 60% practise patrilineal descent and only 10% matrilineal descent. In terms of the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample (SCCS), in which 186 cultures are described, 17% are matrilineal and 41% patrilineal. In an earlier cross-cultural analysis of 565 cultures, in which 84 matrilineal societies were identified, 56% were horticultural (against 23% pastoralist or agro-pastoralist) and of 188 horticultural societies, 30% were matrilineal (references in Holden and Mace 2003; see also Holden *et al.* 2003). Matrilineal societies tend to be matrilocal: a man goes to live with his wife and her mother's kin. The membership of a matrilineal descent group include the mother, her sisters and brothers, her daughters, her sister's children and her grandchildren (but not her brother's or son's children). In such a society, women are more important in decision-making regarding property, politics and residence. Sometimes, as with the Hopi Indians, men may return to their mother's residence for special feasts and ceremonies (Perry 1989).

It is interesting to observe that in ethnographically attested cases of *House societies*, in which the intergenerational and locus-bound aspects are important, descent is often matrilocally organised. Hence, Peregrine (2001), drawing on a body of anthropological evidence, has argued that matrilocal societies have significantly larger dwellings than patrilocal ones. Peregrine was basing his interpretation on earlier work by Ember (1973; Ember and Ember 1971) who, on the basis of cross-cultural anthropological case-studies, argued that societies with patrilocal residence tend to have dwellings that are usually less than 60m² in floor area, while matrilocal societies tend to have dwellings larger than 100m² in total floor area. Apart from size, another statistically relevant characteristic of patrilineal societies is said to be warfare with close neighbours, whereas matrilineal societies are characterised by warfare with distant enemies, for the obvious reason that incoming males tend to derive from closer-lying communities, thus resulting in enhanced regional cohesion. A third characteristic is that patrilineal societies are often agricultural and/or pastoral societies whereas matrilineal groups tend to be associated with horticulture and trade. Some have even argued that the intensive use of cattle is, in fact, one of the reasons why the principle of matrilineal descent might be given up (Holden and Mace 2003).

Returning to Minoan Crete, and assuming that descent was also important for the structuring of relations (within and) between *Established Houses*, one is able to note that the archaeological evidence for mixed farming, relying mostly on sheep with a relatively low number of livestock, would not be incompatible with matrilineal descent. Neolithic and Minoan agriculture was entirely or overwhelmingly horticultural in nature (Halstead 1994; 1996) and it has recently been shown, in the case of Neolithic Knossos (Isaakidou 2008; Bogaard and Isaakidou forthcoming), that within this horticultural regime, cows rather than oxen were used for ploughing. It may equally be suggestive that the massive investment in livestock in the later Mycenaean period fits better with a patrilineal society. Keesing (1975: 65) has noted that in matrilineal societies there is a division of labour in which women perform many of the key agricultural tasks.

Other anthropologists have added a further characteristic, namely a low level of political integration, implying that there is no real arena in which men can build power bases (Divale

and Harris 1976). Helms (1970) and Divale (1984) have remarked that matrilocality and matrilineage were good solutions in societies where men tended to be away for long periods. This male absenteeism and the necessity to maintain a continuously functioning household would have resulted in the co-residential stability of closely related women with men coming from a broader territorial base, hence achieving co-operation and cohesion within a region. Often the men would form fraternities and invest in a co-operative activity such as the construction of public works (which makes them again absent from their residence of course). If such a corporate political strategy applies to the Minoan context, this would imply that the members of different *Established Houses* within a settlement or region were tied together by a series of integrating, cohesive actions, such as the mobilisation of foodstuff for communal ceremonies or construction projects, both represented by the court-centred buildings or ‘palaces’, for which I have argued an essentially community function (Driessen 2003). Certain other aspects of Pre- and Protopalatial culture such as the size of buildings, the possible absence of intra-regional warfare and the obvious inter-regional contacts do fit this hypothesised matrilineal system, as does the repeated seal imagery. More work needs to be done on the space syntax of Prepalatial houses, but Brusasco (2004: 152), in his study of Mesopotamian domestic space, suggests that the space syntax of dwellings in matrilocal societies is often entirely different from that of patrilocal ones, as suggested by the Ashanti residences which are internally distinguishable between a more directly accessible female area in the house strongly oriented towards external relations and a more remote male part.

Finally, the so-called ‘goddess’ figurines from EM IIB Fournou Korifi, the female rhyta from the Mesara tombs (Koumasa) and the Trapeza Cave or the EM III Mochlos and Malia examples can perhaps be used to corroborate the present hypothesis since they underline a female aspect that fits this scenario as do the later Knossian miniature frescoes in which ‘women are emphasized at the expense of men in fullness of portrayal and in position’ (Immerwahr 1983: 144). In a recent paper, Barbara Olsen stressed that ‘Minoan society does not invest in idealizing women as mothers. It seems instead to place them in capacities other than those associated with the care of infants. We see in Minoan iconography images of women in more public contexts: occupying prominent spatial positions in outdoor assemblies and processions, interacting with each other either in conversation or in dance, and acting in religious contexts either as individual worshippers or as officials involved in sacrificial rituals. Above all emphasis is on the social rather than the biological, the public rather than the domestic’ (Olsen 1998: 391). González-Ruibal (2006, 168) has added that ‘Women in house societies usually make a significant contribution in terms of wealth or power to the house’s capital’ and other cases of ‘sociétés à maison’ also emphasise the role of women.

However, matriliney and matrilocality need not imply a matriarchate and it is not true that matrilineal descent systems (or even matrilocal residence) imply female dominance over men in traditional societies (Balée 1984; Blackman 1982: 50) [insert note 1]. Indeed, in most cases of matriliney, men wield the power, but women tend in general to have better positions. In a matrilineal society, the brother of a woman (i.e. the mother’s brother) rather than her husband is the most important male. Indeed, he is the person of authority and respect and the children of his sister, rather than his own, are his heirs and successors. I hope that physical

anthropology may perhaps provide us with a more definite answer in the future since excavations of cemeteries, for which there is ethno-historically documented evidence for the existence of matrilocal postmarital residence, have shown similarities between the women suggesting that they were more closely related than the males (Gamble *et al.* 2001: 204)[insert note 2]. It may be meaningful that a difference in geographic origin for a considerable proportion of mitochondrial DNA and Y-chromosome lineages in the Lasithi Plateau has been observed which made researchers wonder whether this was ‘just the result of genetic drift and random distribution of two independent haplotype systems, sex-biased military occupations or differences in migration patterns between males and females, or if it is at all related to the matrilocal character historically attributed to the Minoan civilization’ (Martinez *et al.* 2008: 221). I have explored other elements elsewhere (Driessen forthcoming b).

Finally, I would like briefly to explore the hypothesis of a link between a matrilocal House society model and the progressive dispersal of seal types from a core area to surrounding villages during the late Prepalatial and early Protopalatial period (for the Mesara see Sbonias 1995; 2000; for Malia see Poursat and Papatsarouha 2000). Some time ago it was noticed how:

“several motifs appear in two or more tombs of a cluster, leading to the conclusion that either the tombs were not the property of homogenous unilineal descent groups or that the motifs of the seals do not represent kinship *per se*. In the former case, ownership of the tombs would have to be assigned to villages; and a person’s alliance to his community would have been more powerful than to his kin group in matters of death and burial” (Blasingham 1983: 16-18).

Basingham concluded that the ‘seal motifs represent political office or social rank, or both at once’ (Blasingham 1983: 18; see also Younger 2000: 355). Karytinis (1998; 2000: 131), following Sbonias (1995), links specific seal types to particular burial buildings at Archanes-Phourni: bone seals with cross-hatching to Tholos Gamma, white pieces to Tholos Epsilon and seals with lions and spirals to Building 19. The Archanes Script sealstones and bone and ivory seals with leaves mostly came from Buildings 3, 6 and 18, so the association between style groups and specific burials may well be real. It has also been noted that only a restricted number of style groups exist, but that within each group no one seal is identical. Thus Karytinis (2000: 131) is undoubtedly correct in arguing that seals ‘were probably not used as an individual signature or name, but rather as a way to express personal status that emerged from group identity. Perhaps the leaders of each group in a community possessed a seal that showed both group identity and personal position and status’ (see also Relaki this volume). Is it possible that each *Established House* had its own sealstone type and that real (or putative) alliances can be identified within the more discrete presences of other types? In this regard, the dispersal of sealstones beyond their core areas of use and deposition might be interpreted as reflecting the origins of mating partners. The presence of identical or very similar sealstones in different tombs or at different places could then be a result of alliances or multilocal housegroups between a series of proximate or even distant communities. These

sealstones would then indirectly also imply the development of a social and political network and hence cohesion within a region.

Finally, we may ask whether hierarchy was present within the *House* itself. For the moment, this seems certainly to be the case in the Neopalatial period – both where funerary and domestic data are concerned – but more difficult to identify for the earlier phases. Age, ritual experience and gender may have played a role but need more research.

Conclusions

I have proposed that we regard *Established Houses* as the principal social unit during the Prepalatial period, but this does not mean that other types of social groupings did not exist. Less successful *Houses* may have undergone fission or disintegrated into first extended and eventually nuclear families, when placed under stress or following the intervention of an authority. I have argued that an intergenerational investment by a corporate group in an estate constituted by an architectural structure, its domain, its heirlooms and valuables formed the basis of Minoan social relations. I have proposed that we reconsider Minoan social organization by taking, as a starting point, the existence of an intimate personal relation between a building and the people engaging with it to the extent that the building might be regarded as a living body. The *house* had an intergenerational quality which made it socially relevant to a succession of people organized in a community with an internal hierarchical organization, perhaps based on gender, age and ritual experience. I think the notion of the *Established House* provides a means of looking differently at the evidence, despite the many regional differences and not to mention the large gaps and biases in the data. The *House* offered stability, but also a system of social storage more reliable than that of the nuclear family and was thus a strategy perfectly adapted to the Cretan environment.

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Notes

- 1 For a recent example of matriarchy see Reeves Sanday 2002. I thank C. Morris for this reference.

2 Matrilineal marriage is described by Strabo for Crete in the 1st century B.C. and is also once attested in the Gortyn texts.

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