

Beyond the Collective...The Minoan Palace in Action¹

Jan Driessen

Introduction : dual strategies

From M(iddle) M(inoan) IB onwards, we witness a dramatic transformation of Crete's social landscape. Large, monumental complexes are built along and around existing courts, and investment in funerary complexes, which received the bulk of the attention before, rapidly diminishes (Devolder 2009). Although courts used as cohesion-enhancing devices seem already to have been the norm in many a Prepalatial (if not earlier) settlement (Todaro and Di Tonto 2006; Driessen 2007; Tomkins in press), the architectural elaboration of the subsidiary buildings was unprecedented and now included ashlar or orthostate masonry, standardised room types (Minoan Hall, lustral basin), wall facings, and a scale that for several hundred years would remain essential to the Minoan architectural canon. Many scholars assume this development to have been accompanied by increased hierarchy. They advocate that political power, wealth and production were centralised in the hands of a single ruler and his personal network, a more exclusionary mode. However, an alternative perspective is possible, one that sees the palaces as community structures with power, wealth and production distributed in a corporate mode and shared as a product of group membership. In this paper I will specifically argue that Minoan palaces result from an inclusionary social process with the voluntary involvement of different social groups. I shall draw upon cross-cultural work in anthropological archaeology, particularly the dual-processual model developed by Blanton et al. (1996) and Feinman (2000), but it follows ideas originally proposed by Renfrew (1974), distinguishing between individualising and group-oriented forms of chiefdoms. Renfrew already placed emphasis where corporate chiefdoms were concerned on communal activities and group rituals, interpreting societies with henge monuments and Prehistoric Malta as such group-oriented chiefdoms. Minoan Crete, in his view, however, was seen as an individualising form of chiefdom and this is why Feinman (2000:

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36) when characterising the individualising form of chiefdom used a series of elements put forward by Renfrew (1974). These included the circumstance that specific individuals were differentiated and privileged, that a marked disparity in personal possessions existed, that the residences and tombs of rulers were far grander than those of the bulk of the population, that exotic trade wealth had a significant role in prestige accumulation, that some exchanged goods were crafted by specialists and that there was less evidence for communal ritual and public construction. Still, as already noted by Feinman (2000: 35), many societies mix elements of corporate based and network based strategies, opposing a too categorical classification². Interestingly, Blanton and colleagues (1996) observed that societies mainly pursuing corporate leadership strategies aim to suppress openly shown competition by developing an ethos of reciprocity between the society's different sodalities, arguing also that ritual systems may have played a pivotal role in promoting community solidarity by emphasizing cyclical, repetitive obligations to the community as a whole and by removing wealth from the control of individuals (Blanton et al. 1996; Wills 2000: 33). It is this line of approach which is further developed in this paper. Elsewhere (Driessen 2002), I have already argued against the ruler-centric model (for a review see, most recently, Bevan 2010) since it is hard to reconcile with the absence of prestigious individual burials, the 'faceless' iconography and the architectural layout of the main central buildings. I have also underlined the scarcity of evidence for the Pre-and Protopalatial period connecting elements of aggrandising, whether in the shape of domestic and funerary architecture, portable wealth or craft specialisation, with *specific* individuals rather than serving to distinguish between *different social* groups (Driessen 2010b). In the present paper, I explore to what extent group membership can be identified in Minoan society and how it operated

² Since wealth accumulation is said to be more distinctive in network based strategies, we may perhaps combine these ideas with the two alternative strategies suggested by Whitelaw (2004: 244), i.e. trade-based or agricultural-based with corporate societies more keen to control agricultural production and surplus. Very much in the same vein as Feinman and Blanton did for American archaeology, Schoep and Knappett (2004: 24) also argued for a dual process on Minoan Crete in which heterarchical developments emerged as well as hierarchical aspects. They were especially interested in illustrating how bottom-up processes could lead to complexity, countering the common assumption that complexity implies the existence of central authority. By highlighting bottom-up dynamics in administrative practices, craft production and architecture, they stress that 'changes in heterarchical structures *prefigured* any major hierarchical developments' (Schoep & Knappett 2004: 25, their italics), arguing that heterarchical developments were important into MM II but less explicit afterwards whereas hierarchical developments, although present before, became more explicit from MM II onwards. Perhaps our hesitation when facing the archaeological material can also be expressed by the dichotomy *domination* or *collaboration* (cf. Blanton and Fargher 2008: 12; cf. also Mills 2000a). See also Haggis (1999; 2002) on *integration* and *connectedness*.

Corporate Communities

Very much like G.V. Childe was reconstructing people while digging pots, archaeologists immediately tend to associate sherd scatters with human groups, often conflating community with site, with each spatially localised co-residential group of people called a community (cf. Hare 2000). Isbell (2000: 244) has shown the inherent dangers of such a definition since people can reside together without experiencing solidarity whereas some people not residing together may feel strong about their belonging to some specific community (Marcus 2000: 235-236). Whereas Yeager and Canuto (2000: 6) favour an interactionalist perspective and the frequent co-presence of community members, Wolfe (2006: 24) argued that a community was “certainly much more than a set of relations among individuals”. Their ideas, combined with the more operational and functionalist approach of Kolb and Snead’s (1997), would highlight social reproduction, subsistence production and self-identification/social recognition as three archaeologically visible functions that can be attached to communities (cf. Yeager and Canuto 2000 : 4-5). With Isbell (2000: 248), we may assume some kind of identity between a ‘natural’ community and an ‘imagined’ community with the implication that the material domain, as argued by Soja (1989: 129), was simultaneously ‘the means, medium, and outcome of social reproduction’. ‘Natural’ communities are more static, fixed in place within a settlement or locale while ‘imagined’ communities can take different forms, are more fluid and are based not on proximity but on relationships and on broader perceptions of identity: here there is less direct equivalence of ‘community’ and ‘site’ (Driessen and Frankel in press). This makes it also possible to identify spatial units in the field that were *smaller* than the settlement but *larger* than the nuclear family and which acted as moral persons, some kind of fractal personhood (Fowler 2004: 21, 48) in which proximate spatial residency would reflect an imagined community, fulfilling a specific social role within a larger community. Anthropological parallels show that a residential structure forming a single household may be occupied by a single nuclear family, by multiple nuclear families or by an extended family. Within a single residential structure, multiple nuclear families may also sometimes form different households. Similarly, multiple residential

structures may be occupied by multiple nuclear families forming multiple households but a single extended family forming a single household may have occupied different residential structures. We mostly lack sufficient archaeological correlates to identify such social units but it would be unwise to exclude their potential existence a priori.

Hayden and Cannon (1982) in their seminal paper, *The Corporate Group as Archaeological Unit*, stress that these are “groups that function as individuals in relation to property” and add that these were formed because “of strong economic or environmental pressures, and which, as a result, exhibit a recognizable degree of residential coherency among two or more nuclear families within the community” (Hayden and Cannon 1982: 135). As such they are termed residential corporate groups, which “are much more closed and exert a pervasive influence on all aspects of individuals’ lives, including their marriage, their postmarital residence, their economic production, their feasting and celebrations, and their pastimes and pleasures” (Hayden and Cannon 1982: 135).

To identify corporate groupings, a series of archaeological variables can be used amongst which architecture (plan, size and complexity) remains the main criterion. Stylistic homogeneity versus variability within and between corporate groups within the same community may also be a potentially interesting criterion (Hayden and Cannon 1982: 147). Indeed, attached craft production may result in a specific style, underlining the coherency of the corporate group, and eventually be used emblematically. Some other criteria may be relevant. Certain critical resources, resulting from trade, hunt or exploitation, may have been linked to specific corporate groups in a more or less exclusionary way.

The Minoan House

Without discounting the existence of nuclear families (for which see especially Whitelaw 2001, 2007) and following the spatial data discussed by Hayden and Cannon (1982: 142), to which I add some elements provided by Stanish (1989), I propose the hypothetical reconstruction of three different types of corporate groups for Minoan Crete: the *co-residential corporate group*, the

proximate residential corporate group and the *dispersed corporate group*. In the first two cases, single households may have been formed whereas the third probably implied separate households.

I have argued that *co-residential corporate groupings* formed the core of Minoan society from the Neolithic period onwards (Driessen 2010, 2010a). My main argument, then and now, remains the size of many Minoan residential structures which, I infer, would have been dictated by a hypothetical matrilineal and matrilocally organised social system (Driessen in press a, b). I put forward the hypothesis that some residences reflected specific, isomorphic social groups corresponding with what anthropologists call *House Societies*. Factions (and even sodalities) compete, *Houses* cooperate, both within and with others. The longevity and size of the residence both underline the intergenerational and corporate nature of this association. At the level of a small site, this corresponds with what Tomkins (2004) has called *submerged* households with the community as a whole being a social actor and with agricultural surplus being pooled and its storage organised at a higher, perhaps communal level. He sees this as a characteristic for Early Neolithic and Middle Neolithic Knossos (Tomkins 2004: 43) with a development towards more individualised households by the Late Neolithic. I would rather argue that the size of these Late Neolithic residences suggests that they contained social groups larger than the nuclear family, reflecting a system which, *mutatis mutandis*, would still be operational at the end of the Bronze Age and very likely beyond. The large residential complexes that abound in Minoan archaeology during its different cultural periods would exemplify this type of social structure (cf. Romanou 2007). In the economic field, these *Houses* pooled labour and production and acted as a single economic unit. In small settlements, a single *House* may have existed but in larger settlements, several of these may have formed the larger community (Driessen 2010).

Proximate residential corporate groupings imply that members of a single social group occupy closely located residences and share certain areas in which specific integrative functions took place. Often the partition walls between the different residences are difficult to distinguish, resulting in an agglutinative plan. The patterned individual residences making up the complex, quarter or block are usually interpreted as representing nuclear families, which may be true for some, but sufficient

complementary features suggest that the different components sometimes acted as a single body, perhaps sometimes only sporadically and on an occasional basis e.g. when cohesion and integration may have been pursued through the ritual and ceremonial role of the residence. In such cases, the physical structure was at the same time the symbol and the screen against which the solidarity of its members was expressed through many collective ceremonies and rituals. Within settlements, barrios, sectors or quarters, spatially delineated by walls or streets may be identifiable but sometimes they are simply defined by interaction patterns of multiple households (Chesson 2003). Neopalatial Gournia and Psira may be examples of such more loosely organised corporate structures where each quarter may have had its own specialised structures for artisanal production, cult and administration (Driessen 2010: 36 for references). This type of corporate structure may be regarded as the frailest since the components probably mostly formed multiple autonomous households. In other cases, it may also have involved an internal but mutual organisation of production, exchange and consumption with the different components acting as a single household. Myrtos Fournou Korifi but also the different blocks (B, G and D) in central Palaikastro would correspond to such an organisation. At Palaikastro, the quarters are sometimes distinguished by specific boundaries such as walls or streets. Typical here too is redistributed wealth and reduplicated service structures linked to neighbourhoods. Sometimes the flow of materials can link households with their proximate neighbourhood (Hutson, Stanton, Magnoni, Terry and Craner 2007).

Where the *co-residential corporate group* and the *proximate residential corporate group* are concerned, it is possible to argue for the existence of some kind of internal hierarchy, illustrated through weighed architectural elaboration, access and circulation of portable finds. Moreover, the same features may have been used to express some kind of hierarchy or difference in status between the different corporate groups.

Although spatial solidarity of the members of a *House* may have been pursued, it may not always have been possible or desirable for reasons of procurement of special resources or mating partners. Moreover, stasis or internal stress may have been averted through the departure of some members and the creation of subsidiaries of the *House* elsewhere, in nearby or distant places. With *dispersed*

corporate groupings, I envisage a social grouping that occupies residential structures in different proximate and non-proximate settlements acting only occasionally as a single household but still forming a strong, imagined community. The specific, seemingly random patterning of identical or related material culture (e.g. seals and pottery styles) throughout the Cretan countryside may suggest such networks (Driessen and Frankel in press). The members of such a dispersed *House* mostly gather on occasion of special feasts related to rites of passage (births, weddings, funerals) but this type of corporation could perhaps also be a mechanism through which trading partners (both where resources and mating partners were concerned) were preferentially integrated within the social group and be treated as fictive kin (Marcus 2000: 239). In such a hypothesis, members of a single social group or *House* would occupy residential structures both at, e.g. Malia and Myrtos Pyrgos (Protopalatial) or Knossos and Myrtos Pyrgos (Neopalatial). It would also open the possibility that certain highly ritualised structures (South-East House, Royal Villa, House of the Chancel Screen, etc.) in the cosmological centre which Knossos must have been, acted as some kind of embassies or subsidiaries for groups that usually or mostly resided elsewhere. Special links, again attested through material culture, may suggest such networks that reinforced regional and interregional cohesion (cf. Van Gijseghem and Vaughn 2008). The implication of such a suggestion is that social networks may have crisscrossed regional circumscriptions hypothetically reconstructed through territorial modelling (Bevan 2010).

Corporate performance. The Iconography of Solidarity

Although a full discussion of corporate iconography falls outside the scope of this paper, its omnipresence may be underlined. A single example may suffice: the Harvester Vase from Hagia Triada depict a procession of men, carrying forked sticks, perhaps for shaking olive trees, accompanied by musicians. It clearly represents the idea of a successful expedition of a group of men. Similar themes, mostly involving men but also women, form the core of Minoan human representation. Cunningham (2007) underlined the preponderance of “crowd scenes (Grandstand and Sacred Grove frescos), communal activities (Boxer and Harvester Rhyta), and representations of

towns (Town Mosaic, Master Impression). Along with the lack of individual aggrandizement, these iconographic preoccupations suggest the importance of community and communal functions” (Cunningham 2007: 106-7). Even the dangerous bull hunt/game seems to imply that it is only through union and mutual aid, through *collective action*, that a result could be achieved. As noted by Chapin (in press), “Aegean power and authority relied on coalitional success...neither male nor female forms of gendered social relations express authority individually...power and prestige in Aegean Neopalatial society seem to derive from the strength of its successful coalitions”. Male coalitions – sodalities or fraternities – are still typical for historical Crete as illustrated in the 3rd cent. BC oath of the 180 ephebes of Dreros. Nevertheless, Minoan art is at least to some degree to be understood as ideology rendered visual which may imply that successful coalitions were aspired but perhaps not always corresponding to real life situations. What also seems clear is that certain acts of solidarity and corporate performance which, from MM IB onwards, would incrementally be concentrated at peak sanctuaries and palaces were first centred on the funerary domain. Interestingly, *Dancing with Death* was both the title of and the chapter within one of the books written by Keith Branigan. He underlined the communal or public aspects of the tombs in the Messara and suggested that the open spaces outside were especially used for dancing (Branigan 1993: 130), as illustrated by the Kamilari and other terracotta models. Branigan connected dancing with rituals and ceremonies that were concerned by the vegetation cycle and fertility and the tombs as such ‘a focus for kin-group and village expressions of communality and stability’ (Branigan 1993: 137). Since *Dancing with Death*, several authors, including Senta German (2005), Alexandra Liveri (2008) and Stella Mandalaki³, have discussed Minoan dances as performances, listing the many Minoan examples from the Pre-, Proto- and Neopalatial period. An element which to my mind has not received sufficient attention but which was developed by Yosef Garfinkel for the Near East is the importance of dancing as a communal action, the moving of many as one, the solidarity and cohesion enhancing aspects of the performance (now also Soar 2010: 151). Dancing, Garfinkel (1997; 2003) argues,

³ S. Mandalaki has given a Minoan Seminar in Athens in 2009; see also her paper on the Dance in Minoan Crete at http://www.arxaiologia.gr/assets/media/PDF/migrated/90_15-20.pdf (Archaologia ke Technes, accessed on January 8th, 2010).

installs solidarity within people and as such traditional dancing still remains a major expression of Cretan collectivity. Dancing may be viewed as a natural and self-organizing structure in which complexity develops through spontaneous and coherent movement of people (cf. Malville 2009), serving to inscribe corporate behaviour in its youngest members.

Collective Action and Common Pool Resources

Why form a corporate group rather than a nuclear family? Hayden and Cannon (1982) only considered economic, environmental and defence aspects as compelling people to live together. Tomkins (2004), following earlier work by Halstead (1995), defends a similar approach where Early and Middle Neolithic households are concerned. “Households”, he argues “if truly isolated, risk extinction... In order to offset their inviability, individual households must have relied on periodic, external assistance that was ensured by the cultivation of social interactions beyond the household, which probably took the form of networks of exchange, alliances and obligations that included food and probably exotic materials, such as obsidian or ceramic vessels” (Tomkins 2004: 40). In his opinion too, economic necessity may have forced people to live in larger social units. In this he was following Byrd (1994) who suggested similar constraints for Neolithic villages in Jordan. What I would like to add is that specific ecological conditions (type of crops and landscape) on Crete may have benefitted the development of certain types of kin relations – in our case corporate groupings based on matrilineal descent and matrilocal residence – from the start rather than as an outcome. Hayden and Cannon (1982: 151) already noted that “restricted economic control over important resources (land, trade, fishing sites, cattle, etc.)...may explain why residential corporate groups among upper class families persist....even where corporate groups disappear almost entirely among lower classes”. If ecological conditions forced Minoans to adopt a societal organisation that was more viable, the different types of corporate groupings – co-residential, proximate and dispersed – would be its cultural and material expression. This is the idea already behind the production process recognised by Tomkins (2004: 47) for Early Neolithic and Middle Neolithic Knossian pottery, which, he argues ‘may be compared to agriculture, which similarly requires group co-operation at

certain stages in the production process (e.g., sowing, threshing, weeding' (Tomkins 2004: 49)). Cereals, vines and olives demand considerable investment and pooling of resources essential for survival (cf. Harvester's vase). The seasonality of these practices would have necessitated *collective action*, the 'group behaviour of individuals united by particular life experiences, existential anxieties, and strategic interests' (Saitta 2007: XVII), which, according to I. Hodder, is some different way of individual agency (cited in Saitta 2007: 24). In Blanton and Fargher's 2008 study 'Collective Action in the Formation of Pre-Modern States', collective action is linked to public goods, bureaucratisation and principal control. Their cross-cultural study includes all types of collective polities with which they understand complex societies "in which the government... provide services...in exchange for revenues...provided by compliant taxpayers" (Blanton and Fargher 2008: 13). In their scheme, cooperation develops between rulers and taxpayers but they fail to address what are known as *grassroot organizations* (or self-organizations), bottom-up collective action resulting from solidarity based on some specific identity that defines a community of individuals. In social theory, the concept of self-organization was introduced by Niklas Luhmann (1984). In recent periods, this is often class-based or related to ethnicity as illustrated by Dean Saitta's 'Archaeology of Collective Action' (2007) but in the past self-organization developed within communities most often along specific kinship links to allow *collective activities on land owned communally*. If we follow Hayden and Cannon (1982: 150) in assuming that corporate groups are more likely to emerge under conditions of moderate land shortages and other resource scarcities (e.g. obsidian, metal), Crete may be a case in point. Land being the most critical resource in all agriculture-based societies, it will be imperative to maintain cohesive land tracts to make production profitable and to provide a sufficient labour force. This is imperative criss-crossing scales or types of social organisation. What I want to suggest is that Crete may have represented what has been called a *communal ownership of property* (COP), a model introduced by Fleming (1985) and applied by different scholars (e.g. Chapman, Shiel and Batovic 1996: 273) to explain prehistoric subsistence in societies in which the scale of seasonal agricultural work exceeded the labour force availability put at the disposal by the average nuclear families. *Communal ownership of property* is a model often related to commons or *common-*

pool resources, natural resources used by many individuals in common. Commons were widespread in all European medieval towns (e.g. Béaur 2006; Bowden, Brown and Smith 2009) but it is a misconception that commons were limited to grazing lands nor should commons be confused with open access (Gibson 2008: 47). Commons were in fact used for many different activities such as fishing, foraging, horticulture, agriculture, arboriculture, grazing, hunting, and mining, and seasonality (cf. transhumance) may also have played a role⁴. Common-pool resources in general but also in the context of this paper comprise a series of renewable and non-renewable resources on which people depend heavily for their subsistence and are hence more typical for *marginal* environments such as reconstructed for the island of Crete (on marginality see Halstead 2008; on coping with uncertainty, Halstead 1981). Conventional solutions typically involve either centralized governmental regulation or privatization of the resource. Hardin's (1968) objection ('the tragedy of the commons') arguing that people would deplete natural resources or prevent others from using these has been effectively countered especially by Elinor Ostrom (1990), 2009 Nobel prize winner of economics. She has noted that communities often practice specific rules that protect the commons through the design of *durable cooperative institutions that are organized and governed by the resource users themselves*, i.e. a kind of institutionalised self-organization or bottom-up action. These common pool resources or CPR are organised communally because the advantages of such a system exceed the individual exploitation (and the risk of encountering violence) and state intervention through coercion (even if the tithe is usually at least partially invested in the common good). The cases of self-organization studied by Ostrom usually affect a relatively low number of individuals (from 50 to 15,000 people), small-scale communities such as we reconstruct for Minoan Crete. To some degree, this line of thought picks up the ideas on social storage or the relief redistribution system explored by Halstead (1981; 1988) and Branigan (1988; 1988a: 65) but without immediately assuming a hierarchical development and a palatial elite divorced from its societal setting. Indeed, Ostrom (1990) identifies eight 'design principles' of stable local common-pool

⁴ Gibson 2008: 48: "Useful distinctions have been made between communal, common, and private forms of land tenure...Members can restrict access to land held in *common*, but cannot dictate how it is to be used by individual households. Under *communal* land tenure, a community can both restrict access to land and also dictate how it is to be used. The owners of *private* property can exclude others from the land, and dispose of it without restrictions"

resource management, especially operational in non-hierarchical conditions. These are (1) clearly defined boundaries (effective exclusion of external unentitled parties), (2) Rules regarding the appropriation and provision of common resources are adapted to local conditions, (3) Collective-choice arrangements allow most resource appropriators to participate in the decision-making process, (4) Effective monitoring by monitors who are part of or accountable to the appropriators, (5) A scale of graduated sanctions for resource appropriators who violate community rules, (6) Mechanisms of conflict resolution are cheap and of easy access, (7) The self-determination of the community is recognized by higher-level authorities, and (8) In the case of larger common-pool resources: organization in the form of multiple layers of nested enterprises, with small local CPRs at the base level.

Where Crete is concerned, communal pasture zones for summer and winter grazing existed in historical times and still today so they may also be assumed for the Bronze Age (Chaniotis 1999: 191, 197). In fact, the increase of land boundaries as implied by early Cretan epigraphic evidence can be explained as reflecting intensified pressure on access of communal lands. Such frontiers often follow limits between specific land use zones that eventually develop into real political boundaries (Chapman, Shiel and Batovic 1996: 276; Chaniotis 1999: 199). We may also connect such grassroots organization to renewable resources as inshore fisheries, hunting grounds, forests etc. and to the occasional adaptations of the natural environment as implied by irrigation systems and dams, as seen at Pseira and Gournia for example, water provisioning (as presented by well-digging in common ground at Palaikastro) and to non-renewable resources comprising the exploitation of minerals (such as quarried stone for building and vases, obsidian and various portable objects but also metals)⁵. It may also imply the creation of *specific infrastructures related to such resources*. In the case of Chalcolithic Palestine, Levy (1998: 239) has argued that cult centres, shrines, monumental buildings and formal cemeteries should foremost be seen as regulating institutions that developed as a

⁵ Devolder 2009 : 192 : « ...la participation aux chantiers de construction, l'aménagement du paysage agricole au moyen de terrasses et de barrages, l'entretien de ces dispositifs, le partage d'installations permettant la transformation des denrées produites ont souligné l'existence de réseaux de coopération économique et sociale ».

reflection of formalised behaviour codes that were related to common pool resources. Is such a scheme envisagable for Prepalatial and Protopalatial Minoan Crete?

Are the Minoan Palaces the result of Collective Action?

Has mythological Minos forced us into seeing the palace as a hierarchical construct intimately connected to a ruler? Two quotes, from works by Italian archaeologists of the pioneer days of Minoan archaeology, illustrate that initially the evidence was interpreted along other lines. F. Halbherr, undoubtedly having read Aristotle's views on the Cretan *politeia*, remarked when first encountering the Knossian ruins before Evans excavated these: *'The largeness of the building makes me think that it must have been one of the chief public edifices of the city, and the large jars for storing grain, wine or oil remind us of the Andreion in which the citizens of Crete used to come together for their public meals or syssitia, to which also were invited any distinguished persons who happened to be visiting their city'* (Halbherr 1893: 111). A decade later, another internationally acclaimed scholar, Angelo Mosso, stated: *"The very architecture of the palaces of Knossos and Phaestos may testify to the power of the democracy. The liberal supply of seats in the palaces of Phaestos and Knossos was an expense forced on the architect by the crowding of a large public in the hall and the courts, and by the freedom with which the people could enter the palace ..."* (Mosso 1907: 163). In fact, Chapter 8 in Mosso's *Palaces of Crete*, published in London in 1907, was entitled 'Prehistoric Socialism' (sic) partly because he followed Stillman who, already in 1866, had claimed to have found *"the great building for public assemblies, the so-called Sissitia (Sussitia), where the earliest Socialists ate in common. ..The soup kitchens, free meals for school children, and municipal bakehouses of the present day are trifles, for at that time men, women and children were all fed at the expense of the State"* (Mosso 1907: 161). In the opinion of both scholars, bottom-up driven collective actions were operational in the organisation and function of the Minoan palaces. Is the Minoan palace in fact a durable cooperative institution that was organized and governed by the resource users themselves, an original institution regulating or governing the commons? Was it a

building that resulted out of a voluntary community decision and act? I pursue this line of approach by asking two questions: who *built* the palaces and who *used* the palaces? Where the second question is concerned, more evidence has been brought forward in recent years underlining the possibility that the palace was used by different groups and by the larger community or at least selected members of the latter. The permeability of its access system, the essence of its circulation pattern in which the central court and other courts formed poles of convergence, and the presence of different entrances linked with specific functional zones within the complex all seem to suggest not only a variety of non-resident users but also the importance of interaction for which the building was specifically constructed (Palyvou 2002; Driessen 2004; Letesson 2006; Letesson & Vansteenhuyse 2006). The involvement of different groups may also be reconstructed on the basis of other, portable evidence. Both Weingarten (1986) and Relaki (2004; 2009) have shown how the sealing pattern represented by the Phaisos *Vano 25* *archivio di cretule* is indicative of a non-resident sealing pattern. Day and Wilson (2004) for Prepalatial Knossos and Macdonald and Knappett (2007) for Protopalatial Knossos have reconstructed ceremonies taking place within the palace involving many participants. Recently excavated palaces such as those at Petras and Galatas have yielded evidence suggesting ceremonies implying large groups (Tsipopoulou 2002; Rethemiotakis 2002). All this corroborates the evidence of the iconography and the importance of mass meetings through which solidarity and integration were enhanced. Where Postpalatial Crete is concerned, it may be informative that Tsipopoulou (2009) has recently suggested that the presence of identical sets of goddesses with upraised arms and snake tubes of different clays within the shrine at Chalasmeno could be related to the fact that different groups dedicated their set. Perhaps we will be able to propose a similar hypothesis for the palaces in the future but since most buildings apart from that at Zakros were found largely empty on excavation, there is little evidence to proceed on. With R. Koehl (2006), we may consider the so-called Treasuries within the palaces of Zakros and Knossos as storing ritual equipment to be used communally, with rhyta meant to be distributed during communal ceremonies⁶. Future work may perhaps also show who was actually using the palace or

⁶ Koehl (2006: 331-332) notes how these rhyta were often found in clusters and, taking into account the Procession

even which specific area within the building and for what activity since certain selection processes may have been operational related to specific rites or age, ritual experience or gender (Driessen 2009). Large-scale storage accessible from the outside could be an additional indication (Garfinkel, Ben-Shlomo and Kuperman 2009) and the best illustration for this remain the Protopalatial *kouloures* at Knossos and Phaistos or the Neopalatial battery of silos found outside the Malia palace.

The second question, who built the Minoan palaces, is now impossible to answer. Studies especially by Graham (1963), Preziosi (1983), Palyvou (2002), Shaw (2009) and Letesson (2009) have underlined the planned nature of the building and the possibility that an original square covering the west wing and the central court formed the basis of the construction, undoubtedly dictated by ritual at every moment of its conception, construction, elaboration, decoration, and perhaps even destruction if the layer of *calcestruzzo* poured over the Protopalatial remains at Phaistos can be interpreted in this way. Planning such a building is one thing, and mythical Daedalos is usually given credit, but actually building it is another. A basic observation needs to be our point of departure: the monumentality of the Minoan palace, because of its scale, elaboration, longevity or plan, mirrors an investment of energy that is unparalleled by other aspects in Minoan society. It compares well with the Archaic investment in immense temples at Samos, Didyma and Athens. As such it reflects a power and an ability to mobilize a work force. Traditionally, this has been seen as reflecting hierarchy. In our bottom-up approach, we may envision a hypothesis seeing the palaces as the materialization of a corporate strategy and a collective action aiming to reduce open tension or competition between the different corporate groups that made up society. What if the construction itself of such a *great house* would be essential in promoting solidarity through its emphasis on the involvement of the different groups, perhaps on a cyclical basis? Was the act as or more important than the result? If the building act itself was a ritual activity, linked to specific time and place

Frescoes, argues that rhyta were distributed from storerooms to participants to be used in processions. He notes, however, how sometimes pairs of almost identical rhyta occur in a single deposit but that at Gournia, two separated pairs occurred respectively in House Bb r 11 and House Cm r 58. "These separated pairs might have commemorated a link that was forged between families of groups within the community. Perhaps the pairs were divided at the conclusion of a ceremony in which members of both groups, or a single representative from each one, participated" (Koehl 2006: 331).

constraints, then participating in the construction was perhaps also considered to fulfil religious or ritual obligations. This is a hypothesis proposed for Chacoan Great Houses (Wills 2000: 38) and Neolithic megalithic monuments (Renfrew 1974) but some features of Minoan building practices may actually reinforce such a hypothesis. I am especially thinking of the repetition in the plan and orientations of the palaces as shown by Shaw (1973; 2010), Preziosi (1984) and Palyvou (2002), but also by the importance of equinox and solstice alignments effectively illustrated by Goodison (2004), and especially by the incremental discovery of foundation or building deposits (e.g. Herva 2005). Add to these the attention given to architecture, both where its realisation in the miniature (with faience facades, clay models, fresco and seal depictions) and in large scale construction are concerned, and the ritual element behind Minoan architecture cannot be underestimated. If through participation in the construction of such a major monumental public building a right of access could be acquired by corporate groupings or their representatives (cf. Wills 2000: 43), then a communal investment may perhaps be envisaged. At present we lack sufficient methodological approaches to answer this question positively but there are some elements which may be highlighted. If we take a processual approach to understand the Minoan palaces, two elements that need discussion are labour and communication, both essential in the organisation of their production (Wills 2000: 21). Mobilising a work force and making sure it constructs the building according to some specific prescriptions implies that task coordination would be critical to construction success (Wills 2000: 36)⁷. This can be achieved through self-organization and what is sometimes called a small-world network in which *patching* took place, an effective way through which non-literate societies would have handled the complex coordination problems presented by the construction of such large complexes (Wills 2000: 37).

Seeing the construction and reconstruction as part of corporate obligations with a sequential, cyclical involvement by the different *Houses* would have reduced potential tensions and coordination requirements and would also have resulted in a learning process of a large specialist

⁷ This said, even if the palace was the result of collective action, it must not imply necessarily that it was built by the community at large: in Archaic Greece, whatever the political system, the *polis* constructed the temple as a sign for the collectivity, but the actual work was done by privately contracted gangs.

task force which could then also explain the regional proliferation of styles and techniques, channelled through the network of our hypothetical dispersed corporative group. As noted by Wills (2000: 38), the result of such a collective process could be quite striking but need not have involved a heavy institutionalized structure or an elaborate political organization.

A few additional observations may perhaps render this hypothesis in which there is an obvious link between the palaces and the communities that build these more attractive. First of all, it may be noted that moments of palace building correspond to moments of population increase (at least as evidenced by survey data) following periods of stress (EM III, MM IIB-III) so that a connection is more than likely and that the building as such may have acted as a release of stress (cf. Malville 2009: 40 on pilgrimages as stress release) for the community at large rather than as an aggrandizing monument celebrating a ruler. If this stands a chance of being correct, the palaces as such may suggest a *coalescent* society, a new social formation formed through the integration of groups coming from different places, or the incoming of new groups (Kowalewski 2006; Haggis pers. com.). I have suggested such a process for the formation of the Malia palace (Driessen 2002a) and both Relaki and Todaro assume a similar process for Late Neolithic and Early Minoan Phaistos (Relaki 2004; Todaro and Di Tonto 2006).

Secondly, by hypothesizing the number of people involved and the time it took to construct Minoan palaces and major buildings considering that only during the two or three agriculturally low months people invested in constructing large monumental buildings, Devolder (2008, 2009) was able to suggest that the energy input represented reflected larger work groups than those potentially and proportionally represented by the residents of these structures. In cases such as Kommos and Gournia, the construction clearly implied a large workforce if the work was finished in a reasonable time, too large to have been supplied by the residents of the buildings. The investment therefore suggests collaboration. Thirdly, as shown by Schoep (2004), Protopalatial architectural innovations seem to show up first in domestic residential structures and only afterwards in central architecture. This could also imply that those who had built more impressive group-related constructions acquired the expertise first which was only later put into practice in communal buildings. Fourthly, all palace

buildings took time to build, and thus reflect a gradual process. The progressive construction of the palaces is clearest where Protopalatial Phaistos is concerned but must also apply to most other buildings. Partly related to this is finally the within-structure variability that exists in each building. Often this is interpreted as reflecting different architectural phases but it may be suggested that the variations reflect the work of distinctive socio-political groups (cf. Hastings and Moseley 1975 and Moseley 1975 for an interesting example of such practices in Peru). Related to this, we may consider mason's marks. As J. Shaw recently noted (2009: n. 482), mason's marks indicate that a structure was a communal building since they occur almost exclusively in palaces, large potentially public structures and shrines (e.g. Palaikastro Building 5, Zeus Thenatas shrine at Amnisos). Is it possible that palatial mason's marks reflect the involvement of different groups in the construction of these buildings? In a recent study, I. Begg underlines that « *The signs assert a collective claim to the creation or ownership of workmanship, either for payment or to commemorate what that particular team had accomplished, in the manner of the signs on the blocks deep inside the pyramid of Khufu. Their use was either temporary if intended to document payment or permanent if commemorative. If the Protopalatial signs served a similar purpose, a strong possibility given the comparative evidence, then the explanation for their different appearance might lie in the nature or organization of the groups engraving them* » (Begg 2004: 20). There are three elements in favour of seeing the marks as signatures for different groups⁸: the signs are often located on parts of blocks that were not visible, most major signs are represented in almost equal numbers and concentrations of similar signs cluster in specific areas of major buildings. Especially this last feature is telling and could suggest that each zone was produced by a different group. Did the people who built the Hall of the Double Axes at Knossos belong to a different group than those who constructed the Court of the Distaffs or the North Entrance Passage with its tridents or the Magazines with its window signs?

⁸ Begg 2004: 20 further notes: "An economical proposal to account for the number of mason's marks would be a system of associations or groups of workers who were permanently organized on a standing basis and who were called upon to provide the required labor, either in a corvée system or by their own decision. The identity of these groups could be symbolized by their distinctive marks. Each group could have provided the material from start to finish in a vertically integrated system. Members of the groups operated throughout Neopalatial Crete, where they sometimes contributed work to other upper-class structures having ashlar walls, such as villas. At the various sites the relative proportions of the various groups might have varied, with the trident club being most active at Phaistos, for example. The groups represent an aspect of Minoan social organization not necessarily found on the Mycenaean mainland ».

Beyond the collective

In this paper, I have put forward elements allowing a reconstruction of a corporate organisation of Minoan society with as basic element the *House*, an enduring social group centring on a residential structure of which the longevity and size underline the intergenerational and corporate nature of this association. The coalitions and co-operative labour forces as suggested by our iconographic material find a good reflection in the way Minoan residences and settlements were structured. By reconstructing three types of corporate groupings (co-residential, proximate and dispersed), I propose a kin network encompassing large regions of the island, resulting in integration and cohesion which culminated in the construction of the palaces. I have hypothesised these as the results of community related practices, bottom-up processes and collective corporate actions in which self-organisation was important with the act of building serving to reinforce group cohesion and installing solidarity, stability as well as a specific identity and hence ethnicity in the related community and region, acts which before may well have primarily centered around funerary complexes. The palaces were monumental communal structures, mechanisms that were put in place in the first place to promote the cohesion between different coalescent groups, the *Houses*. They were a formal *Great House* for integrative practices where disputes were settled, feasts were held and where power may have been held by house representatives, perhaps chosen for their age, gender or ritual experience. They may, moreover, be indicative for a coalescent society. The ritual associations of Minoan architecture may suggest a pattern of collective commitment, involving large numbers of participants that was most pronounced during the construction, but may have been re-enacted through calendrical or cyclical rites.

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