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Looking Beyond the First Palaces: Elites and the Agency of Power in EM III–MM II Crete

ILSE SCHOEP

Abstract

It is widely accepted that the First Palaces emerged around 2000 B.C., MM IB in ceramic terms, and that a palatial elite was the principal political, economic, and religious agent in Minoan society. The appearance of a series of innovations, such as palatial architecture, wheel-made pottery, administration, script, and high-quality prestige craft goods, has traditionally been attributed to the emergence of the First Palaces in MM IB. Palaces supposedly exerted control over long-distance contacts, even though exotic materials, objects, and ideas from the East were making their way to Crete in the preceding EM III and MM IA phases, apparently without the involvement of the palaces. There is, however, little archaeological evidence to support this interpretation of the First Palaces as the principal agents in society. This article proposes that we view these important innovations and changes in society from a different perspective—one that specifically emphasizes the agency of elite groups resident outside the palaces. A new framework for analyzing “elite ideologies” within the archaeological record is presented, and it is argued that the above-mentioned changes were politically motivated and should be understood within the context of ideologies involving emulation of and competition with other elites, both on the island and in distant locations. This elite behavior was aimed at negotiating, displaying, and legitimating status and power. Such an alternative approach provides insights into the organization of power in society and ultimately into the relationship between the First Palaces and their surrounding settlements.*

INTRODUCTION

It is generally acknowledged that the institution of the First Palaces and the elite groups presumed to be resident in them were the principal agents in Minoan society. Responsibility for the appearance of important technological innovations, such as palatial architecture, wheel-made pottery, administration, and script,

has traditionally been attributed to the First Palaces, which are believed to have emerged in MM IB.¹ In addition, it is also widely held that the MM IB–II palaces exerted control over long-distance contacts,² even though few would disagree that exotic materials, objects, and ideas from the East were making their way to Crete in EM III and MM IA, apparently without the interference of the palaces.

The historiography of the Minoan palace begins at the turn of the 20th century with Sir Arthur Evans' excavations at Knossos and his subsequent publications. Influenced by the political and economic situation prevalent in Victorian and Edwardian Britain and by the desire to appropriate the Bronze Age culture on Crete as European (as opposed to Eastern),³ Evans identified the monumental building on the Kephala hill as a palace or the residence of a ruler.⁴ This can be seen in the terminology used to designate individual rooms within this building, such as the Throne Room, the Queen's Megaron, and the Kings's Megaron.⁵ Struck by the absence on Crete of the sort of temples that were known from Egypt and the Near East, and clearly influenced also by perceived resemblances to Anatolian theocracies, Evans suggested that the ruler was a priest-king and the palace a palace-temple.⁶

Other excavators who exposed buildings of a similar plan at Malia and Phaistos followed suit, and the interpretation of large buildings with courts as palaces has, until recently, remained largely unchallenged.⁷ Indeed, in the last three decades, a series of influential publications has built further upon it. An important addition to Evans' interpretation has been a particular emphasis on the economic function of

*I would like to thank Naomi Norman and an anonymous reviewer for constructive comments that improved the final text. Furthermore, I thank Sandy MacGillivray for discussing the Egyptian and Levantine influences on Protopalatial Crete. Last but not least, special thanks go to Peter Tomkins for many discussions, for help with the illustrations, and for his continuous support and encouragement.

¹ Renfrew 1972; Cadogan 1981, 164–65; Warren 1985, 94–103; Cherry 1986, 19–45; Watrous 1987, 65–70; 2001, 157–253; Weingarten 1990b, 105–14.

² Cadogan 1987, 72–4; Wiener 1991, 128–61; Knapp 1995, 1433–49. Warren (1985, 101) also draws attention to a semi-

independent merchant class that would have existed alongside the palaces.

³ MacGillivray 2000; Hamilakis 2002a; McEnroe 2002.

⁴ Evans 1921.

⁵ Hitchcock and Koudounaris 2002.

⁶ This interpretation is mainly based on the *Prince of the Lilies* and the *Grand Stand* frescoes, both of which are very fragmentary. On the doubtful restoration (and interpretation) of the former, see Coulomb 1979; Niemeier 1988.

⁷ See Bintliff 1984, 33–8; Farnoux 1995, 323–34; Driessen 2002, 1–13; Hamilakis 2002a, 2–28; 2002b, 179–99; Schoep 2002, 15–33.

these buildings as redistributive centers.⁸ This emphasis was influenced not only by neoevolutionist thinking⁹ but also by perceived similarities to the Near Eastern palace economies. As a result, large buildings with courts have continued to be interpreted as the residences of a ruler, both as the central seat of a political and religious authority and as the driving economic force in society.¹⁰ The palaces and their resident elite group have come to be regarded as the barometers of social complexity in Minoan society.

A major role in promoting the palace as the principal agent of innovation and change was played by Cherry's seminal 1986 article.¹¹ His aim was to explain the similarities in material culture occurring at the different palatial sites through peer-polity interaction. In so doing, he drew attention to elite behavior that sought to consolidate power through the deployment of material culture (wheel-made, high-quality pottery, administration and writing, trade and exchange with the East, and ideology). This still valuable discussion takes place within a framework where the Minoan palaces are interpreted as multifunctional complexes serving as highest-order centers, integrating and controlling economic, political, and ritual activity within the different regions of Crete. Elite behavior is closely associated with the palaces, which are themselves synonymous with centralized hierarchy. As a consequence, however, elites have become so closely associated with the palaces as to have disappeared from archaeological discourse, replaced by a form of shorthand where power and its agency are described in terms of the "First Palaces."

Although this interpretation of the palace's importance in society was, in the first place, based on the LM II–III palace at Knossos, with its large collections of Linear B tablets documenting the existence of a central authority controlling the mobilization of goods from an outlying area,¹² it has been somewhat indiscriminately applied to the First Palaces, not only at Knossos but also elsewhere on the island (Malia, Phaistos).¹³ The presence of administrative documents in the First Palaces, albeit few in number and undeciphered, has only served to reinforce the no-

tion that a palatial bureaucracy could be traced to the Protopalatial period.¹⁴ Such reasoning reflects an idea of diachronic homogeneity that goes back to Evans himself, who believed that continuities in the design and construction shared between the latest palace at Knossos in LM III and its predecessors allowed the palace as an institution to be dated to the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age: "The foundation of the great buildings at Knossos and Phaistos goes back to the close of MM I.a, or to shortly after 2000 B.C. The hierarchical position of the priest-kings was now consolidated."¹⁵

Subsequent scholars have accepted, at least in principle, the problems associated with using the LM II–III palace model. For example, Cherry has cautioned that the detailed evidence upon which the interpretation of the palaces rests "often represents a conflation of data drawn from more than one stage in the history of the palaces."¹⁶ However, in practice, the First Palaces have continued to be interpreted as the religious, political, and economic centers of society, in just the same way as their successors.¹⁷ In the last decade, the idea that the First and Second Palaces functioned as strong, centralized economic authorities has come under sustained criticism, and at present there is a tendency to emphasize the ideological and ceremonial character of these buildings.¹⁸

Issues of Terminology

Such shifts in emphasis generally have not led to any change in how we refer to these buildings. It is important to acknowledge that the term "palace" carries a whole host of perhaps unhelpful baggage that to this day encourages interpretation of these buildings as the residence of a royal elite, occupying supreme position within a hierarchical social and political structure. The definition given by Warren is symptomatic of the problem in that it combines both objective (architectural) and subjective (interpretive) criteria: "Each palace included a central court; generally there were other courts as well. Around the central court were grouped storage facilities, production areas, archives of inscribed tablets, rooms for ritual activity and rooms for state functions."¹⁹

⁸ Renfrew 1972; Halstead and O'Shea 1982, 92–9; Branigan 1987, 245–49; 1988a, 11–16. If the *kouloures* were not intended for the storage of grain, as has been argued by Strasser (1997, 73–100) and Carinci (2001, 53–62), this would have repercussions for the economic function of the palaces.

⁹ Hamilakis 2002a.

¹⁰ See Warren 1985; Cherry 1986; Watrous 1987, 2001; Halstead 1988; Dickinson 1994.

¹¹ Cherry 1986.

¹² Finley 1957, 128–41; Ventris and Chadwick 1973.

¹³ Finley 1957; Renfrew 1972.

¹⁴ Renfrew 1972, 51, 307.

¹⁵ Evans 1921, 26.

¹⁶ Cherry 1986, 23.

¹⁷ Not least by Cherry (1986) himself. See also Renfrew 1972; Dickinson 1994; Watrous 1994.

¹⁸ Melas 1995; Soles 1995; Day and Wilson 1998; Driessen 2002; Hamilakis 2002b; Schoep 2002.

¹⁹ Warren 1985, 94–103. Watrous (1987, 204) defines a palace as the residence of a powerful authority, assisted by a literate bureaucracy, which controls a system of redistribution.

A closely related problem has been occasioned by the discovery in recent years of several other high-profile buildings with courts of Protopalatial and Neopalatial date. From these it has become clear that within the broad category of buildings containing multiple courts there is a considerable amount of variation. This dissimilarity in plan and/or scale has generated confusion as to whether or not they should be identified as “palaces,”²⁰ as is the case for the Neopalatial buildings at Petras, Galatas, Archanes, Kommos, Makrygialos, and for the Protopalatial structures at Petras, Kommos, Monastiraki, and, perhaps, Archanes. Such uncertainty arises at least in part from a desire to establish island-wide homogeneities, patterns, and typologies and from a reluctance to acknowledge the apparent variation that existed within the island. The traditional palatial model offers no means of explaining the differences in plan and scale displayed by high-profile buildings in various parts of Crete other than in simple terms of domination and subordination.

Some scholars have proposed a less value-laden architectural term, such as “court-centered building,” “court building,” or “court complex.”²¹ These terms have the advantage of acknowledging the physical architectural similarities between the structures without imposing ideas regarding the ways in which they functioned. This, however, leaves us without a word to describe the individual or institutional powers that may or may not have operated within the structures. However, far from being a weakness, this is in fact a more accurate reflection of our current lack of knowledge regarding the identity, nature, and agency of power before and during the Neopalatial period. Since this paper reassesses previous work on the First Palaces, it is difficult to avoid using the term “palace” and particularly the adjective “palatial.” However, a firm distinction will be maintained between the architectural form of the First Palaces, which are referred to as “early court buildings,” and the authority that is thought to emanate from the palace, which will be

termed “palatial authority” in order to distinguish it from other nonpalatial authorities that might be located outside the “palace.”

REVISITING THE FIRST PALACES

It is widely acknowledged that predecessors to the Neopalatial court buildings can be safely identified in north-central (Knossos), south-central (Phaistos), and eastern Crete (Malia) (fig. 1). Owing to differences in form and scale, the high-profile MM I–II buildings at Monastiraki, Petras, and Kommos are not usually included,²² even though they are the main buildings at these sites and are associated with courts (in the case of Kommos, even a raised walkway).²³ Although our knowledge of the early court buildings at Knossos, Malia, and Phaistos is considerably more limited than that of their MM III–LM I successors, little has been made of the information that is available. At Malia, the extent and character of the EM III–MM II court building is much better known than is generally assumed because of the extensive campaign of soundings beneath later floors, and because rebuilding did not remove earlier walls and floors.²⁴ The MM IB–II court building at Phaistos is also relatively well known because its ruins were filled in before the construction of the Neopalatial building at a higher level and several meters to the east. Soundings beneath the floors of the later building have further clarified the extent and nature of the MM IB–II court building. Most problematic are the EM III–MM II court buildings at Knossos, which have been almost entirely removed by later leveling and rebuilding, leaving only a few floors and deposits in situ.²⁵

I have argued in detail elsewhere that the reconstruction and conceptualization of the EM III–MM II court buildings have been heavily influenced by the external characteristics of their MM III–LM I successors.²⁶ Architectural plans often fill gaps in knowledge on the basis of what stood there in a later period.²⁷ Indeed, when browsing the current literature, one gets the impression that the early court

²⁰ See, e.g., Tsipopoulou 2002.

²¹ The term “court-centered building” was first proposed by Shaw (1994, 305–6) to define the monumental building he excavated at Kommos and allow it to be included in the category of palatial buildings despite its architectural differences.

²² Apart from the building at Petras (Tsipopoulou 2002, 133–44), our knowledge of these buildings is sketchy either because of their poor state of preservation or because they are in the course of being published (Monastiraki). For a discussion of Monastiraki, see Kanta 1999, 387–93; Kanta and Tzigounaki 2000, 193–210. The remains at Kommos are very fragmentary, but it is important to note that a court with raised walkways has been found in association with Building AA (Shaw 2002, 99–110). At Archanes, MM I–II remains have been found beneath

the high-profile building at Tourkogeitonia, but it is impossible to define the nature of this building. More importantly perhaps is the paved court with raised walkways that has been excavated to the southeast (Sakellarakis and Sakellarakis 1997, 120–29).

²³ Shaw 2002.

²⁴ These are published in *Chronique des fouilles de BCH* 89, 108, 113, 115, etc. (see Pelon 1980 for bibliography). For a detailed description of the northwest sector of the First Palace, see Pelon 1980, 235–42.

²⁵ For a comprehensive overview, see MacGillivray 1998.

²⁶ Schoep 2004.

²⁷ See, e.g., Evans 1921, fig. 152; MacGillivray 1994, 45–55, fig. 2.



Fig. 1. General map of Crete with sites mentioned in the text.

buildings were grand, two-storied structures featuring the earliest occurrences of so-called palatial architectural features, such as ashlar west facades, Minoan halls, and orthostats.²⁸ This is not, however, born out by a reassessment of the extant features of the early court buildings at Knossos, Phaistos, and Malia, which differ in a number of important respects from their better-known Neopalatial successors (figs. 2–4).

One important difference is that there is no evidence to suggest that the early court buildings had the sort of ashlar west facades that are considered to be the hallmark of the Neopalatial court buildings. At Knossos, the two-story wall in ashlar masonry on top of orthostats is a modern reconstruction by Evans, and the superstructure is now thought to have consisted of mud and rubble.²⁹ Evans' hypothetical reconstruction of the facade of the MM IB–II court building³⁰ as an ashlar facade on large base slabs (orthostats), whose southern section displays a rounded corner (fig. 5), was clearly influenced by the (wrongly) reconstructed Neopalatial facade.³¹ Hood's excavations have brought to light traces of the MM IB facade wall in large limestone and gypsum blocks with mason's marks (see fig. 2).³² At Malia, the extant west facade also post-dates the MM IIB destruction, and where parts of the facade wall of the earlier building are preserved, it seems to have consisted of unworked limestone blocks.³³ At Phaistos, the MM IB–MM IIA west facade

also was not in ashlar; rather, rubble walls were placed on top of sandstone orthostats.

Another major difference is that the early court buildings were, by and large, single-storied. The existence of an upper story is thought unlikely at Malia.³⁴ At Knossos there is no evidence of multiple stories, and it may be significant that the main extant staircases (Stepped Portico, Grand Staircase, and staircase to the north of the South Propylon)³⁵ were constructed only in LM IA. At Phaistos alone can one be certain that the southern part of the building, which was constructed first (MM IB), contained an upper story, although this, to a large extent, was necessitated by the sharply sloping topography in this part of the site. There is no indication of an upper story in the northern part, and it seems likely that the northern (single story) and southern (upper story) parts stood to the same height.

Regarding the internal organization of space, there is no evidence in the early court buildings for the Minoan hall and lustral basin, the most widely attested feature of later MM III–LM I "palatial" architecture. A Minoan hall is defined as a sequence of rooms including a light well, a vestibule, and a hall. The vestibule and hall are separated from each other by pier-and-door-partitions, and the vestibule opens onto the light well by means of columns.³⁶ The installation of the Minoan hall in Quartier III of the

²⁸ Cherry 1986, 27; Dickinson 1994, 147; Watrous 1998, 19–27; Hitchcock 2000, 32; 2003, 27–35.

²⁹ Not a single ashlar block was found during the excavation (Shaw 1971, 89–90; Klynne 1998, 207).

³⁰ Evans 1935, fig. 34.

³¹ Momigliano 1992, 165–75.

³² Catling 1974, 34; 1988, 69.

³³ Pelon 1980, 51–62, 238.

³⁴ Pelon 1993, 693.

³⁵ The sherds found beneath the bottom step of the staircase at the end of the Long Corridor have been dated to MM III (Raison 1993). See also MacGillivray 1994, 53.

³⁶ Driessen 1982, 27–92.

court building at Malia can be dated with certainty to LM I.³⁷ Soundings beneath its floors suggest that the Minoan hall module was laid out on top of rooms that had a very different plan in EM III/MM IA–MM II.³⁸ The MM IB–II court building at Phaistos also lacks evidence for a Minoan hall and lustral basin. The lustral basin in Room XLIV-38 (below Room 70) and the *polythyron* in Room XLV date to MM IIIA.³⁹ At Knossos, it has been suggested that the origins of the Throne Room complex go back to the MM I–II period;⁴⁰ however, the main period of construction represented by the extant remains in this area belongs to MM IIIB.⁴¹ Similarly, although it has been argued that the Domestic Quarter was first constructed in MM II, this early date has recently been questioned.⁴²

A further important difference concerns accessibility. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that the west facades of the early court buildings were more permeable than was the case in MM III and LM I. At Knossos and Malia (see figs. 2, 3), raised walkways abutting the later facade imply the existence of early entrances,⁴³ while at Malia and Phaistos (see figs. 3, 4), direct communication was possible between the west courts (and any activities taking place there) and certain rooms in the western part of the court building.⁴⁴ In addition, it is possible that the central courts of the early court buildings were also more freely accessible, since there is as yet no evidence of a south wing at Knossos, Malia, or Phaistos, such as those found in the Neopalatial buildings.⁴⁵

This reassessment suggests that many of the architectural features previously thought of as “palatial” were not actually present in the EM III–MM II court buildings. Our current conceptualization of the early court buildings is based mainly on extrapolations from the later buildings and on preconceived ideas about their function as the residence of a ruler.⁴⁶ This conceptualization stresses their role as palaces and emphasizes formal and functional similarity and continuity with the Neopalatial palaces. However,

once stripped of their anachronistic associations, the early court buildings emerge as structures that may have had a very different appearance and, perhaps, significance.

DECOUPLING AGENCY FROM THE PALACES

In view of these formal architectural differences, it is perhaps worth reconsidering the role played by the early court buildings and, in particular, whether palatial authorities were, as is generally supposed, the primary agents for change and technological innovation in EM III–MM II society. This section summarizes the evidence for architecture, elite pottery styles, administration, writing, and long-distance exchange, serving as the basis for a broader-based exploration of the nature of power and agency during this period.

Palatial Architecture

The absence of palatial architectural features such as ashlar masonry, Minoan halls, lustral basins, and elaborate upper stories⁴⁷ from the early court buildings should not be taken to imply that they are entirely absent during this period. Rather, as the evidence from the MM I–II settlement of Malia makes clear, these architectural features were first implemented in elite residences located in the surrounding urban settlement.⁴⁸ Building A of Quartier Mu displays an originally impressive ashlar west facade (only the lower course is preserved) in combination with a small paved court with raised walkways (fig. 6). Sandstone ashlar masonry was also used in the Crypte Hypostyle for the elevation of the northern and southern interior walls of the main basement room, and limestone ashlar may have been used in the building complex discovered during the Malia survey.⁴⁹ In addition, orthostats are found in the north facade of Building A and at Chryssolakkos.⁵⁰ Building A of Quartier Mu also features the oldest known example of a Minoan hall and a sunken room that is considered to be a prototype for the Late Minoan

³⁷ Pelon 1983, 251–57.

³⁸ Pelon 1993, 679–703.

³⁹ La Rosa 2002, 77–8.

⁴⁰ Miri  1979; Niemeier 1987, 163–68; Dickinson 1994, 149–50.

⁴¹ Macdonald 2002, 42.

⁴² Macdonald and Driessen 1988, 235–58; but see Macdonald (2002) for new date.

⁴³ Pelon 1992, 21.

⁴⁴ See Pelon (1980, 36) for Malia; see Tomasello (1999, 75–89) for Phaistos.

⁴⁵ At Knossos, a ramp leading up to the central court was found (Momigliano and Wilson 1996, 1–57). For the lack of evidence for a southern wing at Malia and Phaistos, see Schoep 2004.

⁴⁶ Schoep 2004.

⁴⁷ Driessen 1982; Cherry 1986; Watrous 1987, 2001; Dickinson 1994.

⁴⁸ For an in-depth discussion, see Schoep 2004.

⁴⁹ M ller 1991, 743.

⁵⁰ Poursat 1992, 42. At Chryssolakkos, carefully cut orthostats were reused as *krepidoma* blocks for (robbed) orthostats (Shaw 1971, 164; 1973, 319–31). There has been some speculation about where these carefully dressed (ashlar) limestone blocks came from (see Driessen [forthcoming] and Rutter [http://projectsx.dartmouth.edu/history/bronze_age/lessons/les/6.html]). It has been suggested that orthostats were placed along the western side of the early corridor beneath the later portico in the first phase of the monument.

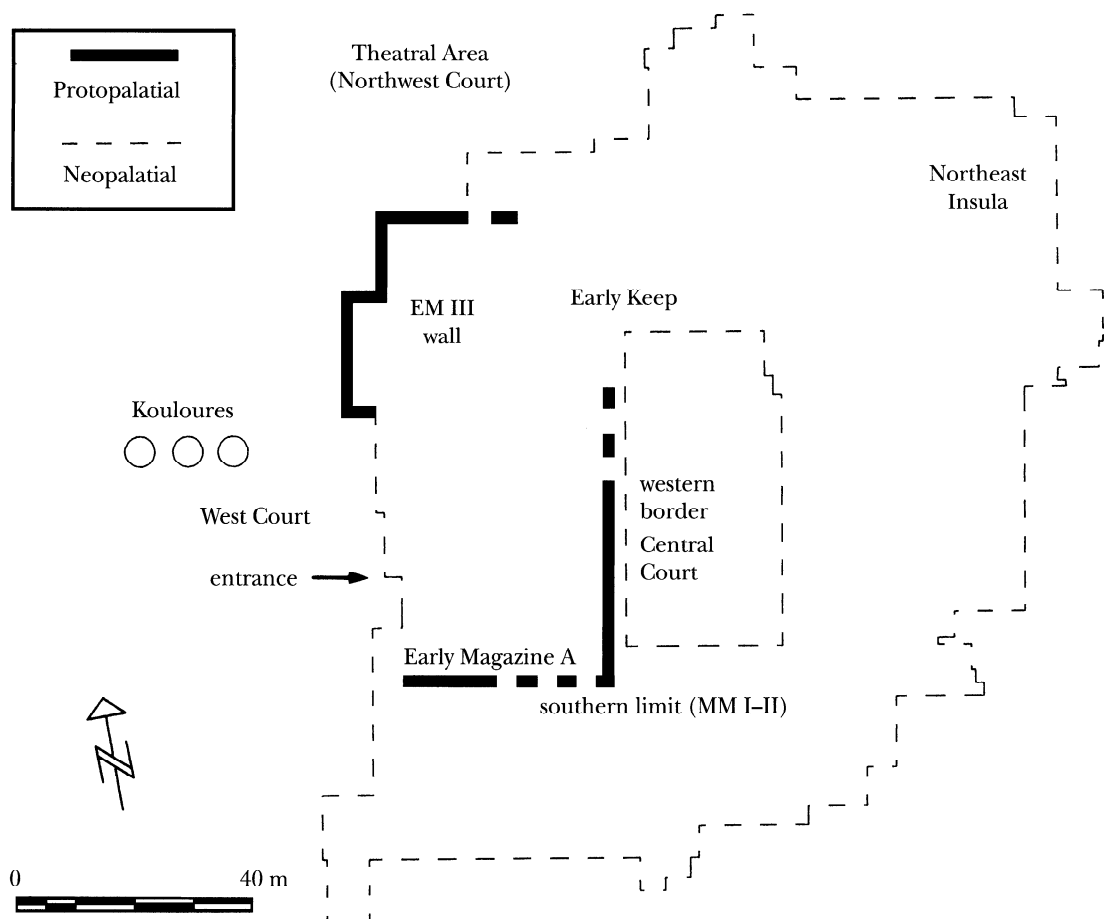


Fig. 2. Plan of the early court building at Knossos (after Wilson 1994, 150, fig. 5.26).

lustral basin (fig. 7).⁵¹ Apart from Quartier Mu, a *polythyron* was also found in the Crypte Hypostyle,⁵² and an alleged example is reported from the area to the west of the Agora.⁵³

And so, although it has been the convention to view MM IB–II palatial authorities as the agents of change and innovation in architecture, the distribution of palatial architecture at Malia suggests on the contrary that the agency for these changes should be sought outside the court buildings, among elite groups residing in the settlement. Such groups emerge not as slavish imitators of an architectural style pioneered by a palatial authority, as has previously been thought, but as a dynamic force that was itself responsible for the introduction and deployment of a new elite architectural vocabulary.⁵⁴

Elite Pottery Styles

The traditional Minoan palace model holds that palatial authorities played a crucial economic role, controlling not only the redistribution but also the production of specialized craft items.⁵⁵ As a result, the production of Kamares Ware has long been directly associated with the palatial authorities at Knossos and Phaistos.⁵⁶ In the absence of direct evidence for pottery workshops in the early court buildings,⁵⁷ the main argument for the palatial production of Kamares Ware was its assumed restricted geographical distribution.⁵⁸ However, although Kamares Ware is found in the court buildings, it is by no means restricted to them, occurring in houses outside the court buildings, in nonpalatial settlements, in tombs, and in caves.⁵⁹ Further, contrary to earlier claims, it is not possible to dif-

⁵¹ Poursat 1992, 40–2.

⁵² Allegrette and Schmid 1998, 790–92.

⁵³ Van Effenterre and Van Effenterre 1969.

⁵⁴ Schoep 2004.

⁵⁵ Renfrew 1972; Cherry 1986; Branigan 1987; 1989.

⁵⁶ Walberg 1976; Betancourt 1985; Cherry 1986.

⁵⁷ As pointed out by MacGillivray 1987, 276.

⁵⁸ Cherry 1986.

⁵⁹ Day and Wilson 1998, 350–58; Van de Moortel 2002, 189–210.

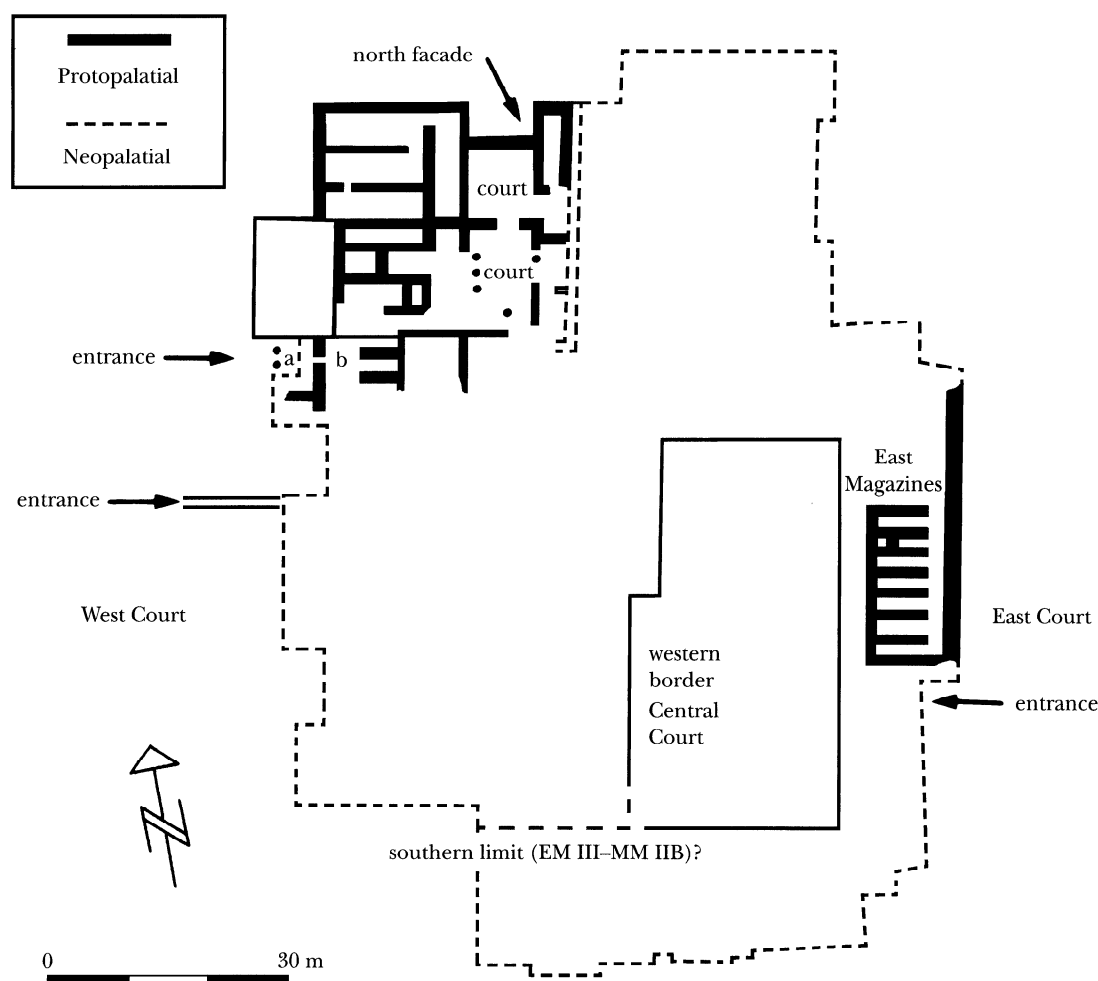


Fig. 3. Plan of the early court building at Malia (after Pelon 1992, plan 14).

ferentiate between Kamares Ware in the court buildings and that found in other settings.⁶⁰ It would thus appear that pottery produced in the same workshops was being consumed in different types of context. This important observation implies that the palatial authorities did not monopolize the consumption of this type of elite pottery style. Recent work combining petrographic and stylistic analyses has argued that the production of Kamares Ware no longer needs to be so closely associated with palatial authority.⁶¹ In the case of Knossos, petrographic analysis suggests that a considerable portion of the Kamares Ware consumed

on the Kephala hill was not locally produced.⁶² Van de Moortel has even argued that Kamares Ware was not produced by attached specialists but by independent producers for the general market.⁶³

This has important implications for our interpretation of the early court buildings, since it suggests that they represent contexts where elite pottery was consumed rather than produced. Moreover, the wide distribution of this high-quality, prestigious pottery indicates that a relatively large number of households had access to it.⁶⁴ In view of the shapes involved (drinking cups and pouring vessels), it may be argued that

⁶⁰ The quality of the Kamares Ware from Ayia Triada and Kommos cannot be differentiated in style or technique from that in the Palace at Phaistos (Carinci 1997, 317–22).

⁶¹ Day and Wilson 1998, 350–58.

⁶² Analysis of vessels with sufficient nonplastic inclusions to provide clear petrographic information has shown them to be incompatible with the geology of the Knossos area and has

suggested the Mesara as the most likely source for some of the Kamares Ware from Knossos (Day and Wilson 1998, 355).

⁶³ Van de Moortel 2002, 205. In this context, attention should also be drawn to the fact that pottery production was specialized from at least as early as EM I (Day et al. 1997, 275–90).

⁶⁴ Van de Moortel (2002) stresses that Kamares Ware is relatively widespread at Kommos.

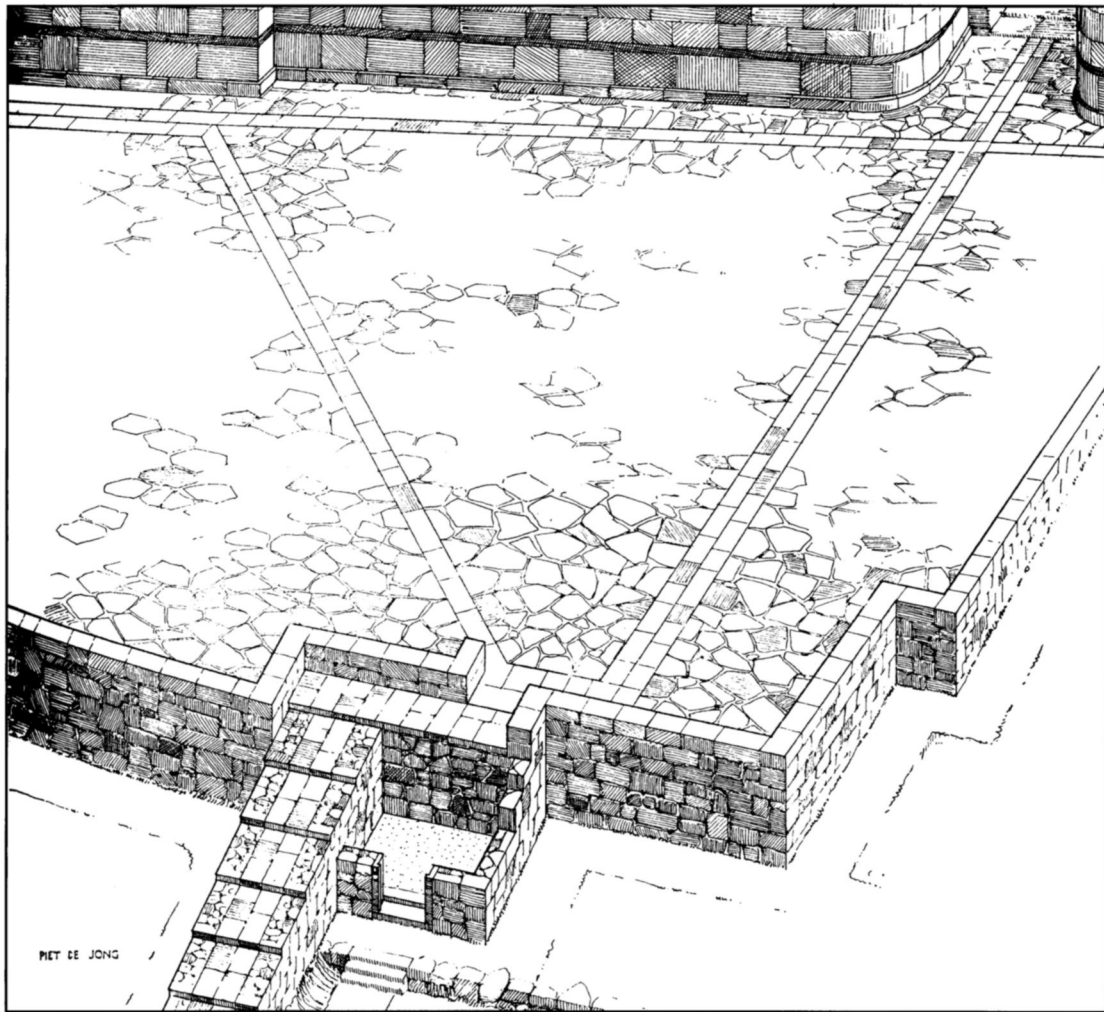


Fig. 5. Evans' reconstruction of the facade of the First Palace at Knossos (Evans 1935, fig. 34).

MMIA court building at Malia.⁶⁹ This does not support the idea that the act of sealing was introduced specifically to meet the economic needs of a palatial authority.⁷⁰

Script per se also seems to have been invented at an earlier date, as suggested by the MM IA inscribed sealstones from burial Buildings 3, 6, and 7 at

Phourni (Archanes).⁷¹ These are usually referred to as the "Archanes script" (fig. 8), although the same repetitive sequence of signs also occurs on sealstones from elsewhere on the island (Gouves, Moni Odigitria, and Pangalochori) and even beyond (Samothrace).⁷² The relationship of the signs to the later Linear A and Cretan Hieroglyphic scripts is not

(burial Building 7 at Phourni and Ayios Nikolaos plot), and the South Front House at Knossos (EM III). No large collections of sealings, comparable to those known on the mainland (e.g., Lerna), have as yet been found on Crete, but this is likely to be a reflection of the fragmentary nature of the archaeological evidence.

⁶⁹ Hue and Pelon 1992, 1–36.

⁷⁰ Weingarten (2000a, 103–23) suggests that administration is not synonymous with central authority and political and economic centralization.

⁷¹ The sealstones are of different shapes (discoids, cube, flattened cylinder, sealstone with 14 faces) and various materials

(ivory, bone, steatite, agate) (Sakellarakis and Sakellarakis 1997, 674–89). They are usually considered as a stylistic group, i.e., the Border/Leaf Complex (Yule 1981, 210), although it is not clear whether they belong to a single workshop. If not, the designation "Archanes script" is misleading. Yule (1981, 210) also notes that the Border/Leaf Complex has highly pronounced Egyptian influence (shapes seals of this complex, motifs, and materials such as frit/faience and ivory).

⁷² Archanes nos. 202, 251, 252, 315; Knossos nos. 134, 179, 203; Samothrace nos. 135–37; Crete (?) nos. 201 and 205; Gouves no. 292, and Moni Odigitria no. 313 (see Olivier and Godart 1996).

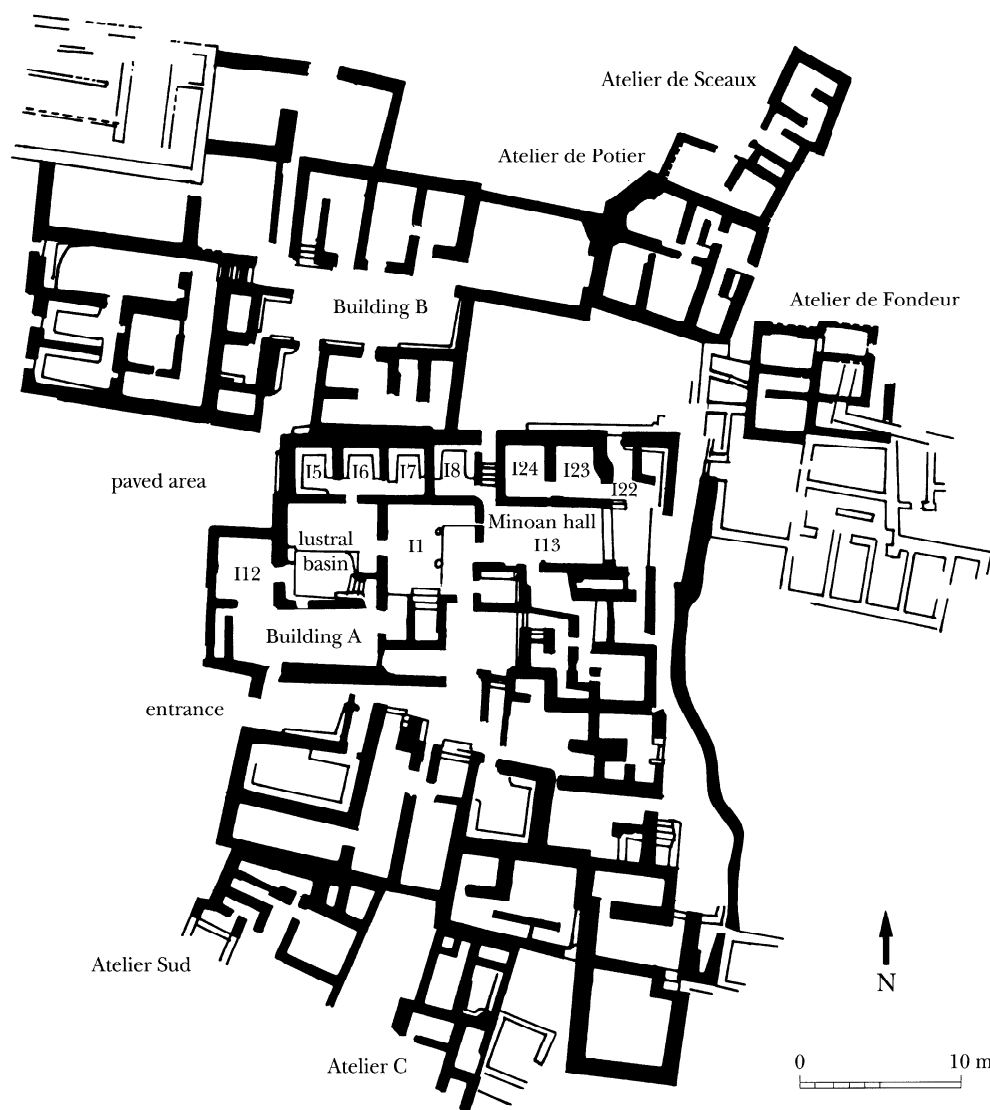


Fig. 6. Plan of Quartier Mu (after Poursat 1992, fig. 40).

certain,⁷³ although there can be no doubt that they represent script.⁷⁴ Recognition of the nature, significance, and context of the Archanes script provides an alternative framework within which to view the development of writing. At Archanes-Phourni the wide variety of burial buildings⁷⁵ and the large quantities of imported prestige objects⁷⁶ suggest a climate of intense competition between different (elite)

groups. Thus the early presence of inscribed sealstones in these funerary assemblages allows a link to be drawn between writing and conspicuous consumption. That writing had important symbolic connotations is suggested by the quality, material (hippopotamus ivory), and large size of the inscribed sealstones. Moreover, the value attached to sealstones, which are thought to confer and reflect status,⁷⁷ could

⁷³ Godart (1999, 299–302) has suggested that these early inscriptions on sealstones are in fact Linear A (apart from a possible co-occurrence of Linear A and Cretan Hieroglyphic on ARKH no. 251). The discovery of two Linear A signs on a larnax from the MM IA–IIB upper level of Tholos E would support this (Panagiotopoulos 2001, 173–74).

⁷⁴ This is suggested by the fact that the sequence A-SA-SA-RA-

NE on the seals is almost identical to the (later) Linear A sign-group A-SA-SA-RA-ME and that this sign group occurs in combination with another sign group on ARKH no. 252.

⁷⁵ Maggidis 1998, 87–102.

⁷⁶ Panagiotopoulos 2001.

⁷⁷ Karyinos 1998, 78–86.

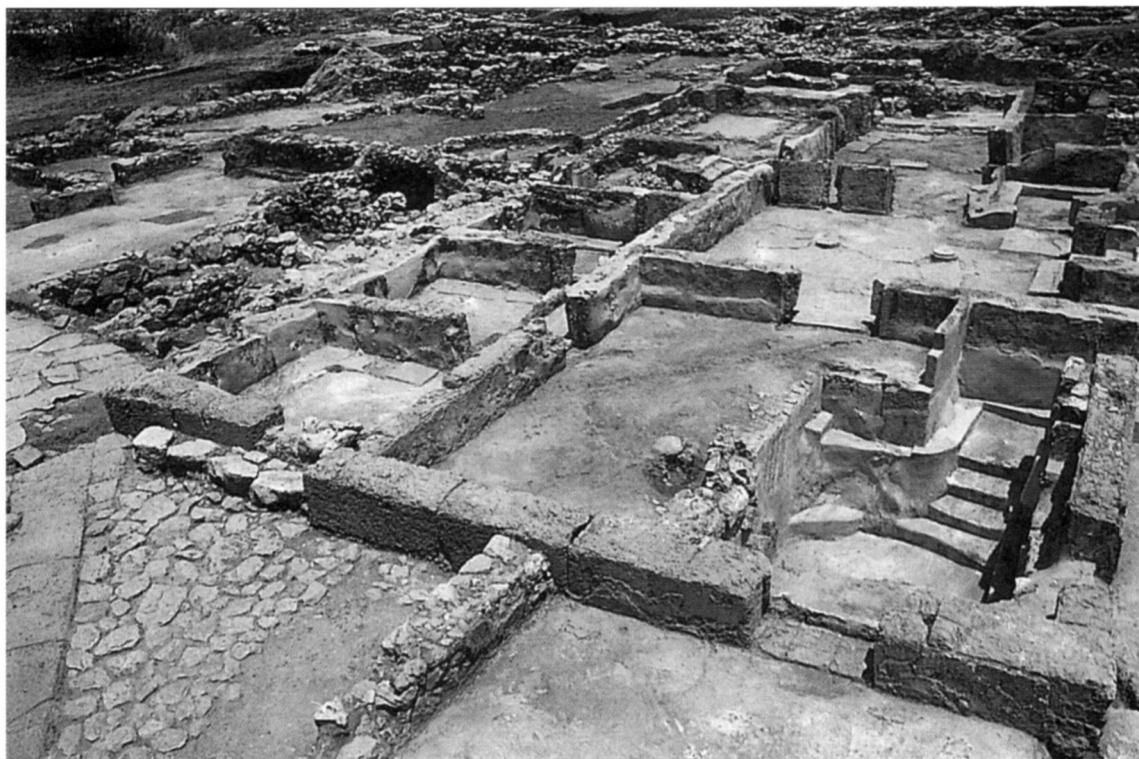


Fig. 7. The lustral basin and Minoan hall in Building A, Quartier Mu (Poursat 1992, 11, fig. 1).

account, at least in part, for the occurrence of writing on this type of object.⁷⁸ It would seem, therefore, that script first appears on supports (i.e., sealstones) and in contexts (e.g., funerary) that indicate not only that the motivation for the introduction of script was primarily symbolic rather than economic but also that the agents behind the introduction were wealthy groups that lacked any demonstrable connection to the early court buildings.

The earliest evidence for the use of script in administration dates to MM II,⁷⁹ when two script sys-

tems, each associated with a distinct set of administrative documents, coexisted on Crete: Linear A in south-central Crete, and Cretan Hieroglyphic in north-central and eastern Crete.⁸⁰ Contrary to what is often assumed, written administrative documents are by no means confined to the early court buildings. In fact, at Knossos⁸¹ and Malia, the earliest evidence for written administration comes not from the court building but from high-profile buildings⁸² in the surrounding settlement, although this could of course be due to the hazard of discovery, since at

⁷⁸ This is perhaps also reflected in the high frequency of sealstones inscribed in Cretan Hieroglyphic. Poursat (2000a, 187–91) has suggested that the number of inscribed sides on Cretan Hieroglyphic sealstones might be directly related to the status of their owners.

⁷⁹ That writing was used on administrative documents before this date cannot be excluded. Considering that sealstones were impressed on clay lumps prior to as well as after MM IA, it is possible that inscribed sealstones were used in a similar way. This would in fact constitute a logical step between early seal use and the MM II full-fledged written administration. The occurrence of fractions on a sealstone from Gouves (no. 292) could also point in this direction (see Oliver and Godart 1996). However, as long as direct evidence for this practice is lacking, it must remain hypothetical.

⁸⁰ Schoep 1999, 265–75.

⁸¹ The earliest written documents that can be associated with the court building at Knossos come from the Hieroglyphic Deposit, which probably dates to MM IIIA (Schoep 2001, 1–

16). Small numbers of uninscribed sealings and noduli have been found in MM IB (Early Magazine A, Vat Room Deposit) and MM IIA (Olive Press Room) contexts (Weingarten 1994a; Schoep 2005).

⁸² At Malia, the only written documents from the palace postdate MM IIB, and the best evidence comes from the settlement, where Quartier Mu and the building discovered during the Malia survey represent two high-profile building complexes using Cretan Hieroglyphic in administration (Müller and Olivier 1991, 65–70). At Knossos, an inscribed label was found together with a nodulus and a sealing in a workshop context in an MM IIA building beneath the Southwest House (Schoep forthcoming). Written administration also occurs in the MM IIB court building at Petras (Tsipopoulou 1998, 436–40). At Monastiraki, evidence for administration in the form of direct object sealings was found in three different locations (Kanta and Tzigounaki 2000, 193–205), but so far only one inscribed sign is attested (Godart and Tzedakis 1992, pl. 85.3).

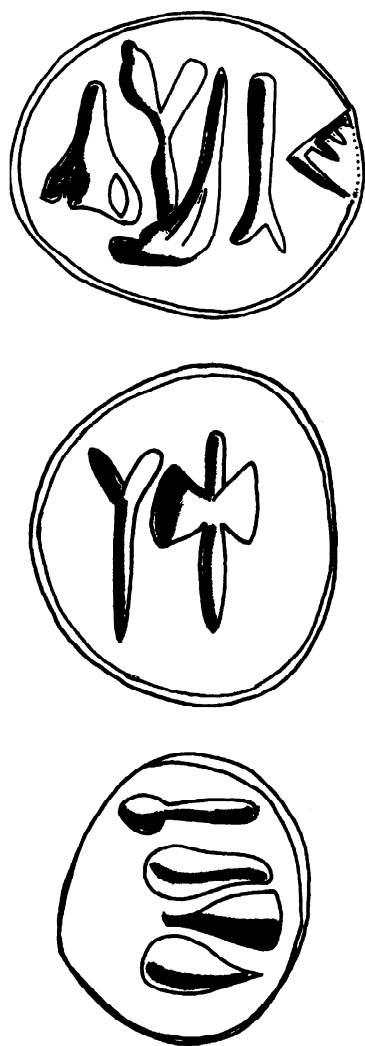


Fig. 8. Three-sided gable sealstone from Archanes (ARKH no. 252) with script (Olivier and Godart 1996, 252; courtesy French School of Archaeology at Athens/French School of Archaeology at Rome).

Phaistos there is evidence for written administration in the court building.⁸³ Neither the context in which script is first attested (wealthy tombs) nor the geo-

graphical distribution of administration and writing in MM I–II support the view that these were monopolized by palatial authorities. Instead, both this pattern and the origins of administration and writing are better explained within a much broader context of elite behavior.

Long-Distance Exchange and Contacts

It is generally thought that there is a direct link between an increase in the evidence for long-distance contacts with the East and the so-called emergence of the palaces in MM IB.⁸⁴ This presumed link is then used to justify the widely held assumption that from MM IB, palatial authorities exerted control over long-distance exchange and long-distance contacts. For example, Cherry argues that “[w]ith the genesis of the Minoan palaces, however, there was a marked stepping-up of the scope and regularity of such long-distance, directional trade.”⁸⁵ The principal problem with this view of MM IB–II trade is that direct evidence for the involvement of a palatial authority is lacking, or at best ambiguous. For example, although it was once argued that the production of Kamares Ware in Cretan palatial workshops and its distribution in Egypt and the Levant reflect the direct involvement of a palatial elite in exchanges between royal courts,⁸⁶ reassessment of the production and consumption of Kamares Ware means that such a line of argument can no longer be sustained.

Similar problems surround the traditional view that palatial authorities directed the acquisition of metals through their control over long-distance relations with the East.⁸⁷ Although copper, silver, and lead were available in the Aegean (at Kythnos, Siphnos, and Laurion),⁸⁸ tin and gold had to be acquired from farther afield (from Afganistan, Egypt, and the Taurus region of Anatolia). Recent finds and new insights into Early Bronze Age metallurgy indicate a complex and sophisticated system of production, exchange, and consumption that thrived without the influence of a palatial authority. The evidence from EM I–IIA Poros-Katsambas suggests that arsenical copper was

⁸³For a recent account, see Militello 2002, 51–91. The Linear A tablet fragment from the Ayia Photini Quarter (PH 30) is now dated to LM IB.

⁸⁴Alexiou 1987; Wiener 1987, 1990, 1991; Manning 1994; Knapp 1995, 1433. For an exception, see Branigan 1982, 208–10, esp. 209; 1989, 65–71.

⁸⁵Cherry 1986, 41. See also Branigan (1988b, 180): “The construction of the palaces required the transportation of large quantities of stone and timber, and the centralization of authority must have led to a similar centralization of control over raw materials and trade. At the same time it must have given further impetus to overseas trade.”

⁸⁶ “[Middle Minoan polychrome pottery] was certainly not

exported by merchants. When found abroad, it is a gift from the palaces of Crete” (Alexiou 1987, 252). This belief in palatial authorities as the main agents in exchange is reflected in Kopcke’s (1987, 255–59) conclusion that because the quantities of Minoan pottery in the East are very restricted, pottery is not a reliable indicator for drawing conclusions about palatial trading (rather than suggesting that palatial authorities need not be considered the main agents in trade).

⁸⁷Alexiou 1987; Wiener 1987; 1990; 1991; Knapp 1995, 1433.

⁸⁸Siphnos produced silver, lead, and possibly copper, and Kythnos was an important copper source. Copper was still obtained from the Cyclades after EM IIB (Broodbank 2000, 79, 317).

already produced at this early date,⁸⁹ while at EM III Chrysokamino there is evidence for the smelting of copper ore from Laurion or Kythnos together with gold, silver, and lead.⁹⁰ The distance of Chrysokamino from contemporary palatial centers means that palatial control can be neither assumed nor demonstrated.⁹¹ Indications for the location of metal workshops suggest there were agents outside the palaces. For example, during MM I–II there is evidence for the production of metal tools (double axes and chisels) at Quartier Mu (Atelier du Fondateur and Workshop C)⁹² and at Poros (Skatzourakis plot).⁹³ These data signify that we can no longer assume that during MM IB–II only palatial authorities would have had the necessary resources to acquire metals.

The model of palatial control over long-distance trade also fails to explain the presence of imported raw materials and finished goods in a wide range of funerary contexts, especially in north and south-central Crete.⁹⁴ As Branigan has argued: “Such evidence as we have from imported and exported commodities in the MM I–II period reveals no evidence that the palaces managed or controlled overseas trade with elites either in the Aegean or the Near East.”⁹⁵ Links with Egypt⁹⁶ are evidenced by finished goods (e.g., stone vases,⁹⁷ scarabs)⁹⁸ and raw materials (e.g., ivory, carnelian, amethyst, gold, and blue frit)⁹⁹ from EM IIA onward. Other imports pointing in particular to the Levant, especially Syria, are the cylinder seals from tombs at Mochlos, Lenda, Phourni-Archanes, and Platanos,¹⁰⁰ and Byblite daggers at Platanos, Ayia Triada, Lasithi, and possibly Knossos.¹⁰¹ It is interesting to note that in the Mesara, the highest number of

imports is found in connection with multiple tholoi sites, such as Platanos and Koumasa.¹⁰²

These funerary contexts suggest a wider pattern of access to imported goods than one would expect if long-distance trade were monopolized by palatial authorities. Moreover, that relatively few imports come from the palatial settlements of Malia and Phaistos¹⁰³ only emphasizes further the need to decouple control over long-distance trade during MM I–II from palatial authorities. After all, it is generally accepted that exotic materials, objects, and ideas originating in the East were making their way to Crete in EM III (and perhaps even in EM IIB) without the interference of a palatial elite.¹⁰⁴ In the context of the EB II Cyclades, Broodbank has made a convincing case for the existence of elite groups whose power was based on knowledge of distant places and seafaring.¹⁰⁵ If the organization of maritime expeditions by independent agents (rather than by a centralized authority) can be envisaged for the EB II Cyclades, and if extensive trading networks of pottery existed from EM I, if not earlier,¹⁰⁶ then this removes the necessity of viewing long-distance trade in MM I–II Crete in purely palatial terms.

TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF ELITE ACTIVITY OUTSIDE THE FIRST PALACES

The discussion thus far suggests that during EM III–MM II, palatial authorities were not the main agents in the development of palatial architecture, the production of Kamares Ware, the invention of script and administration, and the exploitation of long-distance contacts. Instead, the contexts in which

⁸⁹ Day 2004, 177.

⁹⁰ Betancourt et al. 1999, 343–70; Haggis 1999, 53–85.

⁹¹ Nakou (1995, 17) argues that forces other than the purely economic may have played an important role in determining the locus of the critical extraction stages since the latter are usually separated from contemporary settlements. This is not surprising, since the acquisition of metal artifacts was something of a status-creating exercise of which conspicuous consumption formed the basis.

⁹² It is possible that the Atelier Sud (South Workshop) was also engaged in metallurgical activities (Poursat 1996).

⁹³ These consist of a fragmentary but sizeable crucible and by-products of copper in a MM IIB room (Dimopoulou 1997, 434).

⁹⁴ For exhaustive catalogues of these objects, see Lambrou-Phillipson 1990; Phillips 1991.

⁹⁵ Branigan 1989, 67; Dobres and Robb 2000.

⁹⁶ The purpose of this section is not to offer a comprehensive catalogue of Orientalia, for which I refer to Phillips (1991) and Lambrou-Phillipson (1990).

⁹⁷ Bevan 2003, 57–73.

⁹⁸ Besides finished scarabs, Egyptian scarabs were imported to Crete as half-finished products and finished locally (Pini 2000,

107–13).

⁹⁹ Blue frit occurs first in the Vat Room Deposit (MM IA or early MM IB) in the form of beads. Lumps of the material have also been found in the Mesara tombs, and Panagiotaki (2000, 154–61) suggests that it was imported as a raw material from Egypt.

¹⁰⁰ All seem to have been produced within the first 300–350 years of the second millennium (Møller 1980, 85–104; Strøm 1980, 105–24; Lambrou-Phillipson 1990; Aruz 1998, 301–10). For the cylinder seal from Archanes, see Sakellarakis and Sakellarakis 1997, 327, 350. An eight-sided cylinder seal with Cretan Hieroglyphic signs from Neapolis (Olivier and Godart 1996, 290) also betrays Near Eastern influence.

¹⁰¹ Branigan 1966, 123–26; 1967, 117–21; 1988b, 81, 182.

¹⁰² It is assumed that the number of tholoi is directly related to the size of the settlement (Sbonias 1995; Branigan 1998; Murphy 1998).

¹⁰³ See Carinci 2000.

¹⁰⁴ Branigan 1988b, 90; Warren 1995, 1–18.

¹⁰⁵ Broodbank 2000.

¹⁰⁶ Day and Wilson 1994, 1–87; Wilson and Day 2000, 21–63; Tomkins and Day 2001, 259–60.

these various activities and innovations are first deployed emphasize the role of elite groups whose link with the court buildings is unclear. This reading of the archaeological data strongly suggests that the traditional palatial model of centralized political and economic control needs to be rethought for the EM III–MM II period.

One way of amending this model is to reformulate our explanations so they pay more attention to the role of human agents.¹⁰⁷ Theories of agency recognize that humans make choices, hold intentions, and take actions. This sort of approach seeks to put people back into explanations of society and social change.¹⁰⁸ Practice theory and structuration theory have been instrumental in linking structure and agency, and in positioning the individual as the primary agent of social reproduction in society.¹⁰⁹ Reference to the agent, however, is not necessarily reference to the individual, and agency must also include the operation of collectivities extending beyond the individuals' body and their own life span.¹¹⁰ In making everyday decisions, people base their choices not upon their own individual rationalities but upon collectively held values and a shared social understanding of "how things are done."¹¹¹

Keeping this in mind, we can turn back to the question of the nature of the EM III–MM II elite groups and specifically how their social and political power was effected, materialized, and maintained. At a general level, elites may be defined and identified on the basis of their differential and unequal access to social, material, and symbolic resources. This unequal access is most obviously manifested in the EM III–MM II archaeological record by particularly large, complex, or elaborate houses or tomb complexes. In EM III cemeteries, such as Archanes-Phourni and Mochlos, some burial structures distinguish themselves as unusual by their location, finds, and architecture, and are thus most likely to be associated with elite groups. During MM I–II, the burial structures of Chrysolakkos at Malia, Tholos B at Archanes, and the house tomb at Myrtos-Pyrgos are also best interpreted as elite funerary complexes. For EM III, the settlement evidence is sketchy, but at Mochlos, the EM II/III

house underneath House 3 may tentatively be identified as an elite residence on the basis of the quality of its construction.¹¹² For MM IB–II, likely examples of elite residences are Quartier Mu at Malia, the MM I–II building beneath the later country house at Myrtos-Pyrgos, the building beneath the later villa at Ayia Triada, the MM I–II building at Tourkogeitonía (Archanes), and the large MM IB building on the Psychogioudaki plot at Poros.¹¹³ It is not clear at present whether the large buildings on the Charakas hill at Monastiraki and at Petras were elite residences, court buildings, or both.¹¹⁴ These buildings distinguish themselves by their size, their architectural characteristics, their finds, and the activities to which these finds bear witness.

Such differences in architectural scale and complexity may be viewed in simple terms as reflecting basic inequalities in wealth, which is itself an expression of unequal access to labor and other key resources.¹¹⁵ Wealth may be linked to legitimacy because when controlled and channeled, it can be used to sustain a particular and preferential ordering of social values and relationships.¹¹⁶ However, possession of wealth on its own does not define elite status; wealth simply represents preferential access to the resources from which social and political power are constructed.¹¹⁷ A far more significant feature of elite legitimation is the presentation of elites as different kinds of people. As Helms notes, "when elites are accepted as legitimate aristocrats, it is because commoners regard and accept them as qualitatively different types of beings from themselves and vice versa."¹¹⁸ One of the main ways in which elites mark this difference is through the creation and communication of an ideology or an ascribed set of meanings about social, political, and economic relations and events.¹¹⁹ Such ideologies may take a variety of forms, although the ideas and concepts that inform nonwestern, nonindustrial societies about the nature of the cosmos are frequently inspired by the basic resources available for the definition, organization, and operation of earthly society (they are thus animate, personalized, often anthropomorphized, generative, and relational in form and content).¹²⁰

¹⁰⁷ See, e.g., Barrett 1998, 13–25.

¹⁰⁸ Dobres and Robb 2000.

¹⁰⁹ Bourdieu 1977.

¹¹⁰ Barrett 2002, 149.

¹¹¹ For a discussion, see Knappett 2002, 169–71.

¹¹² Soles 1992; Soles and Davaras 1996, 175–230; Maggidis 1998.

¹¹³ See, respectively, Poursat 1992; Cadogan 1978; Carinci 1999; Sakellarakis and Sakellarakis 1997; Dimopoulou 2000, 28–9.

¹¹⁴ Tsipopoulou 1999; 2002; Kanta and Tzigounaki 2000.

¹¹⁵ Costin and Earle 1989, 691–714; Paynter 1989, 369–99; Paynter and McGuire 1991, 1–27.

¹¹⁶ Baines and Yoffee 1998, 199–260; 2000, 13–17.

¹¹⁷ Kus 1982, 47–62; Smith 1987, 297–335; Cowgill 1992, 87–114.

¹¹⁸ Helms 1998, 5.

¹¹⁹ Baines and Yoffee 2000.

¹²⁰ Helms 1998.

Because of these parallels in society and the cosmos, it becomes possible for particular social groups or categories to assume concurrent identities, roles, and statuses within the broader cosmological realm. Access to cosmological origins, therefore, is a crucial part of elite behavior. It has been argued that this can be achieved by a variety of means, including not only formal ceremony, artistic creativity, long-distance acquisitional trade, hunting, and physical and spiritual travel¹²¹ but also the establishment of relationships with beings of the cosmological environment (e.g., elders, affines, and first-borns).¹²²

The communication of such ideologies relies on the ability of elites to translate these ideas and values into the material realm. This is frequently achieved through what Baines and Yoffee have termed "high culture," which may be defined as "the production and consumption of aesthetic items under the control, and for the benefit of, the inner elite."¹²³ High culture deals with questions of cosmic order and the rightful place of elites within that order¹²⁴ and is closely linked with concepts of legitimacy and wealth.¹²⁵ Wealth enables ideas of cosmic order, worth, and rank to be materialized,¹²⁶ and, vice versa, concepts of cosmic order, worth, and rank confer value upon items of wealth.¹²⁷ Order is generated not only by laws, coercion, the creation of institutions, and so forth but also by incorporating society within a cosmological whole.¹²⁸ High culture offers an indispensable tool for the creation and maintenance of strong coalitions or factions and has, therefore, important political and economic implications.¹²⁹ Differential access to commodities, especially those valued and restricted as symbols of power and authority,¹³⁰ affects the ability of different groups to embody either that power or a competing ideology, placing these groups at a disadvantage within the political arena and in terms of their visibility in the archaeological record.¹³¹

The deployment of an elite ideology via high culture can be studied archaeologically using the analytical categories of production, exchange, and consumption. These paths of political economy, "or political influence upon economic activities," are well

trodden.¹³² An example of "political production" is attached craft specialization, aimed at the manufacture of luxury craft items by skilled artisans for patrons of elite status. The workshops of Quartier Mu at Malia provide an excellent archaeological example of this strategy.¹³³ Attached craft specialization implies control (i.e., artisans are making decisions under the influence of their patrons) and/or an element of added value (e.g., innovative technique) that raises the crafted items above the level of other high-quality goods. The Atelier de Potier at Quartier Mu, for example, seems to have specialized in luxury pottery with appliqués (cats, seashells, etc.) (fig. 9). Constant innovation enables high-status persons to share elite markers with lower-ranking groups without threatening their own superior status, thus acting simultaneously as a tool of exclusion and inclusion.¹³⁴ As these elite markers become accessible to lower-ranking groups, new forms of marker are created to maintain social differences.¹³⁵

Exchange also plays an important role in strategies for obtaining, consolidating, and/or legitimating power.¹³⁶ Helms has suggested that imports from distant places are imbued with symbolism and have the potential to increase social power.¹³⁷ From this it follows that the symbolic power of exchanged goods depends on the nature of the object, the sort of relationship it implies, and the distance involved. It may be suggested that the symbolic value attributed to objects obtained through long-distance exchange would be greater than those acquired from more proximate sources. Helms' argument, however, is not restricted to actual imports; it also places great value on information and experiences of distance and the people or goods located in faraway places.¹³⁸ Barrett has argued for the importance of viewing time and space as resources that could be structured, controlled, and used to create differences in human identity.¹³⁹ Distance as a resource allows individuals and groups to demonstrate knowledge of absent or remote spaces, especially through the wearing of exotic materials and finished goods that transform the body into something qualitatively different. Distance also allows elites to demonstrate membership of and

¹²¹ Helms 1998, 8.

¹²² Helms 1998, 74.

¹²³ Baines and Yoffee 2000.

¹²⁴ Baines and Yoffee 2000.

¹²⁵ Van Buren and Richards 2000, 4.

¹²⁶ De Marrais et al. 1996, 15–31.

¹²⁷ Brumfiel 2000, 138.

¹²⁸ Van Buren and Richards 2000, 4.

¹²⁹ Brumfiel 2000, 138.

¹³⁰ Appadurai 1986, 3–63.

¹³¹ Van Buren and Richards 2000, 4.

¹³² See Knappett (2002, 178) for references.

¹³³ Poursat 1992, 1996.

¹³⁴ Miller 1985, 185–96; Brumfiel 2000, 133.

¹³⁵ For a case study, see Kenoyer 2000, 90–1.

¹³⁶ Manning 1994, 244.

¹³⁷ Helms 1993, 3.

¹³⁸ Helms 1988.

¹³⁹ Barrett 1998, 22–4.

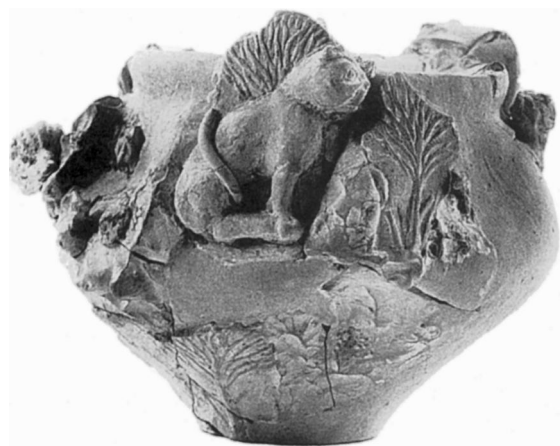


Fig. 9. Cat in a Nilotic landscape from Quartier Mu (Poursat 1992, 26, fig. 14).

movement among a nonlocal but widely dispersed community of elite practices and appearances. At the same time, this quality of belonging excluded other social groups at a local level and set the elite apart. Finally, distance is something that can be defined, mapped, and ordered by a particular authority. Such control is likely to focus on collapsing and reordering distance by importing it into its own locale. This may also include the acquisition of new technologies from afar. Since development of technological know-how implies a very different long-distance relationship than the acquisition of finished goods (which may not imply anything more than access to an exchange network), one wonders if it may have been the more important elite strategy.¹⁴⁰ Although the economic benefits of innovation have been recognized,¹⁴¹ there may have been other ideological reasons for acquiring new technologies from the East.

ELITE IDEOLOGY ON CRETE THROUGH THE LENS OF DISTANCE

Distance already played a crucial role in status-creating strategies in EM I–IIA, when imported

Cycladic goods and local imitations are found in mortuary assemblages. A recent study of the consumption contexts of figurines and other Cycladic-related objects suggests that these items reflect an ability to participate in exchange networks to which access was deliberately restricted and that they were thus used to express social differentiation and status within society.¹⁴² A similar conclusion was reached by a separate study of obsidian blades in tombs, a social practice that seems to have originated in the Cyclades.¹⁴³ From EM IIA onward, imports (e.g., Egyptian stone vases) and raw materials (gold, ivory, and semiprecious stones)¹⁴⁴ may have found their way to Crete from Egypt.¹⁴⁵ The nature of these contacts, however, is unclear, since the objects may have been conveyed indirectly by down-the-line exchange among local communities and prestige chains between elites rather than through direct contacts.¹⁴⁶

The appearance of sailing boats on EM III sealstones and changes in the pattern of exchange in the Aegean could be taken to imply that Cretan (elite) groups were assuming a more active seafaring role.¹⁴⁷ Certainly, evidence for contacts with the East (Egypt and/or the Levant) increases in EM III (fig. 10).¹⁴⁸ Despite the fact that there is still movement between Crete and the Cyclades, implied in the arrival on Crete of metals and Melian obsidian, objects obtained from the East seem to replace the earlier Cycladic items in importance.¹⁴⁹

The local production of Egypt-related objects marks an important new phase in long-distance contacts. From EM III, imported Egyptian objects, especially stone vases, appear to have been imitated locally,¹⁵⁰ which could suggest the adoption of practices associated with their consumption. Likewise, the MM IA terracotta *sistrum* from funerary Building 9 at Phourni-Archanes, the MM II Egyptianizing appliqué of a sphinx¹⁵¹ and a cat in a Nilotic landscape from Quartier Mu at Malia (figs. 9, 11),¹⁵² the appliqué in the shape of a crouching pregnant female from Phaistos, Malia, and Knossos,¹⁵³ and the MM II imagery of the Minoan

¹⁴⁰ See Nakou 1995, 17; Knappett 1999a, 101–29; Panagiotaki 2000, 154.

¹⁴¹ See also Knappett 1999a.

¹⁴² Papadatos 2002–2003, 232–33.

¹⁴³ Carter (1998, 65) notes that the inclusion of blades in Mesaran burial practices can only be viewed as sporadic. Microwear analysis suggests that the obsidian blades deposited had been freshly knapped, as was the practice in Cycladic funerary ritual; this would represent the appropriation of a social practice originating outside Crete.

¹⁴⁴ The EM IIA level of Tholos E at Phourni yielded gold, bronze, and hippopotamus ivory (Panagiotopoulos 2001).

¹⁴⁵ Warren 1995, 12. For an alternative view, see Bevan 2003.

¹⁴⁶ Broodbank 2000, 285.

¹⁴⁷ Broodbank (2000, 251) suggests that the lack of an overlap between the distribution of the EB III–MBA duck vases and MM IA pottery indicates the existence of different contemporary trading networks.

¹⁴⁸ Watrous 1998.

¹⁴⁹ For an exhaustive catalogue, see Lambrou-Phillipson 1990.

¹⁵⁰ Bevan 2003.

¹⁵¹ Morgan 1988, 50–3.

¹⁵² Poursat 1973–1974, 111–14; Warren 1995. It has been argued that the composition of the cat in a Nilotic landscape on an appliqué from Quartier Mu implies knowledge of Egyptian landscape painting (Immerwahr 1978, 41–50).

¹⁵³ Carinci 2000, 33–4. The fact that these are kneeling rath-

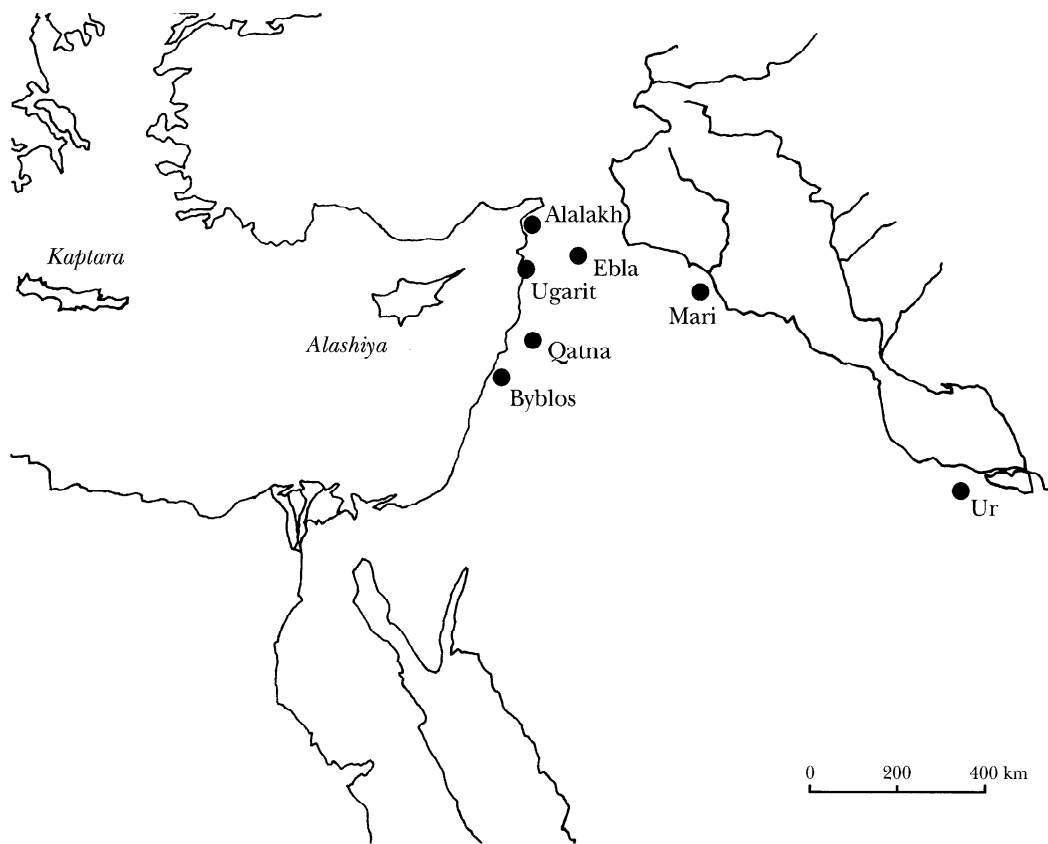


Fig. 10. Map of the eastern Mediterranean (after Dalley 1984, fig. 3).

genius¹⁵⁴ not only point toward local imitation of Egyptian objects but also imply adoption or adaptation of Egyptian practices and beliefs. This local production of Egypt-related objects using local and presumably lower-value materials suggests that such objects derived their value from specific allusions to Egyptian social practice. The consumption of such items, in both funerary contexts and elite residences, would have allowed individuals and groups to display knowledge, membership, and perhaps control of distant places and people, enabling them to legitimate and increase their social status.¹⁵⁵

A similar mechanism could explain the adoption on Crete of new technologies that originated in Egypt and/or the Levant. In general, perhaps as a result of a reaction against diffusionism as a means of ex-

plaining change, the Eastern origins of several technologies on EM III–MM II Crete have not received due attention.¹⁵⁶ The purpose of the discussion here is not to provide an exhaustive catalogue of all possible techniques that were borrowed from the East but to illustrate, using a selection of examples, how these relate to the creation and maintenance of social power.¹⁵⁷ It should be stressed that the selective adoption of technologies borrowed from the East during EM III–MM II is not the same thing as the wholesale importation of a cultural “package” in MM IB that included a new social order, the institution of kingship and kingly regalia, administrative practices using scripts, monumental architecture, and other crafts.¹⁵⁸ Rather, the adoption of these technologies at various points between EM III and MM II should

er than standing has been taken to suggest an Egyptian instead of a Levantine derivation.

¹⁵⁴Weingarten 1991. In the case of Minoan genius, it is clear how the imagery of Taweret was adopted and transformed between MM II and LM I.

¹⁵⁵Helms 1993.

¹⁵⁶A notable exception is Watrous 1987.

¹⁵⁷Other possible techniques are the introduction of the

horizontal bow lathe, which may have been connected to the introduction of semiprecious stones in seal working (agates, carnelians, lapis lazuli) with a hardness of seven or more on the Moh scale (Younger 1989, 53–62). Other features that point toward Egypt and/or the Near East are the three-dimensional terracotta models, which seem to appear in MM II (Schoep 1994, 189–210).

¹⁵⁸Watrous 1987.



Fig. 11. Sphinx from Quartier Mu (Poursat 1992, 26, fig. 14).

be understood as relating to the changing social and political context on Crete.

A good example of a borrowed technology is that for making faience, which appears on Crete in MM I and originated in Egypt or the Levant.¹⁵⁹ The technique of producing a white paste for the manufacture of sealstones, characteristic of a workshop probably located in the Mesara, could also have been borrowed from the East.¹⁶⁰ Another technology that appears to be new to Crete in MM I is writing. The Cretans did not invent script (the rendering of sounds by means of signs) but rather adopted an existing technology.¹⁶¹ However, they did not simply borrow any of the preexisting systems in use in Egypt or the Near East; they adapted the technology to create their own script(s).¹⁶² Both Cretan scripts are syllabic and therefore represent a writing system different from Egyptian Hieroglyphic. The technology of script was not necessarily borrowed from Egypt and might equally have been inspired by models from the Levant.¹⁶³ The attestation of script on sealstones

in MM IA mortuary contexts suggests that writing was imbued with symbolic powers, and its initial restriction implies it was a closely guarded technology shared only among elites. It is also likely that the practice of sealing doors and containers was imported from the East.¹⁶⁴

Metal daggers probably played an important role in displaying status,¹⁶⁵ and their production in EM III and MM I was influenced considerably by types and techniques used in Syria and Cilicia.¹⁶⁶ This is evidenced by the application of the three-rivet system and the production of a new class of dagger with a narrow blade and an incipient tang. Further, the origins of the crescent haft, which became exceedingly popular in EM III and MM IA, can be traced to Syria.¹⁶⁷ Daggers showing Byblian influence tend to have simple ridges, as opposed to the elaborate forms of mid-rib on daggers of typical Minoan type.¹⁶⁸

Important insight into the social and political context of a borrowed technology is provided by Knappett's study of the adoption of the fast potter's wheel on Crete.¹⁶⁹ Contextual study suggests that its early use in MM IB was limited and not motivated by economic considerations.¹⁷⁰ Rather, the wheel technique and the first vessels it produced in this way should be seen within the context of elite political manipulation of their special contacts with the symbolically charged world of the Near East. The production and consumption of wheel-made vessels, often imitating metal ones, may be interpreted as a strategy deployed by elites to validate their local authority by tying themselves into wider prestige systems beyond Crete.¹⁷¹ In this way, the resource of distance is drawn upon to demonstrate knowledge, belonging, and control through restriction of access to the new technology.

Architectural innovations in MM IB–MM IIA also must be considered in the context of the elite manipulation of distance.¹⁷² That the use of ashlar masonry and orthostats was inspired by the East is not a new suggestion.¹⁷³ On Crete, the application of orthostats

¹⁵⁹ Because of the recipe used for Minoan faience, the Near East rather than Egypt is thought to be the likely source (Panagiotaki 2000, 154).

¹⁶⁰ Pini 2000, 112. For attributions to this workshop, see Pini 1990, 115–27.

¹⁶¹ Olivier 1986, 383–87.

¹⁶² Although there are some similarities between Egyptian hieroglyphs and Cretan Hieroglyphic (e.g., logogram for wine), Cretan Hieroglyphic does not seem to have been based upon Egyptian Hieroglyphic (Olivier 1996, 101–13).

¹⁶³ At MBA Byblos, a syllabic script existed (Dunand 1945).

¹⁶⁴ Weingarten (1990a, 1990b, 1992, 1994a, 1994b) has argued that the MM II sealing system was imported from the Near East and/or Anatolia.

¹⁶⁵ Whitelaw 1983, 323–45; Nakou 1995, 1–32.

¹⁶⁶ Branigan 1966, 123–26; 1967, 117–21; 1988b, 182.

¹⁶⁷ Branigan 1966, 120.

¹⁶⁸ Branigan 1966, 126.

¹⁶⁹ Knappett 1999a, 101–29.

¹⁷⁰ Knappett 1999a, 104.

¹⁷¹ Knappett 1999a, 125–29.

¹⁷² Architectural styles were readily copied in antiquity, as shown by a letter from Yarim-Lim at Alalach to the king of Ugarit, in which Yarim-Lim asks for an introduction to the monarch of Mari so that he can see his splendid new palace and thereby gain inspiration for his own palace then being planned (Woolley 1961, 130).

¹⁷³ Cadogan 1976, 34; Hiller 1987, 57–64; Watrous 1987.

seems to predate the use of ashlar. The orthostats in the MM IB west facade of the early court building at Phaistos¹⁷⁴ are of the same type as those in the city gate at Ebla (see figs. 1, 10).¹⁷⁵ Orthostats are rare at Byblos, and architecturally the site was more closely linked to Egypt than to other cities in Syria.¹⁷⁶ The use of orthostats for the socle of a wall in another material, a technique unknown in the rainless climate of Egypt, is likely to have been imported from the Levant.¹⁷⁷ The technique was known at the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age in Syria, at Ebla, and at Mardikh III.¹⁷⁸ Ashlar masonry is present at Byblos, where its use is likely to be due to the close contacts enjoyed with Egypt.¹⁷⁹ Ashlar was in use in Egypt by the beginning of the third millennium B.C., and in Syria from the middle of the same millennium.¹⁸⁰ At Ugarit, however, ashlar masonry was not applied until after the beginning of the second millennium,¹⁸¹ about the same time that it appears on Crete.¹⁸²

A case can be made for seeing other architectural innovations in MM IIA, such as the introduction of the Minoan hall and the sunken room, or lustral basin, as drawing in some way upon the resource of distance. Although the Minoan hall is considered to be a Cretan invention, the concept of a reception hall may well have been borrowed from the East where it existed in Egypt as well as in the Levant. Driessen, in his discussion of the origins of the Minoan hall, points out a certain resemblance to Egyptian houses at El-Haraga.¹⁸³ Certainly, in Middle Kingdom houses, the central hall and living room were status symbols.¹⁸⁴ At Byblos, it seems that a form of large reception hall

was introduced after EB III,¹⁸⁵ and at Alalakh a resemblance has been noted between the “audience chamber” in the Yarim-Lim palace and the Minoan hall with its traverse pier-and-door partitions.¹⁸⁶ Graham dismissed the resemblance between this architectural arrangement and the Minoan hall.¹⁸⁷ It is worth noting, however, that his comparison was based on the evolved Minoan hall of the Late Bronze Age and not the earlier Middle Bronze predecessor, such as that in Building A of Quartier Mu at Malia, which differs from the later Minoan hall in several respects.¹⁸⁸ In addition, Graham denies any relationship between the audience chambers at Alalakh and the Minoan hall on the basis that the latter, in contrast to Alalakh, often occurs in private houses. There is, however, no reason that their use on Crete in a different context (i.e., in an elite residence rather than a “palace”) should preclude any potential resemblance between the two architectural units, especially since there can be no doubt that the Minoan hall fulfilled a similar function as a main reception hall.

The introduction of the Minoan column base in stone should also be seen within this context. Although pillars were well known in Early Minoan architecture, column bases seem to appear only in MM IB or early in MM II. Column bases are now also attested to in the Levant in the Early Middle Bronze Age, having long been assumed to have been introduced from the Aegean or Egypt.¹⁸⁹ In Egyptian houses, column bases were an important status symbol.¹⁹⁰ Another likely new introduction is the architectural space with pillars, parallels for which can be

¹⁷⁴ In addition, the plan of the First Palace at Phaistos bears resemblance to the organization of the Mesopotamian palaces, especially in its cell-like rooms, the lack of a long corridor from which access to the rooms can be gained, and the existence of several internal courtyards (XI and perhaps the room to the south of XXXIV). See Hitchcock (1999, 371–79) for resemblances between the Late Bronze Age palace at Phaistos and Near Eastern palaces.

¹⁷⁵ The Chryssolakkos orthostats are different in that they are in limestone, are less well dressed, and are reused (Shaw 1971, 1973).

¹⁷⁶ Hult 1983, 61.

¹⁷⁷ Shaw (1983, 213–16) believes that the development of ashlar originates in the EM period when rubble socles were surmounted by rubble and/or mudbrick construction, as at Vassiliki.

¹⁷⁸ Hult (1983, 66) mentions the southwest city gate, MB I Building Q, Palace E, as well as MB I–II Temples B1 and D at Ebla.

¹⁷⁹ Hult 1983, 61.

¹⁸⁰ The Egyptians used stone in the first place for temples and tombs, whereas at Ugarit it was used in palaces and official residences during the late Middle–Late Bronze Age. Previously, it was used in the temples of MB II (Hult 1983, 61).

¹⁸¹ Hult 1983, 61.

¹⁸² With the exception of Byblos, there are a number of differences from the Egyptian ashlar tradition in both the types of buildings for which ashlar masonry was used and the application of the technique. For this reason, Hult (1983, 61) does not exclude an independent innovation or at least local adaptation.

¹⁸³ Driessen (1982, 27–92) indicates that the houses in El-Haraga in Egypt contain a reception room to which access was gained through a forehall that opens onto a peristyle court. In this context, it is noteworthy that considerable quantities of MM II pottery have been found at El-Haraga (Kemp and Merillees 1980).

¹⁸⁴ Arnold 1989, 75–93; 2001, 110.

¹⁸⁵ Saghia 1983, 131.

¹⁸⁶ Woolley 1959, iiif, 73. This “audience chamber” consists of two rooms, which are separated by tongue walls projecting from the side walls, and across the space created by the side walls was set a stone threshold that bears burnt circles of four posts of ca. 25 cm diameter separated from one another by intervals of 50–75 cm.

¹⁸⁷ Graham 1964, 200–1.

¹⁸⁸ Poursat 1992, 41, fig. 30.

¹⁸⁹ E.g., at Middle Bronze Age Byblos (see Saghia 1983, 126).

¹⁹⁰ Crocker 1985, 52–62.

found in Egypt. Good examples are the Salle Hypostyle¹⁹¹—so named because of its resemblance to Egyptian hypostyle halls—in the early court building at Malia and the Monolithic Pillar Basement to the southeast of the court building at Knossos.

The origins of the sunken room, as attested in Quartier Mu at Malia, remain unclear. However, a Near Eastern or Egyptian source cannot, at present, be excluded. Although no direct parallels can be pinpointed, it may be significant that the first appearance of sunken rooms on Crete in MM II coincides with an expansion of liquid-pouring rites.¹⁹² Weingarten has noted that the adoption of the Egyptian Taweret and her transformation into the Minoan genius coincide with the appearance of the first rhyta, and that these point toward new pouring and purifying rituals.¹⁹³ The appearance in MM I of Chamaizi juglets, some of which are inscribed in Cretan Hieroglyphic, in the region between Gournes and Chamaizi further emphasizes the importance of pouring rituals. The juglets occur around pillars (fig. 12), in funerary contexts, and in magazines with pithoi.¹⁹⁴ It is tempting to connect the introduction of subterranean rooms in MM IB–II architecture to these new pouring and purifying rituals.¹⁹⁵ Besides the lustral basin in Building A of Quartier Mu, there is also the Crypte Hypostyle at Malia, and a building similar in plan has been found in the settlement at Phaistos (CV–CVII). At Knossos, the Monolithic Pillar Basement also forms a subterranean space, the function of which was connected by Evans to cult.¹⁹⁶

These changes in architectural technology and deployment during MM I–II all appear to represent some form of architectural elaboration and may be situated firmly within the context of nonpalatial elite activity. It may be argued that the adoption of ashlar and column bases on the one hand and architectural modules on the other, such as the Minoan hall and lustral basin,¹⁹⁷ reflect an attempt by elite groups to demonstrate their knowledge and membership of a much wider elite community. This process of adoption was not slavish in its adherence to Eastern models but, rather, in the creation of distinctive forms,

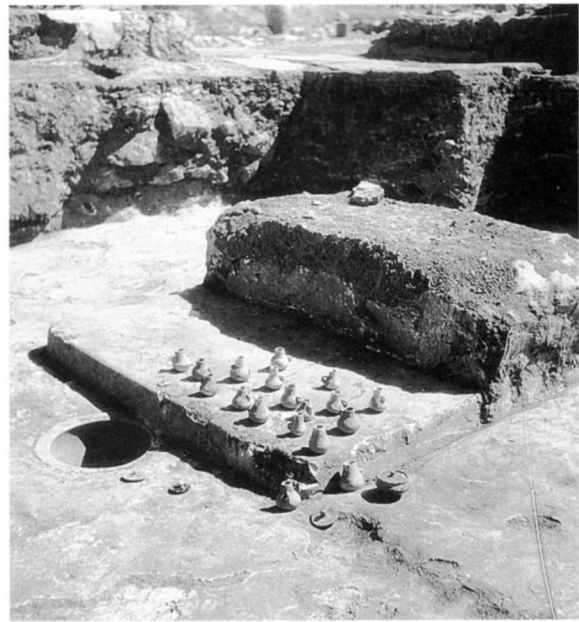


Fig. 12. Chamaizi vases on one of the platforms in Protopalatial Room B in the First Palace at Malia (F. Chapouthier and H. Gallet de Santerre; courtesy the French School of Archaeology at Athens).

such as the Minoan hall, reflects an attempt to control the resource of distance by creating something different that still draws obviously from a recognizably elite and international vocabulary of styles and practices. Such new architectural forms could have served as the backdrop for imported but similarly modified, distant social practices, such as pouring rituals and the Minoan genius. In this way, Cretan elite groups could simultaneously claim affinity with more distant elites and represent themselves at a local level as qualitatively different beings.

To judge by the limited number of contexts of production and consumption, access to the resource of distance was strictly controlled. Thus the introduction of new technologies, beliefs, and practices (and in particular the prestige goods [high culture] and prestigious spaces in which these are manifest) seems to form a crucial part of elite behavior. It has been

¹⁹¹ Joly 1928, 324–46.

¹⁹² Weingarten 2000, 114–19.

¹⁹³ Weingarten 2000, 135.

¹⁹⁴ Poursat (1987, 75–6) suggests that they may have contained aromatic substances.

¹⁹⁵ In the New Kingdom, Taweret was associated with purification basins, and Weingarten (1991, 11) argues that her association with lustral rites goes back to the Middle Bronze Age. In connection with this, attention may be drawn to the introduction at Malia of magazines with plaster drains (to collect spilt liquids) in several elite complexes.

¹⁹⁶ See Evans 1921, 587–88, fig. 431. The Early Keep, which consists of a number of deep cell-like rooms, seems to have had a different purpose; on its dating, see Branigan 1992, 153–63.

¹⁹⁷ Other possible Egyptian influences on architecture have been noted for the early building at Chrysolakkos, which displays similarities with Egyptian funerary architecture (corridor with niches, capping stones, and a strange shape of cup) (Watrous 1987). Near Eastern parallels have also been noted in the plan of the Late Bronze Age (LM I) court building at Phaistos (Hitchcock 1999, 371–79).

suggested that elites on Crete turned toward the East to widen their repertoire “of means to advertise status, technological skill and economic power.”¹⁹⁸ The manipulation of long-distance contacts with the East was probably a deliberate strategy to acquire and increase social power by Cretan elites in EM III–MM II and was chosen as a vehicle for the expression of their ideology. Rather than arising from economic necessity,¹⁹⁹ the importation of raw materials, finished goods, and new technologies, beliefs, and practices from Egypt and/or the Levant was fueled by a constantly evolving elite ideology. Based on the limited number of actual imports in MM II, one wonders if the focus shifted from finished objects to the import of new techniques.²⁰⁰ This shift may be explained perhaps by the fact that the acquisition of technological know-how requires and demonstrates a very different long-distance relationship²⁰¹ from the attainment of an import.²⁰²

CONCLUSIONS

It has been argued that we should no longer view palatial authorities, resident in the early court buildings, as the principal agents of change and innovation in EM III–MM II society. Stripped of their anachronistic associations, the early court buildings emerge as structures that may have had a very different look than is usually assumed. Rather than being embellished with facades in ashlar masonry and elaborate upper stories, their architecture was considerably more simple. Significantly, there is no evidence to support the assumption that MM I–II palatial authorities were responsible for the development of so-called palatial architectural innovations such as the Minoan hall and lustral basin. Rather, where MM I–II settlements have been well explored, such as Malia, the architectural evidence suggests that these innovations first appear in elite residences outside the palace. A similar picture is suggested by the evidence for administration and writing, the production of elite pottery styles, and long-distance contacts. There is now no compelling evidence to link the introduction and control of these directly to palatial authorities. Rather, the first appearance of such elite forms, activities, and practices may be connected di-

rectly to elite groups that lack any clear palatial connection and were probably resident outside the court buildings. The nature of these elite groups is best illustrated by Quartier Mu, which was probably one of several elite residences in the town of Malia. This complex bears witness to the presence of administration and writing, attached craft specialists, the production of elite pottery styles, the introduction of new architectural forms (Minoan hall and lustral basin), architectural elaboration (use of ashlar), new consumption practices, and a conscious exploitation of the resource of distance. This discussion strongly suggests that the traditional Minoan palatial model needs to be rethought for the EM III–MM II period.

Recognition of the independent nature of these elite agents has been obscured in the literature by the use of terms such as “decentralized” and “palatial” to describe high-profile buildings and activities taking place outside the confines of the palaces. In addition, the terms “palatial authority” and “palatial elite” now appear to be vague and unhelpful, not only because they obstruct an important distinction between elite groups and the institution of the palace but also because they perpetuate the now questionable idea that EM III–MM II elites depended upon and were resident in the palaces. In general, application of the rather subjective adjective “palatial” risks promoting a one-sided view of society and of the complex and changing dialectical relationship between court buildings and their surrounding settlements.

The motivation for the introduction of these innovations may be connected with the need for elites to acquire, increase, maintain, and legitimate power. In the construction of social power, it seems that links with the symbolically charged worlds of the East (Levant and/or Egypt) played a major role. These links involved not just finished objects but, more importantly, ideas, beliefs, technologies, and practices that belong to, draw upon, and manipulate elite ideologies developed in other neighboring regions of the eastern Mediterranean. In this way, Cretan elite groups were able to create their own ideology manifest in the elite-controlled production and consumption of Minoan “high culture.” Through their consumption of high culture and perhaps also the

¹⁹⁸ Broodbank 2000, 287.

¹⁹⁹ Opinion is divided between a minimalist and a maximalist view. For the former, see Renfrew 1972, 474; Carinci 2000, 31–9. Branigan (1988b, 182) wonders whether the actual imports were but trinkets accompanying a more substantial trade.

²⁰⁰ The number of imports in MM II seems to be dwindling (Carinci 2000). Also, looking at Quartier Mu, the absence of imports other than ceramic is striking (Poursat 2000b, 29). However, Carter (2003, 79) notes that the majority of the ob-

sidian at Quartier Mu is not Melian.

²⁰¹ This has also been suggested by Knappett (1999a) and Panagiotaki (2000).

²⁰² Helms (1998, vi) argued that geographical distance in nonindustrial societies corresponds to supernatural distance and that a locale situated geographically “out there” was evocative of the qualities associated with the cosmological realm. This is also suggested by Knappett 1999a.

physical display of exotic objects and materials on their bodies (e.g., seals and Archanes script seals, gold jewelry such as the Chrysolakkos bee pendant, EM III appliqué flowers from Mochlos), elite groups reinforced the idea that they were qualitatively different human beings. The adoption and adaptation of distant architectural forms, technologies, and practices into elite domestic contexts may be interpreted in terms of a strategy of “calling in” the people and products of distant sources and making them submit to a logic that was defined by local Cretan elite concerns. This exploitation of distance seems to take off fully in EM III, when there is evidence to suggest that Cretan groups played a more active role in seafaring.

This process of elite emulation, adoption, and adaptation operates on at least two levels: at a higher level, certain elite groups, such as that resident in Quartier Mu, were in a position to draw directly upon links with the East and to exploit distance as a resource to demonstrate their privileged knowledge, membership, and control of those links; other elite groups in Crete may not have had such good contacts and instead drew upon outside elites that were closer to home and looked first toward the more privileged and presumably more powerful Cretan elite groups. This is, for example, the case for the elites at Myrtos-Pyrgos and Monastiraki, who were emulating those at Malia and Phaistos, respectively, both in their adoption and use of writing and administration and in their production and consumption of fine tablewares.²⁰³

This reconstruction of the landscape of power in EM III–MM II society has important ramifications for how we understand the early court buildings. Certainly, their traditional interpretation as residences of a political, religious, and economic authority no longer adequately explains the rich and complex body of data now available. During EM III–MM II there is little evidence at present to support the existence of a palatial authority. Power does not appear to have accumulated in and embodied by a single authority resident in the court buildings. Rather, there seems to have been a broad landscape of competition and emulation between elites at the level of the settlement, the wider region, the island, and even the greater Aegean and the East.

As the social, political, and economic context of the early court buildings becomes clearer, the challenge remains to construct a picture of how these buildings functioned that is based not on a retrojection of later evidence but purely on evidence from the EM III–MM II period. Early court buildings,

rather than serving as a residence for an elite authority that dominated and directed Minoan society, as is traditionally assumed, possibly housed an important social institution that may have been instrumental in promoting a particular social order and maintaining social cohesion. In this way, these buildings, perhaps from their origins in EM IIB and EM III, functioned as the principal ceremonial focus for a wider urban community. Significant changes to this situation may have taken place in MM II, when elites appear to have constructed, in addition to the existing court buildings, alternative ceremonial arenas in close association with their own residences, such as is the case at Quartier Mu at Malia. By constructing their own ceremonial arenas that were not aimed at the community at large but at a much more restricted public, elites may have been attempting to appropriate some of the ceremonies associated with the court buildings. This suggests that specific elite groups were consciously trying to remodel the existing social order, simultaneously enriching their own elite ideology by drawing upon Eastern (Egyptian and Levantine) elite ideologies (architecture, iconography, beliefs, practices) and collapsing the conceptual boundaries between their own residences (and perhaps themselves) and the court buildings. This development suggests a landscape of ever-increasing competition between elites that was brought to an end by a horizon of destructions at the end of MM IIB. What came after remains a matter of debate, but one possibility is that individual court buildings were appropriated, both conceptually and physically, by single elite groups that were successful in merging their own ideology with a long-standing tradition of beliefs and practices centered upon the court buildings.

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²⁰³ Kanta 1999, 387–93; Knappett 1999b, 615–39.

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