

From the volume: J. Driessen, I. Schoep & R. Laffineur (eds), *Monuments of Minos. Rethinking the Minoan Palaces. Proceedings of an International Workshop held in Louvain-la-Neuve, 2001 (Aegaeum 23), Liège, 2002, 1-15.*

‘The King Must Die’. Some observations on the use of Minoan Court Compounds¹

The title of my paper provokingly refers to M. Renault’s famous novel² in which a puppet King, ritually chosen, underwent self-imposed sacrifice after a year of marriage to the sacred Queen, hence reflecting a regenerating cycle of nature, till Theseus came along and upset the order of things. Rather than following her line of thought and defending some kind of matriarchy and a rotating or temporary, ritual kingship, for Minoan Crete, I have opted for a brief historical account of scholarly opinion on the nature of the ruler and occupant of ‘a Minoan palace’ followed by a critical assessment of the evidence. I also offer a new approach to the problem which starts from the Minoan ‘palace’ itself.

1. The Palace of King Minos ?

We may perhaps start with terminology. The word ‘palace’ on Minoan Crete is, as so many other terms, a matter of convention and it is of course partly Evans’ legacy that we have become accustomed to talk about ‘palaces’ and this term has become even more fixed through its use in the words Prepalatial, Protopalatial, Neopalatial and Postpalatial³. Essentially, however, the term ‘palace’ (from Latin *palatium*) refers to the “vast and sumptuous residence of a chief of state, of an important person or of a rich person” although in some languages, the word is also used to refer to a large building destined for a general, public use such as the ‘Palais des Sports’, ‘Palais des Beaux Arts’, ‘Palais de Justice’ etc⁴. This dichotomy in modern language is interesting and it will be picked up again in the second part of this paper. For reasons explained below, I suggest the term ‘court compound’, till we can more precisely determine the role of the Minoan building we traditionally call ‘palace’.

¹ As the workshop in which part of this paper was presented, the ideas here form part of the FSR ‘Topography of Power’ project at the UCL. I have learned much from T.F. Cunningham, F. Driessen-Gaignerot, I. Schoep and K. Vansteenhuyse. I thank Delia Riccardi-Percy for the tracings of the Knossos miniature frescoes.

² M. Renault, *The King Must Die*, New English Library, 1990 (reprint of the 1958 edition).

³ N. Platon, “Chronologie de la Crète et des Cyclades à l’Âge du Bronze”, in *Bericht über den V. Internationalen Kongress für Vor-und Frühgeschichte, Hamburg, 1958*, Berlin, 1961, 671-674. It is already obvious, for example, that the term Postpalatial can no longer be used to cover the entire Late Minoan III period. Hallager’s remedial ‘Monopalatial’ period for LM II-III A1 helps somewhat to rectify this, but the discovery of Linear B tablets in a LM IIIB layer at Khania also implies that some palatial and centralised authority still existed on the island in this late period (see E. Hallager, “Final Palatial Crete. An Essay in Minoan Chronology” in *Studies in Ancient History and Numismatics presented to Rudi Thomsen*, Aarhus, 1988, 11-21)

In general, the ‘palace’ as the residence of a chief of state is intimately connected with the notion of ‘royalty’⁵. From the time of the Linear B tablets onwards, be it LM II or IIIA, a *wanaks* ruled over parts of the island, a term that has been identified with Homeric *wanaks*, the ‘Great King’⁶. That a human ruler is meant in the case of the Linear B tablets seems clear and the implication is of course that Knossos, at the time of the Linear B tablets, had such a human ruler⁷, something perhaps also reflected by the ‘ruler of Keftiu’ inscriptions in Theban tombs⁸.

Even without having this information at his disposition, Schliemann already was in no doubt that the ruins uncovered by Kalokairinos in 1878 were those of a ‘palace’⁹. And when Arthur Evans started digging in the spring of 1900, assuming he was discovering a ‘Mycenaean’ type of building, he too immediately interpreted the remains he was excavating at Knossos as those of a ‘palace’. The mainland discoveries may indeed have tainted somewhat his explanation of the evidence but the discovery of a gypsum throne in the West Wing with the seat ‘hollowed out to suit the form of the human body’¹⁰ reinforced his interpretation. So, Evans continues, ‘the specially rich character of the relics found in the chamber itself [=the Throne Room] corroborates the conclusion that a royal personage once sat here for council, or for the enjoyment of the oriental *kéif*. The smaller size of the hollowed seat itself as compared with that from the neighbouring chamber [= the room of the Lady Seat] points to its occupant as a king rather than a queen’, an interpretation not shared by all his contemporaries¹¹. He had found his ‘lord of the palace’¹² and certain deposits, because of their extraordinary character, would henceforth receive the epithet

⁴ *Le petit Larousse Illustré*, 714.

⁵ “Among forms of political structure, kingship can be defined, rather inexactly, as rulership by a single individual holding a supreme office in a lifelong tenure, most often succeeding on a hereditary principle and wielding – or not, as the case may be – great personal power. As such it may be the single most frequent form of state government, but it is by no means the only one. It occurs typically both in states and in nonstate entities such as chiefdoms: there is no easy distinction between ‘chief’ and ‘king’ (J. Baines & N. Yoffee, “Order, Legitimacy and Wealth in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia”, in G.M. Feinman & J. Marcus (eds), *Archaic States*, Santa Fe, 1998, 205). In the case of Minoan Crete, Melas talks about ‘a hundred years of royalty syndrome’ (M. Melas, “Transcending the ‘Palace’: Kinship versus Kingship, and the Social Dimension of Minoan Ritual”, *Acts of the 7th International Cretological Congress*, Rethymnon, 1995, 613-624).

⁶ The closest Linear A term, **u.na.ka**, occurs on inscribed ritual vases, dedicated in peak sanctuaries etc. Since there are several examples of the alternation u/wa, it may suggest that the word is of Minoan origin. If the same sense is intended, perhaps something as ‘Lord’ is meant. I owe this observation to Paul Faure.

⁷ On this and other issues, see P. Rehak (ed.), *The Role of the Ruler in the Prehistoric Aegean (Aegaeum, 11)*, Liège, 1995.

⁸ See J. Driessen, “Kretes and Ijawones. Observations on the Identity of Late Bronze Age Knossians”, in J. Bennet & J. Driessen (eds), *Anaqota. Studies on Mycenaean Society and Economy presented to J.T. Killen (Minos Supplement, 20)*, (forthcoming)

⁹ See J. Driessen, *An Early Destruction in the Mycenaean Palace at Knossos (A.A.L., 2)*, Leuven, 1990, 16-31.

¹⁰ A.J. Evans, “Excavations at Knossos, 1900”, *BSA* 6 (1899-1900), 38; see P. Rehak, “Enthroned Figures in Aegean Art and the Function of the Mycenaean Megaron”, in Rehak o.c. (*supra* n. 7), 97-99 for a full discussion building further on N. Platon, “Μινωικοί θρόνοι”, *Kritika Chronika* 5 (1951), 385-412; the Knossos throne can hardly be earlier than LM IB, however.

¹¹ In a footnote, Evans adds that the popularity of female iconography could “favour the view that a queen had occupied the throne”, an alternative then preferred by his German colleague Wolters, but he decides against it; see also R. Koehl, “The Nature of Minoan Kingship”, in Rehak o.c. (*supra* n. 7), 25-26 on matriarchy; P.M. Warren, “Minoan Palaces”, *Scientific American* (July 1985), 102 also seems to opt for a ‘chief priestess’ as a ruler.

¹² A.J. Evans, “Excavations at Knossos, 1901”, *BSA* 7 (1900-1901), 66.

‘royal’ (e.g. Royal Gaming Board, Royal Pottery Stores etc.). When, in 1902, the Domestic Quarter was explored, Evans was convinced to have found “the centres of domestic and family life of the Palace”¹³, adding that there was no question of “a rigorous separation of the sexes in the ‘House of Minôs’”¹⁴. From then onwards, mythological Minos gradually creeps into the story as a pseudo-historical personage and by 1918, when the first volume of the ‘Palace of Minos’ was published, the legend had become reality. Whether ‘Minos’ was a historical figure or the royal or religious title of a local dynasty as Graves and Bernal (and Mary Renault) would like it¹⁵, he has acquired a permanent position within our studies that are called after him, as are his folks. That his was a later, Hellenic invention seems quite certain, however¹⁶. The fine stone throne from the Knossian ‘palace’ (and a not dissimilar example in poros from Katsamba¹⁷) provide a link with similar, quasi-permanent installations in the Mainland palaces where a human ruler with, apart from ceremonial and religious functions, a political role is quite likely¹⁸. Where the Knossian throne is concerned, studies by Mirié, Niemeier and Goodison have clarified its date and importance: while it may have belonged to the later occupation of the Knossian ‘palace’, it is also mainly attributed a religious significance for epiphany re-enactment and equinox or solstice observations¹⁹. But even if the Knossian throne also involves a political dimension, its date would imply that it belonged to the *wanaks* mentioned in the Knossian Linear B tablets and so it does not help us for the earlier Neopalatial period when similar installations are absent from the Minoan ‘Palaces’²⁰.

Our Minoan court compounds can of course still have been ‘palaces’ in the Near Eastern sense²¹ if we can prove the existence of ‘royalty’ or a hereditary kingship or perhaps simply of

¹³ A.J. Evans, “Excavations at Knossos, 1902”, *BSA* 8 (1901-02), 45.

¹⁴ Evans (*supra* n. 13), 45; see also J.W. Graham, *The Palaces of Minoan Crete*, Princeton, 1963, 84, 88, 92-93.

¹⁵ R. Graves, *The Greek Myth*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1960, I, 295; M. Bernal, *Black Athena: the Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, New Brunswick, 1991, 23.

¹⁶ Driessen (*supra* n. 8) (forthcoming).

¹⁷ The Katsamba example (without proper archaeological context) did not preserve its base and back part and its seat was hollowed ‘into cupules like a kernos’ (Rehak, *supra* n. 10), 98, plate XXXIIB; Platon (*supra* n. 10), fig. 1-2-3). Rehak, moreover, suggests that most Mycenaean iconographic evidence dates from a period before *wanaks* ideology was fully formed.

¹⁸ K. Kilian, “The Emergence of Wanax Ideology in the Mycenaean Palaces”, *OJA* 7 (1988), 291-302.

¹⁹ S. Mirié, *Das Thronraumareal des Palastes von Knossos*, Bonn, 1979; W.-D. Niemeier, “On the Function of the ‘Throne Room’ in the Palace at Knossos”, dans R. Hägg & N. Marinatos (eds), *The Function of the Minoan Palaces*, Stockholm, 1987, 163-168; L. Goodison, “From Tholos Tomb to Throne Room: Perceptions of the Sun in Minoan Ritual”, in R. Laffineur & R. Hägg (eds), *Potnia. Deities and Religion in the Aegean Bronze Age* (*Aegaeum*, 22), Liège & Austin, 2001, 77-88.

²⁰ O. Pelon, « Aspects de la vie religieuse minoenne à la lumière des recherches récentes au palais de Malia (Crète) », *CRAI* 1980, 658-670 ; O. Pelon (in this volume) would like the flat base situated in the centre of the *Loggia* in the Malia ‘palace’ to be for such a royal seat. That it served for a seat is quite likely but its position opposite the baetyl rather suggest a religious or ritual significance than a political one.

²¹ For Near Eastern palaces, see E. Heinrich, *Die Paläste im alten Mesopotamien*, Berlin, 1984 and J. Margueron, *Recherches sur les palais mésopotamiens de l’Âge du Bronze*, Paris, 1982; for Egyptian, New Kingdom, palaces, see P. Lacovara, *The New Kingdom Royal City*, London, 1997.

human rulers or ‘Big Men’ on the island or residing in the ‘palaces’, as assumed by many scholars²² and it is here that iconography should be of help. Granted, during Late Minoan IB, ‘possibly’ human figures – often male – show up much more prominently in Minoan iconography as discussed in the ‘Role of the Ruler’ volume and illustrated by the Master Impression, the Mother of the Mountain, the Chieftain Cup and now the Poros Ring²³. And, although these are isolated examples, they seem to fit in the general trend of societal changes that occur on the island as reaction to the Santorini eruption, as discussed in the Troubled Island²⁴. They may likewise announce the changes to come and the introduction of real royalty in LM II even if the iconography fits into the “notion of cosmic unity according to the Minoan concept”²⁵. In pre-Late Minoan IB contexts, however, such male figures are extremely rare. Generally, Minoan art (and here it is fair to quote Ellen Davis) may have served as propaganda, but not “as a proclamation of the supreme status or of the divine sanction of a ruler, but rather of the status and divine sanction of the cult. In this respect, Minoan art appears to be unique in the Eastern Mediterranean”²⁶. One can object that Mycenaean Greece likewise lacks such royal iconography whereas royalty is clearly attested in the tablets so we cannot use the absence of such an iconography on Crete to claim the non-existence of royalty. There are, however, two features on the Mainland present in other contemporary societies with royalty but lacking from Minoan Crete.

The first can be found in the architectural lay-out of the main buildings. Mycenaean palace architecture is clearly intended to serve a *human* ruler with an access pattern in which all possible efforts have been made to direct traffic towards the core of the complex: the throne near the hearth in the *megaron*²⁷. A similar observation can be made when looking at Near Eastern or Egyptian palace plans where either the ‘throne room’, a hall of investiture or ritual or a chamber of audience forms the target of any official visitor to the complex. This is not the case in the Minoan ‘palaces’

²² Warren (*supra* n. 11), 97, 101 assumed ‘powerful families who established dynasties as they built the palaces’.

²³ N. Dimopoulou & G. Rethemiotakis, « The ‘Sacred Conversation’ Ring from Poros », in I. Pini & W. Müller (eds), *Minoisch-Mykenische Glyptik. Stil, Ikonographie, Funktion. V. Internationales Siegel-Symposium, Marburg, 23.-25. September, 1999*, (CMS Beiheft, 6,) 39-56 for a recent synopsis.

²⁴ J. Driessen & C.F. Macdonald, *The Troubled Island. Minoan Crete before and after the Santorini Eruption*, (Aegaeum, 17), Liège & Austin, 1998.

²⁵ Dimopoulou & Rethemiotakis (*supra* n. 23), 55.

²⁶ E. Davis, “Art and Politics in the Aegean: The Missing Ruler”, in Rehak, *o.c.* (*supra*, n. 11), 19.

²⁷ See the instructive circulation plans of Mycenaean palaces in M. Küpper, *Mykenische Architektur. Material, Bearbeitungstechnik, Konstruktion und Erscheinungsbild*, Espelkamp, 1996, 273, Abb. 220.1-2, and, most recently, W. Cavanagh, “Empty Space? Courts and Squares in Mycenaean Towns”, in K. Branigan (ed.), *Urbanism in the Aegean Bronze Age (Sheffield Studies in Aegean Archaeology, Sheffield, 2001, 119-134, esp. 130*, as well as O. Pelon, “La naissance des palais dans le Proche-Orient et dans l’Égée: Contribution à l’étude du développement d’un système architectural”, in P. Darcque & R. Treuil (eds), *L’Habitat égéen préhistorique. Actes de la Table Ronde internationale (BCH, Supplément, 29)*, Paris, 1990, 265-279, esp. 271-272 : « l’organisation de l’édifice [=the Mesopotamian palace] ne se fait pas autour d’une cour...mais autour d’un quartier ou bloc architectural... ».

where the circulation pattern obviously leads to the central court²⁸, as discussed below, and we look in vain to find a specific room or feature (staircase etc.) that would inextricably draw the official visitor. The best would-be candidate or target, the Minoan Hall, has been interpreted as an audience room where a wooden throne would have stood but, apart from its size and sometimes decoration, these halls are identical to their homonyms found in elite buildings²⁹. In the Knossos Palace, moreover, the ‘Hall of the Double Axes’ is located at basement level in the East Wing: a visitor entering the complex via the Northern Entrance Passage would have to cross the Central Court, pass the East Portico³⁰, descend the Grand Staircase for two floors and pass a number of other rooms, before reaching it and, although this may ultimately have been the intention to live up the reputation as Daedalos’ labyrinth, it is against an interpretation as an official reception room serving non-local visitors³¹.

A second observation is also difficult to reconcile with the existence of royalty in Minoan Crete. This is the absence of burials that can be described as ‘royal’, meaning that a single interment received so much attention in the way of energy investment in the tomb construction and offerings that set him or her apart from his or her contemporaries. We have such ‘royal’ tombs where the Mainland, the Near East and Mycenaean Crete are concerned, but we lack them on Minoan Crete at least till the end of the Neopalatial period³². From Early Minoan times onwards, group burial is common practice and even if an individual received more attention through larnax burial or offerings, all happened within the confines of the group³³. This does not imply that Minoan society was egalitarian, far from it, but this may rather have been a ‘flat’ or horizontal

²⁸ See J. Driessen, “Observations on the Central Courts of the Minoan Palaces”, in E. Hatzaki & A. Vasilakis, *Knossos. From Palace to Polis. Proceedings of an International Conference held in Iraklion, 15-18 November, 2000* (forthcoming).

²⁹ That the Hall of Double Axes was where the King resided is a popular idea, understandably suggested in guides available at the site (e.g. A. Michailidou, *Knossos: A Complete Guide to the Palace of Minos*, Athens, 1989) but uncritically taken over by scientific studies (e.g. K.V. Flannery, “The Ground Plans of Archaic States”, in G.M. Feinman & J. Marcus (eds), *Archaic States*, Santa Fe, 1998, 22).

³⁰ J.W. Shaw, “Reconstructing the Missing Façade of the Central Court in the Palace at Knossos”, *103rd Annual Meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America* (forthcoming). I thank J. Shaw for sending me the manuscript.

³¹ C. Palyvou, “Circulatory Patterns in Minoan Architecture”, in R. Hägg & N. Marinatos (eds), *The Function of the Minoan Palaces*, Stockholm, 1987, 197-198, fig. 2, calls the Minoan Hall in the palaces a ‘meeting point’ where an access deriving from the entrance and an access from the private apartments on the upper floor confront each other. The problem with the Hall of the Double Axes is that both its accesses seem to come from at least semi-private (or semi-public directions).

³² The ‘nécropole royale’ of Chrysolakkos at Malia remains, despite its name, an enigmatic case: its location and finds (including an altar for ancestral cult) suggest that the building indeed served for funerary purposes but more likely for a group than for an individual. The same is true for the built tomb at Myrtos-Pyrgos (which comprised more than 60 skulls); see L. Preston, “Mortuary Practices and the Negotiation of Social Identities at LM II Knossos”, *BSA* 94 (1999), 131-144.

³³ See the papers by K. Branigan, J. Murphy, A. Karytinou, C. Maggidis and Y. Hamilakis in K. Branigan (ed.), *Cemetery and Society in the Aegean Bronze Age (Sheffield Studies in Aegean Archaeology)*, Sheffield, 1998. In the Poros tombs, the same tombs seem to have been used continuously for the burying of ‘the local elites and commoners’ (Dimopoulou & Rethemiotakis (*supra* n. 23), 56).

hierarchy as is the case in so-called ‘faceless polities’, societies organised in corporate groups, as Vansteenhuyse has suggested for Minoan Crete³⁴, an idea I also develop below.

2. What is a Minoan ‘Palace’ then ?

The well-known definition of a Minoan palace as a combination of Buckingham Palace, Whitehall, Westminster Abbey and Wembley Stadium³⁵ assumes a combination of residential, political, religious and public functions and usually an important economic function is added, especially concerning production, trade and storage. But is this really the case? Did every Minoan ‘Palace’ really serve all these functions to the same degree? Evans himself was convinced the ‘palace’ was more of a ‘palace-sanctuary’ where religious and political functions completed each other and balanced each other, i.e. a real sanctuary with also a residential and political aspect. Afterwards two main tendencies developed³⁶:

The first consisted in downgrading the religious functions of the building, turning it into a vast architectural complex constructed to answer exclusively to residential, political or economical needs. The ‘palace’ hence united a large number of habitation and reception areas, utilitarian rooms for ‘royal’ officials such as scribes and artisans as well as a number of magazines for the storage of goods deriving from royal propriety. This secularising tendency is notable amongst some Italian (Banti, Pernier), and especially Anglo-Saxon writers³⁷. For them, the palace was primarily concerned with the redistribution of commodities : the authorities took foremost care in collecting primary materials, natural or human, in their transformation and their redistribution, either in the shape of rations to workers and artists, or in the shape of gifts to the elite, in exchange goods for trade and in treasure that can be re-converted in times of troubles. This is Halstead’s social security system and Branigan’s social storage³⁸, especially where the First Palaces are concerned.

A second tendency prefers to exclude the political aspect from the building altogether, seeing it as a large complex entirely devoted to cult and as the main religious building of Minoan

³⁴ See K. Vansteenhuyse, “A Study of the Political Institution in Neopalatial Minoan Crete”, in *SOMA 2001*, 23-25 February (BAR Int. Series) (forthcoming) and his contribution to this volume.

³⁵ Cf. P. Halstead, “From Determinism to Uncertainty: Social Storage and the Rise of the Minoan Palace”, in A. Sheridan & G. Bailey (eds), *Economic Archaeology: Towards an Integrated Approach* (BAR), 1981, 201.

³⁶ A third hypothesis – better not given too much attention – was defended by the German pharmacist H. Wunderlich in his book ‘Wohin der Stier Europa trug’, translated as Wunderlich, H., *The Secret of Crete*, London, 1975: the Palace of Knossos (as well as the others) would be nothing else than a large necropolis imitating Egyptian examples; his arguments are especially founded on the presence of gypsum, on the pithoi in the Magazines (which would have contained mummified bodies) and on the importance of the West Entrance – the Gate of Death !

³⁷ For a good discussion, see O. Pelon, « Le palais minoen en tant que lieu de culte », in G. Roux (ed.), *Temples et Sanctuaires (Travaux de la Maison de l’Orient, 7)*, Paris, 1984, 61-74, esp. 62;

³⁸ Halstead (*supra* n. 35) and K. Branigan, “Some Observations on State Formation in Crete”, in *Problems in Greek Prehistory, BSA Manchester 1986 Conference*, Bristol, 1988, 62-68.

Crete. This point of view was especially formulated by P. Faure³⁹. For him, the Minoan ‘palace’ was analogous to the great temples of the Levant and especially those of Mesopotamia but also to some of the large sanctuaries of classical Greece and to the monasteries of Byzantine Greece with the building serving to house a religious economic community. The real royal residence according to the same scholar had to be looked for elsewhere : in the Little Palace at Knossos, in the *villa reale* at Hagia Triada for Phaistos, in *Maison Epsilon* at Malia and in House A at Zakros. Faure’s hypothesis was reactivated in 1990 by Manolis Melas⁴⁰, who, after also having reviewed the evidence for Minoan kingship and for a non-palatial function of the ‘palaces’, prefers to see them as exclusively ceremonial centres and as ‘important cult centres for all Minoans’⁴¹, as some kind of Monastery or Temple or a combination of the two, of which feasting was an important element.

A variation of this hypothesis was recently proposed in a popular work by R. Castleden, who, perhaps influenced by Renault’s novel, sees the Knossos ‘Palace’ as *The Temple of the Goddess* ⁴²(1990, 1997), with, scattered throughout the building around the ‘Court of the Bull’, a series of sanctuaries (‘of the throne’, ‘of the snake goddess’, ‘tripartite shrine’ etc.). Following this view, each ‘palace’ is called a ‘Temple’ and he goes so far as to modify the chronological phases (*Early Temple Period*, *Second Temple Period* etc.). Another variant to this view is proposed in Hitchcock’s recent book on Minoan architecture⁴³ where she defends the idea that each ‘palace’ had a specific local cult (e.g. the bull cult at Knossos, the water or Poseidon cult at Zakros). There are of course many scholars who have insisted on the fact that ‘l’édifice de culte par excellence dans la Crète minoenne est le palais, qui réunit en lui à la fois les principaux emplacements cérémoniels et les petites pièces destinées aux manifestations plus intimes’⁴⁴.

There are some interpretations that seem to close the gap between these extremes. Sinclair Hood, for instance, has stressed the absence from Crete of major free-standing temples in the Near Eastern and Egyptian sense where these buildings are easily identifiable. Since something similar should have existed on Crete, it seems logical to attribute their function to the ‘Court Compounds’ which are therefore called residences of gods and men, as ‘centres of administration and residences

³⁹ P. Faure, *La vie quotidienne en Crète au temps de Minos*, Paris, 1973, 188.

⁴⁰ Melas (*supra* n. 5), 613-624.

⁴¹ Melas (*supra* n. 5), 620.

⁴² R. Castleden, *The Knossos Labyrinth. A New view of the ‘Palace of Minos’ at Knossos*, London, 1990; Idem, *Knossos. The Temple of the Goddess*, Athens, 1997.

⁴³ L.A. Hitchcock, *Minoan Architecture: A Contextual Analysis* (SIMA-PB, 155), Jonsered, 2000, 91-98, with reviews by J. McEnroe in *AJA* 106 (2002), 123-124 and myself in *Classical Quarterly* (forthcoming).

⁴⁴ Pelon (*supra* n. 37), 74 ; see also O. Pelon, « Particularités et développement des palais minoens », in E. Lévy (éd.), *Le système palatial en Orient, en Grèce et à Rome*, Strasbourg, 1987, 187-201 ; G. Gesell, G., « The Minoan Palace and Public Cult », in R. Hägg & N. Marinatos (eds), *The Function of the Minoan Palaces*, Stockholm, 1987, 123-127.

of human rulers, but also as sanctuaries and homes of gods'⁴⁵. 'Temple-Palaces', hence, that had administrative functions, served as the residence of a political authority and as the residences and sanctuaries of the divinities. He accepts the existence of a king with religious functions, similar to Evans' Priest-King.

These contrasting views illustrate clearly that the last word has not been said about the function of these complexes. The absence of royal iconography and burial and the attention to group activities suggest another hypothesis which is here explored: that the Court Compounds served in the first place as communal, ceremonial centres that were used both by non-elite (outside) and by elite groups (inside) as meeting places for ritual, integrative actions⁴⁶. This hypothesis, in fact, seems a logical outcome from a new analysis of the monument that is the Minoan 'palace'.

As stressed by Trigger, Bradley and others, 'monuments' imply *monere* 'to remind', 'to commemorate' and monuments "are about memory: they join the past to the present"⁴⁷. Societies remember through rituals – a specialised kind of communication during which the past is re-enacted in the present. Rituals, Bradley continues, "follow a set pattern and may communicate through unusual media such as song and dance"⁴⁸. Rituals are inextricably related to places, both natural and artificial, that help to condition the pattern of movement during the ceremony and, in this regard, rituals and places work together. Elsewhere I have argued that, from the mature EM IIA period onwards, enclosed courts were constructed to manipulate the performance, the visual perception as well as the communicative potential of specific, unifying and integrative rituals that originally took place outside in the open⁴⁹. Henceforth these rituals could now both spatially and temporally be controlled by being anchored at a particular place where they were obstructed from view through the construction of screen walls⁵⁰. It is clear that this process implies an institutionalisation of these rituals since the specific environment which they received implied an element of permanence, of intensification⁵¹ and of standardisation, reflected by the repetition in

⁴⁵ M.S.F. Hood, "The Minoan Palace as Residence of Gods and Men", in *Acts of the 7th International Cretological Congress*, Rethymnon 1995, 393-407.

⁴⁶ This hypothesis is, I believe, closer to the one dismissed by Melas (*supra* n. 5, 617-619) in his discussion on the function of the 'palaces', namely that they could have been a combination of secular and ritual centres, communal houses for the surrounding settlements and wider regions.

⁴⁷ B. Trigger, "Monumental Architecture: a thermodynamic explanation of symbolic Behaviour", *World Archaeology* 22 (1980), 119-132; R. Bradley, *Altering the Earth* (1992 Rhind Lectures), Edinburgh, 1993, 2.

⁴⁸ Bradley, *o.c.* (*supra* n. 47), 2 (citing M. Bloch, *Ritual, History and Power*, London, 1989). For some of the rituals see S.C. German, *Performance and the Art of the Aegean Bronze Age*, PhD Univ. of Columbia, 1999.

⁴⁹ Driessen (*supra* n. 28). I prefer to see dancing rituals as most important (cf. Y. Garfinkel, "Dancing and the Beginning of Art Scenes in the Early Village Communities of the Near East and Southeast Europe", *Cambridge Journal of Archaeology* 8 (1998), 207-237) since these discipline a society in ways that authoritative force can rarely do.

⁵⁰ J.D. Moore, *Architecture & Power in the Ancient Andes. The Archaeology of Public Buildings*, Cambridge, 1996 for a refreshing new look at public architecture.

⁵¹ This becomes more obvious during the Neopalatial period when the Central Courts receive temporary installations that are usually interpreted as cultic e.g. the baetyl and altar at Malia, the altar at Zakros etc.

modular design of these Central Courts which undoubtedly corresponds with a set of prescribed rules that the rites taking place on the courts dictated. The Central Court should then foremost be seen as a constructed landscape, an artificially created space for the enactment of ritual action. If this hypothesis is accepted, it has some important consequences:

1. Particular sites were chosen for the location of these enclosed courts, creating a new sense of place, not only locally but altering the entire landscape or region. Why at that particular spot on the sites of Knossos, Phaistos or Malia is, however, a question that we cannot yet answer. It may be related to celestial observations, as J.A. MacGillivray prefers, or to features of the natural or artificial landscape (e.g. Neolithic tell, peak sanctuary, chasm etc.).
2. By enclosing the court, the time range of the rituals were changed and given an intergenerational dimension, linking the past to present.
3. The anchoring of rituals within an enclosed place must also have had tremendous social and political repercussions since it reflects the development of a hierarchy in society through selection and exclusion.

Both features, rituals and monument, henceforth worked together turning the place into an ideal formalised information vehicle with great potential for communication and remembrance, especially during specific ceremonies.

The question is of course whether the Central Court of the Minoan 'Palace' simply fulfils yet another function of an edifice that served a plethora of purposes or whether the entire complex may be seen as a formalised Central Court, as a ceremonial centre or court compound? I tend to believe the second for a particular reason: the Central Court, in each of the respective 'palaces', is the *final* destination, the target of the circulation pattern of the complex⁵². At all times, indeed, the Central Court formed part of a well established, conceptualised urbanistic and ritual landscape and the destination of a process in which progressive, hierarchical selection was at work. This is also expressed by some of the miniature frescoes found in the 'palace' at Knossos (Figs 1 & 2): that of the Sacred Groove and Dance takes place outside, probably on the West Court, and involved a large number of men and women, whereas the scene depicted on the Fresco of the Tripartite Shrine or Grand Stand probably took place on the Central Court and involved large crowds but apparently

⁵² In contrast to many ancient buildings, serving human or divine power, of which the circulation pattern is axial or linear, that of a Minoan 'Palace' is entirely different, as was already stressed by K. Devitt, *Knossos Revisited. An Architectural Analysis of the Palace at Knossos*. Unpublished Ph dissertation, Saint Louis University, 1982, 407, 409: "making this central courtyard the focus of the circulation and intercommunication system".

of different age⁵³. Large-scale groups – perhaps the entire community – would be involved in collective rites taking place on the West Courts⁵⁴ but access to the Central Court would be restricted to specific social groups, both male and female. It explains why I prefer the term ‘Court Compound’ since it somehow refers to the interplay of different courts since outer courts and inner courts act together in a single, encompassing ritual action. It also implies that I regard the structures around the court as ancillary, as secondary rooms that screen off and add to the main function of the complex: serving as an artificial open but enclosed place for specific rituals including feasting, dancing, processions, sacrifices and communal meals. There is either iconographical or archaeological evidence for these different group activities⁵⁵ and, in an important paper, Moody insisted on the commensality function of the complex, serving primarily for the organisation of communal meals during religious festivities that served as a source of power⁵⁶. The storage – obvious in the case of the Knossos and Malia buildings but less impressive elsewhere – would especially have been organised with a specific ritual goal in mind. Recent excavations seem to prove her right: especially at Petras⁵⁷ and Galatas⁵⁸, but also in the Splantzia Quarter at Chania⁵⁹, ample evidence was found not only for the processing of foodstuff but especially for the consumption of small quantities of food and beverages by larger groups within these complexes. A similar function has also been suggested in a very interesting paper by Day and Wilson where the Early Minoan Knossos Palace is concerned⁶⁰ and every visitor to the Phaistos ‘palace’ is still surprised by the high number of mortars and other domestic implements related to food production that are nowadays stored in the West Wing magazines. In this sense, I combine ideas by Halstead, Branigan, Moody and Melas.

If the Court Compounds derive their power and aura through their links with the past, it is also clear that their sheer scale and elaboration imply organisation and co-ordination, not only where their initial construction and maintenance is involved, but also where the regular

⁵³ See especially E. Davis, “The Knossos Miniature Frescoes and the Function of the Central Courts”, in R. Hägg & N. Marinatos (eds), *The Function of the Minoan Palaces*, Stockholm, 1987, 157-161 but also C. Boulotis, “Villes et palais dans l’art égéen du 2ème millénaire av. J.-C.” in Darcque & Treuil (o.c. supra n.), 442-447.

⁵⁴ N. Marinatos, “Public Festivals in the West Courts of the Palaces”, in R. Hägg & N. Marinatos (eds), *The Function of the Minoan Palaces*, Stockholm, 1987, 135-142.

⁵⁵ See K. Vansteenhuyse’s paper in this volume.

⁵⁶ J. Moody, “The Minoan Palace as a Prestige Artifact” in R. Hägg & N. Marinatos (eds), *The Function of the Minoan Palaces*, Stockholm, 1987, 235-240; see also Melas (*supra* n. 5) for a similar idea.

⁵⁷ M. Tsipopoulou, “Before, During, After: The Architectural Phases of the Palatial Building at Petras, Siteia”, in P.P. Betancourt, V. Karageorghis, R. Laffineur & W.-D. Niemeier (eds), *Meletemata. Studies in Aegean Archaeology presented to Malcolm H. Wiener (Aegaeum, 20)*, Liège, 1999:847-855, and her contribution to this volume.

⁵⁸ Already Rethemiotakis, G., “The Hearths of the Minoan Palace at Galatas”, in P.P. Betancourt, V. Karageorghis, R. Laffineur & W.-D. Niemeier (eds), *Meletemata. Studies in Aegean Archaeology presented to Malcolm H. Wiener (Aegaeum, 20)*, Liège, 1999: 721-727, and his contribution to this volume.

⁵⁹ M. Vlasaki, this volume.

⁶⁰ P.M. Day & D.E. Wilson, “Landscapes of Memory, Craft and Power in Pre-Palatial and Proto-Palatial Knossos”, in Y. Hamilakis (ed.), *Labyrinth Revisited: Rethinking ‘Minoan’ Archaeology*, Oxford (forthcoming); I thank P. Day for making the manuscript available prior to publication.

organisation of rituals, feasts and ceremonies is concerned, so that those who controlled these compounds, controlled the past as well as the present⁶¹.

The question is then: who was in control and where did political power reside? The Court Compound was a *dominant locale*, or, as described in recent archaeological theory (e.g. Thomas, Gregory, Giddens): “a place to which subjects repeatedly return, and which serves to generate the major structural principles implicated in the constitution of different types of societies....Such dominant locales are central to the way in which societies *bind* space and time, by acting as storers of authoritative and allocative resources....Such spaces will tend to be architectural...”⁶². The ‘Minoan Palace’ seems such a ‘storer of authoritative and allocative resources’ since it is a space that carries elements of ideology and religion through the rituals, on the one hand, and of elements of production and technology for the feasting, on the other hand. Power over such resources would then mean political power and, in normal cases, those persons assumed power that were closer to the ancestors, i.e. the elders, or those that possessed arcane knowledge, access to which was regulated through initiation rites, i.e. the priests, or those that had control over surplus resources, i.e. the wealthy. However, through the separation of ritual from civic space, two worlds were created within a single community, something that occurs at Knossos and in the other major centres but is also replicated in minor localities such as Myrtos-Pyrgos, Petras, Gournia or Nirou Chani. In each case, the complex is characterised by a court, the ritual space par excellence and, although the difference between e.g. Knossos on the one hand, and Myrtos-Pyrgos is striking (size, organisation, functional differentiation), they share sufficient features that permit them to be placed along a single continuum, with the gap being harmoniously filled by court buildings such as Makryghialos, Petras, Zakros, Galatas and Malia. The difference between ceremonial public monumental and private monumental architecture is gradual, discrete and subtle and, apart from size and the presence of a central court, very few other features seem exclusively reserved for one or the other. There is hence a definite democratic or egalitarian element in the nature as well as distribution of court compounds and in the fact that the court is the target. The world of the Minoans seems to have adhered to ‘a cognitive code that emphasizes a corporate solidarity of society as an integrated whole, based on natural, fixed, and immutable interdependence between subgroups’⁶³. Blanton refers to the cases of Teotihuacán and the Indus Civilisation as archaic states where there is “an absence of royal tombs; few or no figural representations of, or textual

⁶¹ On social memory control and on spatially contextualized memory, see the recent paper by S.E. Alcock, ‘The Reconfiguration of Memory in the eastern Roman empire’, in S.E. Alcock, T.N. D’Altroy, K.D. Morrison & C.M. Sinopoli (eds), *Empires. Perspectives from Archaeology and History*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, 323-350, esp. 325.

⁶² J. Thomas, ‘The Hermeneutics of Megalithic Space’, in C. Tilley (ed.), *Interpretative Archaeology*, Oxford, 1993, 73-98, esp. p. 77 quoting work by Gregory and Giddens.

references to, specific rulers; and no named ruling dynasties”⁶⁴. In the case of Minoan Crete, it would imply that the “ecumenical viewpoint of the corporate orientation supplants or replaces the ancestral ritual that legitimated the control of the society by a few high-ranking individuals or households and replaces it with collective representations and the accompanying ritual emphasizing universalistic themes of fertility and renewal in society and cosmos”⁶⁵. It implies that decisions are made in assemblies made up of the constituent groups of a society whereas resolutions are implemented by a specialised, nondurative administrative staff, selected or chosen according to personal qualities. Other characteristics of such corporate societies, still following Blanton, are e.g. a non-exclusionary use of metallurgy, a decentralisation of ritual, less attention to ancestor worship, an absence of portraiture in art, the common use of writing but for ‘practical’, apolitical purposes only, and the presence of semiautonomous lower-order centres and self-governing households, all features that seem to characterise Minoan society up till the LM IB period. Households, especially, receive elaborate attention as does the decentralisation of ritual (also reflected by the repetition of courts in minor sites). As with Harappa culture, “social integration was achieved through the widespread acceptance of a broadly shared cognitive code that resulted in a surprising degree of similarity and artefacts (despite decentralized production)”⁶⁶. That social differences existed in Minoan society seems obvious from the differences in scale and elaboration of domestic architecture and the selective process at work in the court compound’s layout, but social conflict seems to have been limited, undoubtedly because the integration of groups through ritual forged an allegiance that was strong enough to be regarded as an ideology⁶⁷. It may be assumed that Crete’s insular position held it at large from corrupting influences from nearby centralistic bureaucratic states as pharaonic Egypt. In fact, later Cretan society was very much organised along corporate lines according to Aristotle (Politics II, 10.1)⁶⁸, who attributes its origin to ‘king Minos’: aristocratic groups delegating a small number of officials as executive power (*Kosmes*) and a council made up of ex-officials (‘the Ancient Ones’; *Boulè*). According to Aristotle, the entire community of men, women and children took part in free, communal meals (*syssities*) provided by the state, whereas other writers limit such banquets to men only or special categories of men. Aristotle also concludes that it is the island’s isolated position that kept the

⁶³ R.E. Blanton, G.M. Feinman, S.A. Kowalewski & P.N. Peregrine, “A Dual-Processual Theory for the Evolution of Mesoamerican Civilization”, *Current Anthropology* 37: 1 (1996), 1-14.

⁶⁴ R.E. Blanton, “Beyond Centralization. Steps Toward a Theory of Egalitarian Behavior in Archaic States”, in G.M. Feinman & J. Marcus (eds), *Archaic States*, Sante Fe, 1998, 149 (and referring to Blanton, Feinman, Kowalewski & Peregrine *supra* n. 63)

⁶⁵ Blanton (*supra* n. 64), 150.

⁶⁶ Blanton (*supra* n. 64), 170.

⁶⁷ P.M. Warren, “The Genesis of the Minoan Palace”, in R. Hägg & N. Marinatos (eds), *The Function of the Minoan Palaces*, Stockholm, 1987, 54, seems already to have considered the possibility that ritual integration may have prevented internal dissent.

⁶⁸ Compare with Plato’s ‘ideal polity’. I thank F. Driessen-Gaignerot for this reference.

system intact. Without going so far as claiming a Minoan origin for these practices, it remains a possibility that Minoan society was indeed already organised along similar lines.

How do we visualise this? In a settlement such as Palaikastro, for example, I suspect a number of groups to have existed, large extended families with their clientele, forming some kind of clans. It may be suggested that each of these clan groups had at its disposal one large house with a 'Palaikastro Hall', a large room with four columns around a sunken basin⁶⁹. These Halls are regularly distributed in different blocks along Main Street and a similar observation applies perhaps to those houses containing Minoan Halls in sites such as Knossos, Tylissos and Malia. The senior members of each clan may have assembled within the Court Compound's elaborate rooms for the running of the settlement whereas, for feasts and religious celebrations, different segments of the community participated in various ritual actions held either outside and/or within the Compound.

Throughout the Minoan periods, a development may be observed. As mentioned, the manipulation of the rituals through constructed space implies that a particular social group at a given moment (EM IIB) spatially and temporally controlled these rituals, allowing participation only by selection. The incremental care given to regulate the access to the respective buildings and the courts therein and to the screening of the court may then be interpreted socially, as a rise in hierarchy perhaps along with demography. A quantum leap, however, is evident during Late Minoan IB⁷⁰, when additional measures were taken to reduce the accessibility of the compounds in general and the courts in particular. This seems to imply that at least in the beginning less hierarchical conditions prevailed and that the complexes had a more public or community function in accordance with the circulation and access pattern of the compound, or rather that (elite ?) participation was wider then than during LM IB, when, along with other societal changes, a single group may have settled within the court compound at the same time heralding the end of a system that had been harmoniously operating for more than 500 years. But even when the building itself was in disrepair or unused, the group ritual use of the court may have continued.

This new reading of the role of the 'palaces' in Minoan society as communal buildings without a *primary* political and residential function but still serving as the main political arena, erected by a community for the fulfilling of religious and ritual tasks, does not claim to offer a definitive answer

⁶⁹ See J. Driessen & J.A. MacGillivray, "The Neopalatial Period in East Crete", in R. Laffineur (ed.), *Transition. Le Monde Egéen du Bronze Moyen au Bronze Récent, (Aegaeum, 3)*, Liège, 1989, 99-111, esp. 107 : «It may therefore be suggested that each of the main blocks originally contained a clan or a family unit the members of which, who did not leave through marriage, constructed houses against their ancestral home, the latter taking up functions which were not repeated again in the same expanded family unit....If this hypothesis is correct, the old families, which are concentrated along the main artery of the town, may have formed some kind of oligarchic administrative system...".

and much interpretative work remains to be done. If we want to progress, however, we should be aware that some of our traditional terminology imposes an interpretative ‘strait jacket’ on archaeological discourse: even if ‘Court Compound’ may not be the most flowery description for the Minoans’ most important ceremonial center, we should bury ‘King Minos’ while we ecstatically dance for the spring equinox on the court and rejoice in the regeneration of nature !

Jan Driessen

Fig. 1 : Knossos: Sacred Grove and Dance Fresco (D. Riccardi-Percy after PM III, Pl. XVIII).

Fig. 2: Knossos: Tripartite Fresco (D. Riccardi-Percy after PM III, Pl. XVI).

⁷⁰ Moody (*supra* n. 56), 239, J. Driessen, “Some Observations on the Modification of the Access Systems of Minoan Palaces”, *Aegean Archaeology* 2 (1995) [1997], 67-85; Driessen & Macdonald, *o.c.* (*supra* n. 24).