

THE LIFE OF BUILDINGS: MINOAN BUILDING DEPOSITS IN AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Summary. This paper discusses the interpretation of the objects deliberately hidden and sealed up in the structure of Minoan buildings. These building deposits are usually interpreted in terms of religion and ritual but this conventional view may actually be based on fallacious assumptions about the nature of human-environment relations in Bronze Age Crete. The present paper outlines an alternative ecological approach, which allows a degree of sociality between humans and non-human entities, and treats building deposits as an essentially practical means of manipulating the relations between humans and the (built) environment in situations of potential stress. It will be argued that buildings and other artefacts can, in some respects, be understood to live and grow similarly as organisms. Thus, in order to appreciate their significance, Minoan building deposits need to be related to the life-cycle of buildings.

INTRODUCTION

The study of deposition practices and structured deposits has become an integral part of European archaeology since the 1980s, and rightly so, as deposition practices can arguably illuminate how people in the past perceived the world around them (e.g. Jones 1998; Thomas 1999, 62–88; Brück 2001). In Minoan Crete, on which this paper focuses, special deposits of various kinds were made, and the practices associated with them have recently attracted scholarly attention (e.g. Day and Wilson 1998, 2002; Hamilakis 1998; Hallager 2001). The type of special deposit discussed here is best termed as building deposits. Building deposits are not functional in terms of mechanical causation and consist of objects deliberately hidden under or in buildings (Ellis 1968, 1). The term building deposit is preferred here instead of the more familiar ‘foundation deposit’ because the former includes all objects intentionally incorporated into architecture, whether or not they are found literally in the foundations of buildings.

The purpose of the present paper is not to describe and analyse the structure and content of known Minoan building deposits but to explore, in a rather theoretical manner, a more general topic concerning the functionality of such deposits. The question why building deposits were made is rarely discussed to any great extent in Minoan archaeology, but as will be seen below, they tend to be associated with religion and ritual. In this paper, however, I propose to pursue a rather different approach, which is ecological in orientation. An association between building deposits and ecology may at first seem surprising or perhaps downright bizarre, but the suggestion is made that it might be useful to regard building deposits as an essentially practical

means of maintaining human-environment relations. In order to put forward this argument, it is necessary to relate building deposits to buildings themselves and also address a much broader theme of human engagement with the world.

The ecological approach discussed in this paper challenges certain modernist assumptions regarding the nature of the non-human constituents of environment, especially regarding the life and agency of things. The notion that artefacts have their specific life-cycles, that they are biographical entities, is an established one in archaeology today, and the life-cycles of both buildings and objects deposited in them are also central to the approach advocated here. Nonetheless, the concept of object biography invests artefacts with life only in a metaphorical sense (e.g. Langdon 2001) whereas the ecological perspective has more profound implications to our understanding of material culture. In essence, buildings and other artefacts can, in some respects, be understood to live and grow not unlike organisms (cf. Ingold 2000, 77–88, 339–61). Therefore, building deposits need to be related not only to the context in which they were made but also to a more large-scale process of the development of buildings. While the approach advocated here is, in principle, applicable to all buildings, this paper focuses primarily on so-called Minoan palaces. This is because most Minoan building deposits derive from palatial contexts and because long-standing and monumental palaces most clearly illustrate the significance of the ecological perspective.

MINOAN BUILDING DEPOSITS

Some 20 Minoan building deposits have been identified to date, and they comprise, despite certain similarities, a rather heterogeneous group in terms of both content and structure. An early reference is given by Evans, who describes a limestone box, which was set under the southern wall of the Knossos palace and contained triangular tesserae of precious materials. He considered the discovery enigmatic, but interpreted it as a possible foundation deposit (Evans 1928, 373–4). At least three other building deposits were also found at Evans' excavations at Knossos even though they were not explicitly treated as such.

Nonetheless, the famous Temple Repositories in the west wing of the Knossos palace obviously formed a building deposit. The Temple Repositories consist of two large rectangular stone-lined cists that yielded a variety of objects of which the fragments of four faience figures are the most well known. The assemblage also contained other faience artefacts, some 50 ceramic vessels, sealings, stone artefacts, sea shells, and various miscellaneous finds (Evans 1921, 463–72; Panagiotaki 1993). The precise contents of the Temple Repositories and the structure of the deposit remain a little unclear, but it is certain that the Temple Repositories formed a structured deposit. The ceramic vessels formed the uppermost layer of the deposit and the faience objects, which were found near the bottom of the cists, were grouped together rather than simply thrown into the cists (Panagiotaki 1993, 84–6). The cists were sealed by a gypsum pavement, which was built around the MM IIIB/LM IA transition (Panagiotaki 1999, 151).

A building deposit was also found under the threshold of the Vat Room near the Temple Repositories. This deposit dates from the late MM IA or early MM IB and thus appears to be associated with the initial construction of the Knossos palace (MacGillivray 1998, 34–5; Panagiotaki 1999, 273). While not quite as rich as the Temple Repositories assemblage, the Vat Room deposit nevertheless included objects such as coarse and fine ware, chipped stone, ivory, metals, seal impressions, ostrich egg fragments and an arm of a faience figure (Panagiotaki 1999,

7–43). Yet another building deposit from Knossos derives from the Little Palace where the fragments of a serpentine bull's head rhyton and a small double-axe base were discovered in a shaft between the south-west pillar room and the stairs (Gesell 1985, 94). These objects seem to have been deliberately built into a wall and not to have fallen from an upper floor (Rehak 1995, 439).

Building deposits are also reported from other palaces. At Phaistos, dozens of broken and intact ceramic vessels, animal bones, carbon and ash were deposited in two pits under the pavement of Room 50, and these features were apparently associated with the inauguration of the second palace (Levi 1976, 405–8). Two small 'foundation pits' have also been recently reported from Phaistos (Whitley 2003, 82). At Mallia, a single jug in a small stone-lined cist was found in the foundations of the first palace (Pelon 1986) whereas conical cups, a chalice and a sheep bone were discovered in a niche under the west façade of the new palace at Zakros (Boulotis 1982). Evidence of a 'foundation ritual' has been reported from the north wing of the Galatas palace where a coarse ware vessel containing two cups was placed under the floor of Room 53 (Whitley 2003, 80).

A few discoveries from Minoan 'villas' and some other sites have also been interpreted as possible foundation deposits. Boulotis (1982, 158, 161) lists two finds from Nirou Chani and one from Vathypetro, Zakros, Pyrgos and Vorou. La Rosa and Cucuzza (2001) have reported a building deposit from the house of Volakakis in Seli where a bridge-spouted jar was placed in a small pit under the pavement at the time of the construction of the house in MM IIIB/LM IA transition (see also La Rosa 2002). Among the more intriguing cases are the deposits of Thera pumice. On Pseira, pumice was deposited under the floor of a purported shrine dated to LM IB, and a similar deposit is also known under the blocked doorway of a shrine at Nirou Chani (Boulotis 1982, 158; Rehak and Younger 1998, 100). It seems possible that there are many other building deposits not yet identified as such, but this brief overview of the material suffices for the purposes of the present paper. What should be clear from above survey is that Minoan building deposits appear to be associated not only with the initial erection of buildings but also with subsequent rebuilding and remodelling activities.

RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATION OF MINOAN BUILDING DEPOSITS

Minoan building deposits are often mentioned in passing in the literature, but there are few longer treatises of the subject (most notably, Boulotis 1982; Pelon 1986; La Rosa 2002), and even those tend to address only superficially the 'meaning' of building deposits. The case of the Temple Repositories provides us with an illustrative example. The faience figures and certain other objects from the cists have been described and studied in detail (e.g. Weingarten 1989; Alberti 2001), but one finds little thoughtful discussion of the nature of the deposit; symptomatically, the Temple Repositories were not included in Boulotis' list of Minoan foundation deposits (1982, 158, 161). The deposit is simply considered 'religious' and associated with the purported shrine area in the west wing of the Knossos palace, but little more is usually said about the subject (e.g. Gesell 1985, 85–7; Rutkowski 1986, 126–7). Panagiotaki, however, discusses the nature of Temple Repositories in some depth when trying to define whether the deposit is a religious or secular feature. In her opinion, the faience figures and offering tables 'argue directly and incontrovertibly for a concern with matters outside of everyday world' while the rest of the objects could equally well be found in a secular context (Panagiotaki 1999, 148). Ultimately, all the finds are linked through symbolic associations to the domain of the Minoan

goddess of nature, and the conclusion is that 'there can be only one basic interpretation: the religious' (Panagiotaki 1999, 148).

Once again, the question why the deposit was made is left more or less open, but Panagiotaki's account is otherwise revealing, as it stresses that the Temple Repositories are best understood in terms of religion and ritual – this is generally received wisdom where Minoan building deposits are concerned. While the interpretations of building deposits tend to be cautious to the point of vagueness, such terms as 'ritual', 'offer', 'sacral', 'votive', 'consecration' and 'commemoration' are used (see Boulotis 1982; Gesell 1985, 85–7; Pelon 1986; Rutkowski 1986, 126–7; La Rosa 2002). This vocabulary assumes a connection between building deposits and the belief in supernatural beings and/or manipulation of (power) relations in society. At least indirect support for a religious interpretation has also been sought in references to Egypt and Mesopotamia (e.g. Boulotis 1982, 157, 159), where foundation deposits are well attested and usually associated with apotropaic rituals and the consecration of buildings (e.g. Ellis 1968; Nakamura 2004). The appeal of the religious interpretation of Minoan building deposits is understandable, but it may actually be based on unsound assumptions about the nature of human-environment relations in Bronze Age Crete.

HUMANS AND THE (BUILT) ENVIRONMENT

Animate/inanimate, agency and 'animism'

For some centuries, the modern western worldview has built on dualistic divisions such as those between nature and culture or body and mind. Within this view, a categorical distinction is drawn between humans and artefacts. Humans are regarded as animate, sentient beings and active agents whereas artefacts, such as buildings, are seen to be inanimate and passive lumps of matter – although the human mind is considered to project 'meanings' outwards onto the material world. Nonetheless, the concept of object biography is frequently used in archaeology today to establish a useful metaphorical relationship between organisms and artefacts: like organisms, buildings and other artefacts are recognized to have their specific life histories (e.g. Langdon 2001). Buildings are also metaphorically likened to the human body in some societies (e.g. Brück 2001).

These metaphors are valuable in their own right, but there appears to be more than metaphor involved in the 'life' of things. To begin with, not all societies make categorical distinctions between the animate and the inanimate or the living and non-living, but apparently inanimate things may be perceived to possess human-like qualities. For the Ojibwa of northern Canada, for instance, stones can be alive in some circumstances although not all stones are regarded as living beings (Ingold 2000, 95–8; see also Tilley 1999, 183). A particularly illustrative example is provided by Schefold, who contracted malaria while studying longhouses among the Sakuddei in Indonesia. The anthropologist fell ill, according to the Sakuddei, because he had molested and offended the houses by examining them too closely; the agency of houses, in other words, was seen to be the cause for illness (cited in Brück 1999, 321). Isolated anecdotes are of little value, but they serve a purpose here in leading us to more profound questions about the nature of human-environment relations.

Moving stones and illness-causing buildings would seem to be about 'animism', which has traditionally been understood as a form of 'primitive' religion characterized by a tendency to anthropomorphize the non-human environment, and attribute human properties to entities that

do not 'really' possess them. But instead of treating animism as simply religion or a misconceived worldview, it might be more useful to understand it as a mode of engaging with the environment (Bird-David 1999). Within this view, animism stands for two-way relatedness between people and their surroundings:

If 'cutting trees into parts' epitomizes the modernist epistemology, 'talking with trees', I argue, epitomizes Nayaka animistic epistemology. 'Talking' is shorthand for two-way responsive relatedness with a tree – rather than 'speaking' one-way to it, as if it could listen and understand. 'Talking with' stands for attentiveness to variances and invariances in behaviour and response of things in states of relatedness and for getting to know such things as they change through the vicissitudes over time of the engagement with them. To 'talk with a tree' – rather than 'cut it down' – is to perceive what it does as one acts towards it, being aware concurrently of changes in oneself and the tree. (Bird-David 1999, 77)

Bird-David is concerned with hunter-gatherer perceptions of the world, but relational knowing is not limited to some phase of social evolution, although it has largely lost its authority in the western world (Ingold in Bird-David 1999, 81).

As the above quote implies, people in some societies engage with non-human constituents of the environment in a manner that is in some respects of a 'social' nature (see also Århem 1996; Pálsson 1996). The question now arises, if such apparently inanimate things as stones and buildings can 'really' be active agents, can they 'really' do something. Modernist thought has limited agency strictly to the human domain, but it is becoming increasingly clear today that this anthropocentric view is too narrow (Gell 1998; Graves-Brown 2000; Jones and Cloke 2002). Although not 'causing' malaria, such inanimate things as stones and buildings *are* potentially active agents, and their agency is 'real' rather than imagined or 'socially constructed' because 'agency is a property of the environment in which we live, not only of human psyche' (Gell 1998, 20). In other words, agency (and indeed the mind) resides in the *relations* between people and their environments (Bateson 1972, 460; Ingold 2000, 16–19; Knappett 2002).

Buildings as part of the lived-in environment

These considerations are not without consequences for our understanding of buildings. In archaeology, buildings are often viewed as passive containers of human life, vehicles of symbolic expression, or mirrors of socio-economic conditions, and all these perspectives undoubtedly illuminate some aspects of buildings and their social context. What should be evident from the preceding discussion, however, is that the relationship between humans and the (built) environment is far more complex than standard approaches assume. From the perspective of natural science, buildings are just packed molecules, but from an *ecological* perspective, buildings are part of the lived-in world of humans and other organisms. That is not a very perceptive observation in itself, but ecological thinking does actually challenge some assumptions deeply embedded in western thought.

Of course, the idea is a familiar one in archaeology that the relationship between humans and buildings is dynamic and mutual (e.g. Parker Pearson and Richards 1994), and it is also recognized that the identity of people, their ways of life, and even language are necessarily tied to place (e.g. Gell 1995; Chapman 1997, 140–8; Jones 1998). Yet the profound nature of the integrity between humans and their life-world may be less familiar. Namely, from a truly ecological point of view, humans and their life-world are not separate entities in the first

place: the former is continuous with the latter, and the two comprise a meaningful unit of analysis only as an indivisible organism-plus-environment whole (Gibson 1986; Ingold 2000, 18–19). From this perspective, changes in buildings are indicative of changes in people or, more accurately, in a local humans-in-an-environment system.

It goes almost without saying that not all such changes are archaeologically identifiable, but major modifications and rebuildings might be expected to alter the identity of buildings and consequently restructure human relations with the (built) environment. The approach advocated here also suggests that buildings can be considered to accumulate ‘life-force’ and certain qualities modernist thought attributes only to humans. The life of artefacts, as Gell (1998, 226) notes in the context of Malangan carvings, ‘is the net result of product of a lifetime’s activity in the social world, not a species of mystical energy distinguishable categorically from ordinary life and activity’. As a result, buildings and other artefacts may ultimately come to be treated in some respects as human-like social beings. Finally, the ecological perspective assumes the primacy of process over form, but this issue is best addressed later.

On the basis of the above discussion, some general propositions can now be made on the relationship between humans and the non-human world in Minoan Crete. The objectification of the environment is most obviously a product of modern western worldview (Pálsson 1996; Mrozowski 1999), and there is no reason to impose modernist categories and ideas of nature and culture onto the Bronze Age Aegean. A rather more useful and considerably less ethnocentric approach (Pálsson 1996, 78) to human-environment relations in Minoan Crete is to adopt a dialogic perspective, which allows two-way relatedness and potential ‘sociality’ between humans and non-human constituents of the environment (see also Evans 2003, 20–44). This view implies, it must be stressed, neither that the Minoans mistook plants, animals or artefacts as humans nor that they believed all things to have a soul, but it does propose that various constituents of the environment were perhaps perceived to possess such qualities as consciousness and intentionality (cf. Gell 1998, 123). Not troubled by the Humean notions of causality and mechanical worldview, the agency of things was probably not so problematic an idea for the Minoans as it is for us. The Minoans can be seen to have co-inhabited their world with manifold beings that were not, despite their non-human nature, considered to be ‘supernatural’ or categorically distinct from humans – the Minoan world was permeated with life and power.

BUILDINGS AS PROCESSES AND DISTRIBUTED OBJECTS

The primacy of process

Why the known Minoan building deposits appear to concentrate on palatial sites cannot be resolved here, but it probably has something to do with the importance of palatial sites and their long occupational history. The buildings known as Minoan palaces – though the term ‘court building’ is sometimes favoured today – were in use for several centuries, but a ‘myth of diachronic homogeneity’ has tended to dominate modern understanding of palaces (Schoep 2004, 245–6). ‘This principle’, Schoep (2004, 246) writes, ‘assumes that despite minor differences the Middle Bronze Age court buildings fulfilled more or less the same function as the Late Bronze Age palaces’. The tendency to represent palaces as ahistorical artefacts is manifested, for instance, in the frequently reproduced plans, which do not attempt to differentiate various phases of construction (Hitchcock 2000). Of course, it is generally known that palaces

faced several destructions and were rebuilt and remodelled more or less extensively over the course of their use-life, but even weak forms of the myth of diachronic homogeneity necessarily undermine the significance of change in architecture, as they render change as relatively unimportant variation on the material manifestation of pre-existing conceptual and architectural forms.

The tendency to regard change itself as somehow secondary to buildings as 'finished artefacts', fixed constellations of physical features, is unsurprising in the sense that it merely seems to reflect more general modernist attitudes. Namely, western science and thought give ontological priority to things over relations between things and form/state over process: speech is taken as a mere expression of pre-existing language, development of an organism as the realization of its genetic 'blue print', etc. (Goodwin 1988; Ingold 2000). Ecologically speaking, however, the 'form over process' paradigm is at fault. A properly ecological approach treats life as a continuous form-generating process, not a series of distinct objects and states. If process rather than form is elementary, change is not 'something that happens to things as a consequence of forces from outside themselves in a pre-existing space-time framework' but 'what we call objects and their environment are self-generating complementary forms' (Goodwin 1988, 106). As this quote indicates, the primacy of process applies not only to organisms but also to things that are part of the life-world of organisms. In an ecological perspective, things do not exist as discrete bodies in space but are always in the process of coming into being, as their relation with organisms is constantly changing.

A process-oriented approach opens up some new insights into Minoan palaces. Previous research on palaces has sought to produce functional explanations and/or decode the symbolic/ideological messages expressed through palatial architecture. Most accounts, although using a variety of methods, share a tendency to treat palaces as (a series of) finished artefacts. While temporality of palaces is in principle acknowledged, 'periods' and 'phases' tend to be treated as the primary object of study and thus considered of primary importance; change, the very process of development, is more or less implicitly represented as something secondary that takes places between defined periods and phases.

Distributed objects

Buildings are more than physical objects and immaterial symbols; like all artefacts, they are material embodiments of complex relations between people and the non-human constituents of the environment. As the form-generation process involves manifold agents, buildings are not ultimately reducible to the intentions of builders or of their patrons. Minoan palaces, presumably, were particularly salient places enmeshed within dense fields of diverse relationships. Palaces and palatial sites more generally embodied in a highly visible 'monumental' form the constantly unfolding relations between people of several generations and their environments. Palaces did not merely preserve traces of people's life; rather, the material traces of the activities of innumerable agents *constituted* palaces. This is not a matter of mere physical constitution, as artefacts preserve the agency of those who made or were involved with them or, conversely, 'a person and a person's mind are not confined to particular spatio-temporal coordinates, but consist of a spread of biographical events and memories of events, and a dispersed category of material objects, traces, and leavings, which can be attributed to a person' (Gell 1998, 222). The past was not just sedimented in the soil and architectural structures but actively present all the time through material indexes of past agents.

Seen from this perspective, a palace appears as a 'distributed object' rather than a series of 'finished', discrete buildings or building phases (cf. Gell 1998, 226). Thus, for instance, all the activities carried out at different times in relation to the site of Knossos constitute the indivisible but temporally dispersed object 'Knossos complete'. Each element of a palace, just like each work of an artist, to quote Gell (1998, 236), 'is partly a recapitulation of previous works and partly an anticipation of works as yet uncommenced'. A distributed object is by no means a static ahistorical entity but, like the oeuvre of an artist, it 'constitutes a dynamic, unstable, entity; not a mere accumulation of datable artefacts' (Gell 1998, 242). Thus, the concept of the distributed object denotes the very process of coming into being. Most relationships involved in this process are, of course, beyond the reach of archaeological research, but such events as initial construction, major modifications and abandonment leave observable traces in the archaeological record and are therefore interpretable. Moreover, it seems that those events were often endowed with meaning (Stevanovic 1997; Brück 2001).

The life of artefacts after breakage and deposition: the relation of building deposits to the life-cycle of buildings

Various scholars have recently observed that certain artefacts appear to have been deliberately broken and deposited in Minoan Crete, and that the breakage and deposition of artefacts were in themselves meaningful practices in some instances (e.g. Rehak 1994; Hamilakis 1998). But what were artefacts for after they had been reduced to fragments and deposited? This question remains to be addressed in the context of Minoan building deposits. Where the issue is referred to at all, the assumption seems to be that breakage and deposition marked the end of the use-life of artefacts. For example, Panagiotaki (1999, 273) interprets the Vat Room Deposit as 'a foundation deposit or, perhaps better, shrine offerings no longer needed and used as a foundation deposit'. Alberti (2001, 198) proposes that the faience figures from the Temple Repositories were perhaps intentionally 'killed' by reducing them to fragments. These accounts clearly imply that the artefacts that ended up in building deposits were either useless or, at the very least, deposition was unrelated to some actual, primary function of the deposited artefacts.

Functionality, Graves-Brown (1995, 14–15) observes, is often considered to be self-evident in the sense that formal qualities are taken to reveal, regardless of cultural context, what an artefact is for. For instance, the faience figures from the Temple Repositories are visually impressive, but they lack practical function in terms of mechanical causation. There is therefore a tendency to assume that the figures were objects of display, which were intended to be *seen* (e.g. Panagiotaki 1999, 273; Alberti 2001, 202). In other words, iconicity, the ability of an object to refer beyond itself, is considered to have been the main mode of meaning of ancient 'art objects', but this notion is clearly embedded in the modern western conceptions of art (Herva n.d.; Errington 1991, 270). There is no reason why the Knossian faience figures and other so-called art objects could not have been made, say, *in order to* break and deposit them. This observation does not imply that the iconic aspect of the figures is insignificant or uninteresting; rather, the point is that functionality is not self-evident or easily inferred from the formal qualities of artefacts.

The concept of object biography suggests that all artefacts, potentially, have several functions and meanings during their use-life. While it is still not uncommon in archaeology to treat objects as ahistorical 'finished artefacts', ethnographic data indicate that in many cases the

priority between form and process is contrary to our assumptions. For example, the making of artefacts can be more important than the resulting artefacts, which are, so to speak, mere by-products (e.g. Küchler 1987; Ingold 2000, 127–30, 198). What is of particular importance here is that breakage and deposition do not necessarily bring to an end the use-life of an artefact, but may only mark another phase in object biography (Chapman 2000, 25–6). Artefacts may well continue to be functional after deposition even though they are no longer visible and nothing is done with them.

An example from early modern England illustrates this notion. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, stoneware bottles filled with pins, nails and human substances were sometimes hidden in the structure of houses, often under the threshold or the fireplace, in order to prevent evil spirits from entering the house (Merrifield 1987). These so-called witch bottles, apparently, were considered perfectly functional objects after their deposition; in fact, deposition marked the beginning of their life *as* witch bottles. A stoneware bottle may have been used for other purposes before it was turned into an evil-spirit repellent, but there is no reason to believe that its use as a witch bottle was secondary in any meaningful sense. It is possible that the use of the bottle for an apotropaic purpose was more important than any function that the object had performed prior to its deposition. Without pushing the analogy too far, it seems worthwhile to explore the possibility that the artefacts found in Minoan building deposits continued to be for something even after their burial beneath or in buildings. While this is not really a novel idea in itself, its implications have not been explored in the context of Minoan building deposits.

MINOAN BUILDING DEPOSITS AS MAINTENANCE OF HUMAN-ENVIRONMENT RELATIONS

Day and Wilson have recently suggested that the site of Knossos on the Kephala Hill was, even before the construction of the palace, a source of ancestral, divine and political power that elites used to legitimize their position. Within this view, rituals performed at the site implied continuity with the past and thus allowed elites to claim ‘a moral or supernatural justification for their actions’ and ultimately to maintain the existing social order (Day and Wilson 2002, 148). The notion that the significance of a place stems at least partly from its past would indeed seem to be an instructive one. The view proposed by Day and Wilson may, however, be too narrow because rituals are reduced to mere *social* practices, tools for the manipulation of power relations between people. Bearing in mind that the life-world of the Minoans was presumably saturated with power and agency, I propose to pursue the idea that some rituals might better be understood as *ecological* practices, essentially practical maintenance of the relationship between humans and their lived-in world.

To illustrate the implications of this approach to the interpretation of Minoan building deposits, I first take a cue from Driessen (2001, 362–3), who links the deposits of pumice in LM I Crete to ‘crisis cults’, which in this particular case arose as a reaction to the environmental and psychological tension caused by the eruption of the Thera volcano. Since there appears to be a connection between building deposits and critical moments in the life histories of buildings, Minoan building deposits can more generally be understood as a reaction to situations of potential stress. For example, several deposits, including the Vat Room Deposit and the foundation deposit from the Mallia palace, were apparently associated with the initial construction of the palaces. The foundation deposits from Room 50 of the Phaistos palace and the foundation deposit from the Zakros palace, in turn, were related to the inauguration of new palaces. It seems plausible, though the connection is difficult to prove, that the building and

sealing of the Temple Repositories were associated with one of the several major rebuilding phases carried out at Knossos due to the destructions caused by earthquakes during MM IIIB and LM IA (see Niemeier 1994, 79; Macdonald 2002, 38–41). Moreover, it seems possible that deposits comparable to building deposits were also made when buildings or parts of them were abandoned. One wonders, for example, if the neatly organized assemblages of upside-down-turned vessels from some purported Minoan shrines reflect activities performed in these rooms during use-life or if they represent practices related to the very abandonment itself.

Minoan building deposits, then, were associated with the events when buildings were transformed and, according to the principle of mutualism discussed above, the relations between people and certain places redefined. By way of comparison, Fox (1997, 485) observes that in Mesoamerica buildings were generally considered to be ‘animate entities subjected to their own rites of passage’. Gell (1998, 142–3), in turn, notes that medieval churches were animated by installing holy relics into them.

Minoan building deposits can similarly be seen as a strategy of maintaining the life of buildings. As discussed above, artefacts are parts of people who made and owned them, and in burying artefacts beneath or in buildings, the social and environmental relations embodied by those artefacts were integrated in architectural structure. The incorporation of artefacts into architecture transformed parts of the people associated with those artefacts into parts of buildings themselves, thus strengthening the bond between people and the lived-in environment. Moreover, the making of such artefacts as faience figures, which required special knowledge and control of complex processes, perhaps involved non-human agents (or ‘magic’) (cf. Budd and Taylor 1995; Henderson 2000, 52). Through the deposition of such artefacts in buildings, the power or some qualities associated with certain non-human beings were also infiltrated into the texture of built environment. The incorporation of building deposits in the texture of built environment connected the present with the past at critical points in the history of buildings and implied continuity of life, which was to extend into the future.

The making of building deposits was not, of course, the only means of maintaining the successful continuity of human-environment relations. Other strategies involved the very decision to inhabit a certain place across generations (cf. Chapman 1997, 142–3, 146–8) and the incorporation of parts of earlier buildings in later ones. At Mallia, for instance, parts of a monumental EM IIB building were deliberately incorporated into a later structure (Schoep 2004, 245; also cf. Evans 2003, 35–9). The appropriation of the past and the maintenance of continuity, seen from the perspective advocated here, were not (only) a form of negotiating power relations in society; rather, they were a form of practical engagement with the environment. Building deposits were a small but apparently important element in the procreation of the life of buildings and, consequently, of people.

CONCLUSIONS

It may be too narrow-sighted to consider Minoan building deposits only in terms of the ‘religious’ and the ‘social’. An event of burying artefacts beneath or in buildings was presumably of social significance and provided possibilities for manipulating (power) relations between people. Nonetheless, it has been suggested in this paper that it was not only the ‘ritual’ itself that was important but also the very *being* of artefacts in the architectural texture. The deposition of artefacts did not necessarily mark the end of use-life but the beginning of a new phase in object biography; buried artefacts continued their life as a part of a place, the lived-in

environment. Also, the incorporation of artefacts into buildings need not be seen as communication with supernatural beings, or 'worship' in any meaningful sense. If one wishes to keep to the established vocabulary, it could be said that building deposits were 'offerings' to a place itself, not to some power that was external to it and originating in some other sphere of existence. The making of building deposits was an attempt to keep on good terms with the ancestral and other powers perceived to reside in palatial sites and affect human life, a practical technique of maintaining relations with buildings when they were undergoing transformation and in circumstances where human-environment relations were based on reciprocity and mutuality. The relations between people and a place, or some constituents of a place, were inherently social, and the being-in-the-world of the built environment, to paraphrase Köhler (2000, 68), was not understood reductively in terms of its utility to humans.

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