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BACK TO THE BEGINNING

REASSESSING SOCIAL AND POLITICAL COMPLEXITY ON
CRETE DURING THE EARLY AND MIDDLE BRONZE AGE

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Bridging the divide between the 'Prepalatial' and the 'Protopalatial' periods?

Ilse Schoep

The Middle Minoan IB period has, from the beginnings of Minoan archaeology, been taken as a crucial moment in the development of Minoan civilisation. In the literature it is widely accepted that MM IB saw the first construction of the monumental building complexes, which are conventionally termed 'First Palaces' or 'Old Palaces' and that their emergence signalled a new level of complexity (Renfrew 1972; Warren 1985; 1987; Watrous 1987; 2001; Cherry 1986; Cadogan 1987; Manning 1994; 2008; Parkinson and Galaty 2007). Evans himself took the construction of the 'Palaces' as marking the establishment of a hierarchical society ruled over by priest-kings (Evans 1921: 26). In his seminal 1986 article John Cherry argued that the 'twentieth century BC saw the appearance, in several regions of Crete, of complex monumental buildings (i.e. palaces) of closely similar form, the material embodiment of radically new institutional features and major changes in the organisational basis of Minoan society' (1986: 27). A series of innovations were initially related to the MM IB emergence of the Palaces (Cherry 1986; Warren 1987; Watrous 1987; 2001), including the fast-turning potter's wheel (Cherry 1986), script and administration (Weingarten 1990; 1994), palatial architecture (*e.g.*, ashlar masonry, the Minoan Hall etc) (Driessen 1990), long-distance contacts, urbanisation and specialised craft production (Walberg 1987; Wiener 1991; Warren 1994). For this reason MM IB has conventionally been perceived as a watershed in complexity and as the moment when 'states' first appeared on Crete (Cherry 1978; 1986), whether 'chiefdom-states' (Renfrew 1972: 367), 'minor states' (Renfrew 1972: 369), 'something more than a chiefdom but less than a state' (Renfrew 1972: 368–69), 'principalities' (Renfrew 1972: 367), 'segmentary states' (Knappett 1999) or 'secondary states' (Parkinson and Galaty 2007).

The main area of debate has been centred, not so much on whether such a MM IB explosion of complexity actually took place (Parkinson and Galaty 2007 for a recent example), but on the pace and trajectory of change, whether the result of slow incremental growth (Warren 1987; Branigan 1987; 1988) or a sudden explosion (Cherry 1983). Although Cherry (1983) was correct in criticising the deployment of time as an explanation for change, his scenario of a sudden explosion of complexity has contributed to a tendency to view the Early and Middle Bronze Age in polarising terms, resulting in an underestimation of social and economic complexity in the Early Bronze Age and an overestimation of complexity in the Middle Bronze Age.

In the last two decades new data and analytical techniques have made clear that the Early Bronze Age period was considerably more complex than previously envisaged and saw the appearance of a host of phenomena that were originally associated with the MM IB watershed, such as script and administration, 'palatial' architecture, long-distance contacts and specialised craft production (Branigan 1988; Soles 1992; Wilson and Day 1994; Day *et al.* 1997; Whitelaw *et al.* 1997; Haggis 1999; Schoep and Knappett 2004; Tomkins and Schoep 2010). Moreover closer study of the biographies of the 'First Palaces' is starting to reveal distinct local trajectories of development, which attest to a range of different construction dates spanning a much longer period than MM IB. Thus at Malia the 'First Palace' is constructed in EM III/MM IA and shows no signs of substantial modification in MM IB or MM II (Pelon 2005). At Phaistos, it has become clear that the orthostat West Facade should be redated to MM II and that it replaced a previous MM IB West Facade (La Rosa 2007), suggesting that there the 'First Palace' took shape during the course of MM IB–IIA (Militello this volume). In addition, it would appear now that prior to the emplacement of this MM IB–IIA structure, there was a deeper history of significance at this location marked by evidence for large-scale communal open-air ritual activity, stretching back to the late FN, and from EM II a series of major episodes of construction marked by large-scale terracing and ramped access points (Todaro and Di Tonto 2008; Todaro this volume). A similarly deep history of communal ritual activity can also now be traced for Knossos and it now seems likely that the emergence of the 'First Palace' there began well before MM IB, perhaps as early as EM I–II (Tomkins this volume). In contrast, at Petras the 'First Palace' was constructed only in MM IIA (Tsipopoulou 2002). It is equally important to note that at some sites, at least on current evidence, it would appear that a Palace or Court Building was never constructed, despite 'promising' developments in the Early Bronze Age (*e.g.*, Vasiliki, Mochlos, Palaikastro; Whitelaw 2004).

This emerging, divergent and very different picture of EBA complexity calls

into question the entire basis of the claim that MM IB represents a watershed in the development of more complex organisational forms (Schoep and Knappett 2004; Schoep 2006; Tomkins and Schoep 2010). Moreover it suggests that we need to reconfigure the way in which we frame and explore social development during the Early and Middle Bronze Age, moving from the old position where social practice in the two periods is modelled in opposing and largely contrasting terms to a more inclusive approach, where prehistoric social practice is characterised and analysed along common and comparable dimensions of variability (Tomkins and Schoep 2010).

Discursive fields in Minoan society: court buildings, cemeteries and private spaces

As a contribution to this, this paper will explore social practice during the Early and Middle Bronze Ages in terms of a single framework, in which any given society is understood to comprise different *fields of discourse* (for the term see Barrett 2000). Discourse is a means of communication; it draws upon and reproduces particular structures of knowledge, thus also reproducing relations of dominance between individuals and groups (Barrett 2000: 27). A field is defined by Barrett (2000: 28–29) as an arena in time-space occupied by virtue of the practice of a particular discourse. Such fields ‘shade off’ in time and space and contain material conditions (of which the archaeological evidence is the residue) which contribute towards the structuring of practice. Examples of such different fields of discourse from Minoan Crete would include the locale of the Court Building, cemeteries and private or residential space.

By framing Minoan society as composed of multiple such fields of discourse, one is better able to contextualise and compare social practice in time and space. This allows changes in the way Court Buildings were used and perceived in the Early and Middle Bronze Age to be characterised and related to contemporary changes in the funerary and the residential arenas. By examining social practice in this way, I will try to show that these different but contemporary spatial and temporal arenas fulfilled specific roles in the reproduction of society. This perspective on social reproduction undermines the validity of the approach that would see the Court Buildings *alone* as ‘black boxes’ or barometers for the understanding of Minoan society as a single totality in which the Palace is considered to have been the primary or only force and agent (Warren 1985: 94; Wiener 1991; 2007; Betancourt 2002).

An obvious practical problem, involved in contextualising and comparing

activity across these different fields of discourse within Minoan society, is that there are hardly any sites where these three fields are well documented in the Early and Middle Bronze Age. For Knossos, little is known of the early settlement and, as yet, the Early and Middle Bronze Age cemeteries remain unexcavated, most attention having been devoted to the Court Building and proximate residential areas. It is therefore assumed here that the cemetery of nearby Archanes Phourni represents a reasonably representative proxy dataset for EM II–MM II burial practice (Whitelaw 2004; Macdonald 2005). At Mochlos, the cemetery is relatively well known and the early settlement is being investigated (Seager 1912; Soles 2005; 2009). However, the cemeteries of Malia and Phaistos are respectively poorly understood (Treuil 2005) or scarcely known (Todaro this volume). For Phaistos proxy data is, however, available from nearby cemeteries (*e.g.*, Ayia Triada, Ayios Onouphrios). A second issue is scale and more generally regionality, since Court Buildings are not the rule within all scales of settlement or in all regions on Crete, indicating the existence of alternative forms and trajectories at the local and regional level.¹

Monumental architecture and the paradigm of a central authority

Before considering the data for the early Court Buildings in more detail, it is necessary first to give further consideration to the convention, widespread in twentieth century Minoan archaeology, that monumental architecture serves as a signifier of a particular social formation, typically one directed by a single centralised authority (*e.g.*, Childe 1950; Renfrew 1972; Warren 1985; 1994; 2002; Manning 1994; 2008; Betancourt 2002; cf. Barrett 1998: 256). In the case of the ‘First Palaces’ this central authority, whether primarily political and religious (*e.g.*, Evans’ priest-king) or also economic in nature (Warren 1985; Cherry 1986; Watrous 2001), has traditionally been understood to be resident within them (*e.g.*, Evans 1921; Cherry 1986; Cadogan 1987; Watrous 2001; Manning 2008) and to have exercised extensive control over a wider hinterland. In the Aegean, and particularly on Crete, the notion that this central authority (sometimes also called a ‘palatial elite’ or ‘centralised hierarchical authority’) took the form of a single managerial elite is deeply embedded in scholarship (Hamilakis 2002). Thus Renfrew in *The Emergence of Civilisation* (1972) argued that the construction of the Palaces should be explained as the result of the actions of a single elite body. Similarly the presumption that power and authority were wielded by a single managerial elite group also lies at the heart of Halstead’s social storage model (Halstead 1981; 1982). More recently, however, it has

become apparent that by modelling power in such specific and simplistic terms we have polarised and obscured any meaningful assessment of complexity in the Early Bronze Age. As Haggis (1999: 56) has argued, ‘by seeking evidence of hierarchy as a sign-post for a complex socio-political structure, it is unlikely that observable forms of Prepalatial social and economic organisation can be shown to be developmental precursors of palatial forms’.

Moreover, elsewhere in archaeology the existence of a single managerial elite or centralised authority is no longer seen as a condition for the existence of monumental architecture or conspicuous consumption. For example, work on the British Bronze Age has shown that monuments such as Stonehenge were constructed by a wider community and not just by a single leader (Barrett 1994). This raises the question of what the nature of these earlier monumental buildings then was, who constructed them and for what purpose. Barrett has questioned the notion that monumental architecture might be seen as a reflection of a certain type of society and has argued that the construction and transformation of the megalithic monuments was as important to the societies that built them as the final product (Barrett 1994; 1998: 256). Monuments should not be seen simply as a passive reflection or record of the societies that built them, but, in a more active sense, as the medium by which social practices gained their vitality and thereby how social life was reproduced and transformed. This seems to be equally true of the first Minoan Court Buildings, which are increasingly being understood as structures performing a ceremonial function for a wider community (Schoep 2002; Driessen 2002; Relaki 2004; this volume; Todaro this volume; Tomkins this volume), not least because of their usually prominent location and the presence of gathering spaces for large crowds of people. However, in order to understand why and how they became the focus of a community, we need to explore when and how they came into being and why in the places that they did.

The long biographies of the Court Buildings

One key aspect of the early Court Buildings seems to be an association with locales already redolent with meaning. Day and Wilson (2002: 148; see also Evans 1928: 2–3) have argued that the deep Neolithic history of occupation at Knossos played a role in the construction and legitimation of the Court Building on the Kephala hill: ‘The great antiquity of Knossos, perhaps resulting from the belief that it was the ancestral home of the original settlers of Crete, may have given it a special status and even sanctity which set it apart from other sites in

the area'. Although it is debatable whether the site was indeed the home 'of the original settlers of Crete' (Tomkins 2008: 31–32), there can be no doubt that the Kephala hill at Knossos had come to be imbued with special meaning by the beginning of the Bronze Age, if not the late FN (Tomkins this volume). In the case of Phaistos, there is now good evidence, in the form of large deposits of tableware and animal bone, to suggest that the location of the later Lower West Court was set aside for feasting from as early as the late FN (Todaro and Di Tonto 2008). Todaro (this volume) notes that from FN IV the wider region around Phaistos began to be settled and suggests that the new sites were perhaps settled by people from Phaistos. This would provide an explanation for the participation of people from the wider region, as suggested by the very large groups of people implied in the quantities of animal bone being consumed.

At Malia no such rich late FN–early EM heritage is obviously apparent below the EM III/MM IA Court Building. This lacuna, real or not, is all the more striking because of the presence of what appears to be an EM IIB building or group of related buildings, aligned upon and constructed around a large open space, stratified beneath the floors of the present Court Building and above EM IIA architecture on a different orientation (Hue and Pelon 1999; Pelon 2005 for overview). Although the picture is at present incomplete, there seems little reason to doubt that the various separate exposures of aligned EM IIB architecture belong to a single building complex, rather than 'scattered houses' as has been argued (Watrous 2001). It is remarkable that this EM IIB building had exactly the same orientation and shared the same general form (*i.e.*, a series of rooms constructed around a large court to the north, west and probably east) as the EM III/MM IA Court Building, which itself remained in use until MM IIB (Pelon 2005; Schoep 2004 for references). More generally, the construction of the earliest EM IIB Court Building coincides with a period of nucleation at Malia, by the end of which occupation at sites in and around the Malia plain had ceased and Malia had grown to a size of at least 4 ha (Müller 1996; 1997; Whitelaw this volume).

The existence of a similarly early Court Building at EM II Knossos had been considered moot given the widespread belief, since Evans, that EM strata had been entirely removed from the hill-top by a massive levelling event in MM I that was thought to have preceded the construction of the 'First Palace'. However, recent work by Tomkins has drastically changed this picture (see Tomkins this volume). The initial large-scale levelling of the hilltop now appears to date much earlier, to one or more episodes between the end of FN and EM I, with additional episodes of levelling and terracing on the lower slopes of the hill apparent in EM I, EM IIA, EM IIB (see also Wilson 1994; 2008) as well as EM

III, MM IA and MM IB. Moreover, it would seem that there are now strong hints as to the existence and form of a complex of public buildings constructed during the course of EM I–II around a large Central Court. These were then further added to and modified in EM III with the addition of the Northwest Terrace and the Early Keep. In addition, the MM IA phase, traces of which were believed to be scanty (MacGillivray 1994; 1998; Macdonald 2005), now appears to be a major phase of construction with a large-scale terracing, levelling and construction project on the east slope (Tomkins this volume). Thus most of the major wall lines of the MM IB–MM IIA Court Building would now appear to have been established during EM II–MM IA and remained in use throughout the Neopalatial and LM II–III periods (Macdonald and Knappett 2007: 169).

Our knowledge of the biography of the Court Building at Phaistos has also changed greatly in recent years (La Rosa 2002; 2007; Todaro 2005; this volume; Tomasello 1999; Militello this volume). After EM I the hill was not abandoned, as was previously assumed (Relaki 2004), but continued to be occupied and was reorganised, first at the beginning of EM IIA and again and more decisively at the beginning of EM III, resulting in the creation of the terraces upon which the First Court Building was later built. These works coincide with a shift in the locus of habitation to the northernmost and southernmost slopes of the hill, a shift which might be interpreted as a further sign that the hilltop had acquired a specialised function (Todaro this volume). Considering the long history of building and rebuilding activity and the nature of the practices taking place during the Early Bronze Age and into the Middle Bronze Age in the area of the MM IB–MM IIA Court Building, the emergence of the ‘First Palace’ at Phaistos can no longer be considered a sudden event, unrelated to what might hitherto have been going on in this location. This deeper history of ritual significance for the locale, in which the later Court Building developed, in particular the prior existence of a court, helps to explain why the steep and challenging lower slope of the hill was chosen as the site of the Southwest Quarter, constructed in MM IB.

In the case of Petras, although the Court Building was only constructed early in MM IIA, indirect traces of communal consumption may be suggested by the large amounts of MM IB tableware and ritual equipment from the ‘Lakkos’, which has been argued to represent the remains of diacritical feasting, in which different tablewares were connected to different consuming groups (see Haggis 2007). This good quality pottery was a secondary deposit of material, cleared from the upper plateau during the modification of the hill to accommodate the Palace at the start of MM IIA. This suggests that the plateau, which became

the location of a Court Building in MM IIA, may well have been a focus for ritualised communal consumption in EM III and MM IA. In this way, ritual practice in the MM IIA and MM IIB Court Building at Petras might also be understood as also drawing upon a pre-existing tradition and one that was perhaps not accompanied by monumental architecture.

If it is accepted that the earliest Court Buildings were constructed in locales already central to the cosmological beliefs of the societies that constructed them, this would suggest that these buildings drew upon and perpetuated aspects of this significance. That the importance of the past continued to resonate in the present would seem to be indicated by general continuities in the structure and use of space in these locations and, above all, by the intentional preservation of portions of early architecture. Thus, for example, at Malia a vault with EM IIB vases *in situ* beneath the later Magazine I1 (Pelon 1992: 64, fig. 41) appears to have been intentionally incorporated into the EM III/MM IA Court Building. Since the space beneath Magazine I1 does not appear to have functioned in any obvious practical way, such as an entrance or corridor, its incorporation into the later building would seem to be symbolic and linked to notions of continuity in function or significance. The objects left in place on the floor of the large MM I–II rooms beneath Room III1 (*i.e.*, Chamaizi juglets, an ivory figurine, a stone pyxis and two swords; Pelon 2005: 187) could perhaps also be explained in this way. They must have been deposited here intentionally since it was common practice to remove valuable objects or to redeposit them in a structured manner and in a specially designed place (*e.g.*, the Temple Repositories in Knossos, Hatzaki 2009). Pelon (2005: 190) has observed a general tendency towards the incorporation of archaic elements of unspecified date into the material culture, which contrasts strongly with the innovations that take place in MM II in the architecture and material culture of the settlement (Schoep 2002).

It may therefore be concluded that the locales of the later Court Buildings, at least in the cases of Knossos and Phaistos, were important arenas for the negotiation and maintenance of social norms and values with prior histories of ritual practice stretching back to the beginning of the Bronze Age, if not the end of the Neolithic. In this way the acts of construction associated with the Court Buildings at Knossos and Phaistos might be understood as taking a set of meanings that were already soaked into a particular place in the landscape and focusing them more directly upon contemporary concerns (cf. also Barrett 1998: 255). By appropriating a locale imbued with meaning, ‘the timeless values which seemingly governed order in the world were increasingly mediated and therefore *controlled by the actions of a restricted group*’ (Barrett 1998: 255–56, *my italics*). What form this restricted group took in the case of the early Court

Buildings is not clear (see also Macdonald 2005: 22), but the evidence from the contemporary Early Bronze Age funerary realm would seem to suggest that it involved several groups, rather than a single dominant household or a single 'central authority' (Schoep 2006). A plurality of contributing groups would also be suggested by the scale and episodic nature of the construction of these monumental buildings, which clearly involved the united effort of several groups of people, and possibly also by the way space is configured within them (Tomkins this volume).

This deeper significance of ritual practice imbued the first Court Buildings with cosmological significance and provided certain groups with the ideal medium for legitimising their status and activities. The cosmological significance and the repetition of related ceremonies of consumption in the same locale over a long period would have lent this arena, and the practices associated with it, a powerful sense of tradition and continuity. This emphasis on continuity, manifest most obviously in the intentional preservation of older elements, whether ceramic or architectural, perhaps served to make change appear less drastic, more acceptable and, perhaps, divinely sanctioned (see also Relaki this volume).

Social practice in the Court Buildings

Continuity in the location and architectural components of the first Court Buildings finds a corollary in continuities in social practice. Although little is known about the precise details of the nature, timing and structure of the ceremonies that took place in the Early and Middle Bronze Age Court Buildings, it seems clear that they involved the ritualised consumption of food and drink by large groups of people. More tentatively, we may venture some hypotheses as to where these acts of consumption took place and perhaps even how they may have been structured.

At Knossos it is now clear that the area of the later Central Court was already a ritual focus of the settlement during FN IV and EM I, and that this court was progressively extended during FN IV–EM I and again in EM III/MM IA, after which its form and size appears to have stabilised, with only limited subsequent extension to the south in MM III (Macdonald 2002; Tomkins this volume). A narrow western forecourt probably fronted the Court Building in EM III, and probably also EM II (Tomkins this volume), serving to buffer it from the residential area that lay further to the west below the western half of the present West Court (Momigliano 2007; Wilson 2008). It has been suggested that the West Court remained small and narrow during MM I–II (Macdonald 2005: 45;

Macdonald and Knappett 2007) and thus that it could not have functioned as a large gathering space. However, there now seems to be good reason to connect the construction of the Kouloures and the deposition of a large MM IB fill with a large western extension to the court in MM IB. This extension was situated opposite the main West Entrance and provided an enlarged space suitable for massed gatherings, with its own ritual foci for deposition in the form of the Kouloures (Tomkins this volume). Other gathering spaces to be constructed in or after MM IB are the Northwest Court, in the region of the later Theatral Area, a South Court in the area of the Early Paving, an East Court on the Lower East Terrace and most, if not all, of these peripheral courts appear to have been associated with entrances and ramps which gave access to the Court Building and/or the Central Court (Tomkins this volume).

The MM IB–II Court Building at Phaistos appears also to have been surrounded by multiple peripheral courts to the west, north and perhaps east (Schoep 2004; Militello this volume; Todaro this volume). The Central Court itself does not appear to have been accessible from the south on account of a massive east-west terrace wall in this location (Militello this volume). In general, there seem to be good reasons for thinking that differences in function and/or significance existed between these different courts, both between internal (*i.e.*, the Central Court) and external spaces and between different external spaces, as suggested by the likelihood that the Upper West Court was a specialised area for ritualised craft activity (Todaro this volume). It seems likely that access to certain internal courts, above all the Central Court, became increasingly restricted and thus a means of reproducing status differences.

If, as seems likely, ceremonial activity in the Court Buildings was at least in part court-based, then perhaps we might learn more about the nature and structure of court-based ritual by looking at patterning in the pottery discarded in and around the Court Buildings. In the case of Knossos the typology of the late FN and EM I pottery combined with the presence of separate hearth foci within the Court, would seem to suggest that early court-based ritual there was sub-divided into separate consuming units of approximately the same scale as the household group implied by the size of later Neolithic domestic architectural units (Tomkins 2004; 2010; this volume). Day and Wilson have suggested that the fill from the Early Well (EM I) represents the debris from a single or a small number of drinking/feasting ceremonies (Day and Wilson 2002: 151; 2004; but see Whitelaw this volume), and these may well have taken place in the Court on the hilltop. Changes in the typology of tableware, most notably the appearance of the footed goblet, in EM IIA late imply a change to the structure of commensality and an increase in the potential size of the commensal unit (Day and Wilson

2002; 2004; Wilson 2008; Tomkins and Schoep 2010). This change seems to coincide with the rapid expansion of the Court Building (via the construction of a series of seemingly discrete peripheral buildings) and, if related, these two developments may suggest that ritual practice now sought to reproduce a new and larger-scale corporate identity, above that of the household and below that of the community (Tomkins this volume). From EM II there is evidence at Knossos for large scale consumption and deposition of cups, shallow bowls and pouring vessels; drinking sets, in other words, which have been associated with group feasting (Day and Wilson 2002: 149–51; Wilson 2008).

Although there is a strong communal (*i.e.*, aimed at inclusion at a communal scale) aspect to consumption in the Court Buildings this need not imply an egalitarian structure. Indeed the existence of social difference and hierarchy within these corporate groups, at least by MM IB, would seem to be indicated by the pyramidal structure of the MM IB pottery deposit from Early Magazine A (*i.e.*, a single Eggshell Ware goblet at the top, followed by ten relatively fine goblets, twenty less fine goblets and about forty roughly-made goblets; Macdonald and Knappett 2007: 57–68). Differences in quality and quantity also exist among the MM IIA tableware from the ‘Royal Pottery Stores’ (MacGillivray 1998). Inter- and intra-group hierarchies may also have been articulated by the attire and attributes of the participants (*e.g.*, headgear or body adornments, such as seals, jewellery and daggers) and by differential access to different parts of the Court Building. Discrete assemblages of MM I and MM II vessels from rooms within the Court Buildings at Knossos (*e.g.*, the amphorae, jugs, bowls, goblets, miniature vessels and imported tumblers of the MM IA–B Vat Room Deposit; MacGillivray 1998; Panagiotaki 1999) and Phaistos (Militello this volume) suggest that these internal spaces generally played host to smaller and more select groups of people. In this way differential access to and participation in practices taking place in the Court Building reflected and reproduced both heterarchical and hierarchical differences within their surrounding urban communities.

Further insight into the practices taking place in the MM I Court Building at Knossos is provided by the contents of the Vat Room Deposit, which has been described as cult paraphernalia and which appears to testify to a strong degree of continuity with the later (MM III–LM IA; Macdonald this volume) Temple Repositories in this part of the West Wing (Panagiotaki 1999). Besides pottery, the deposit contained pieces and cores of obsidian from Yiali and Anatolia (Carter 2004: 178), rock crystal, ivory, ostrich shell, faience inlays, gold, a fragmentary faience figurine and two sealings, which had been deposited either during a destruction (Panagiotaki 1999) or reflect a more structured deposition (Hatzaki 2009). Besides finished objects, there is also evidence for production

debris, seemingly indicating a close link between the production of high-value objects and their use within the Court Buildings (Carter 2004: 281). Worth mentioning in this regard is the evidence from Phaistos for the setting aside of the Upper West Court as a locale for the ritualised production of ceramic vessels, seemingly for use in rituals associated with the Court Building (Todaro this volume). Both the production *and* consumption of these objects could have played an important role in the material embodiment of cosmological beliefs and in the construction of corporate and communal identities.

Taken together the evidence suggests that the EM II–MM II Court Buildings were symbolically charged locales, central to the cosmologies of their attendant communities. They were places where social status was negotiated, maintained and contested, where alliances were formed and where social norms and values were established and promoted. This was achieved primarily via the medium of ritualised commensality, which appears to have taken place at a variety of scales, from small scale, exclusive and intimate elite dining to large-scale, inclusive corporate and communal feasting.

Social practice in the funerary arena

Whereas the architecture, location and rituals of the EM II–MM II Court Buildings give an impression of continuity and tradition, the funerary realm during the same period seems to be punctuated by a number of upheavals. The first major break with earlier mortuary practices is signalled by the construction from EM I of artificial, above-ground funerary foci. The great visibility of tombs, especially from EM IIA onwards, contrasts sharply with the scarcity or absence of archaeologically-visible forms of burial during the Neolithic (Dimopoulou 2004; Tomkins and Schoep 2010; Tomkins in press) and, to a lesser extent, with the limited visibility of tombs during EM I (Alexiou and Warren 2004; Relaki 2004; Papadatos 2005; Legarra Herrero this volume). This increased visibility seems to go hand in hand with an extraordinary deposition of wealth in certain EM II–III tombs and cemeteries, albeit manifest at different times and in different ways in different places. Thus, whereas in MM IA and MM IB Mochlos shows considerably less funerary action than in EM II–MM IA, at Archanes Phourni there is a sharp decrease in burial activity in EM IIB (in common with many other cemeteries, Legarra Herrero 2009; this volume) and a marked increase in the number of different burial complexes in MM IA and MM IB–MM II (Whitelaw 2004: fig. 13.2 and 13.10). At Malia there is, as yet, no evidence for the explosion in wealth witnessed at Mochlos and Archanes

Phourni, but it must be noted that only a small proportion of the cemetery has been excavated and, although the earliest phase of Chrysolakkos has been dated to EM III–MM IA, later pillaging has meant that little material was found (Demargne 1945; Soles 1992: 163–66).

It should be stressed that, while funerary goods and funerary practices cannot be used as a straightforward indicator of power relations within a society (Morris 1992; Voutsaki 1998), they can provide certain useful insights into social structure, provided one is able to contextualise them and thereby gain a sense of the social strategies that might have informed depositional behaviour. In the context of the Shaft Graves at Mycenae, Wolpert (2004) has pointed out that too much attention has been paid to the grave goods themselves and not enough to their social context. He emphasises that the acquisition of wealth and its deposition in tombs is insufficient on its own to strengthen personal prestige or to attract supporters, as status was negotiated in kinship obligations, such as marriage transactions and lineage affiliation, and not by stockpiling prestige items.

‘The staggering consumption in the shaft graves was not the mechanism for social change; rather it points out that narratives were being renegotiated and retold and contested, and this is where social changes resided. Competition was not enacted in deposition itself but rather in the redefinition of the social networks and lineage claims through the connotations attached to and negotiated for discrete assemblages’ (Wolpert 2004: 139).

This observation, transposed to Crete, would suggest that the deposition of wealth in the Early Minoan II–III tombs was not in and of itself enough to define high status or attract supporters.

Although EM II–III mortuary behaviour does not allow for straightforward identifications of hierarchy, at least in the traditional sense of a single central authority (Haggis 1999; Legarra Herrero this volume), there can be no doubt that it does contain expressions of differences in identity and status. This is, for instance, suggested by differences in tomb types within cemeteries (*e.g.*, Mochlos), differences in energy investment and burial mode (primary versus secondary; collective versus small groups etc) and differences in the quantity and quality of grave goods, not only within a single cemetery, but also within different cemeteries within a region (Schoep forthcoming). Also noteworthy in this respect is the preference for the deposition of imports or imitations of imports in Early Bronze Age tombs. In order for unusual objects to function as a prestige item, they need to be positioned within an existing conceptual framework, such as an origin myth, ancestral lineage or cosmological landscape (*e.g.*, Wolpert 2004: 129). In the case of Crete, many EM–MM grave goods seem

to be intended to convey access to and participation in long-distance exchange networks (Schoep 2006; Colburn 2008). Distance as a resource allows individuals and groups to demonstrate knowledge of absent or remote spaces, especially through the wearing of exotic materials and finished goods that transform the body into something qualitatively different (see Helms 1998). In this way grave goods with exotic connotations represent powerful statements that have the potential to legitimate status and symbolise social power (Schoep 2006).

It would seem that within different Early Bronze Age communities on Crete, certain individuals or groups sought to demonstrate their special or elite status by claiming affinities with a 'centre-out-there', rather than 'a-centre-up-there' (cf. Helms 1993: 176–77). Within the cemetery of Archanes Phourni differences may be noted in the specific configuration of affiliations and identities represented in each tomb. Thus the EM IIA burial stratum associated with Tholos Gamma contains objects with Cycladic parallels or affinities (*i.e.*, figurines, a marble bowl, obsidian blades, bone pins and pendants; Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellaraki 1997: 184; Papadatos 2005), whereas that from Tholos Epsilon provides the earliest evidence for hippopotamus ivory and gold, which suggest a connection with Egypt (Panagiotopoulos 2002). These different consumption strategies are both based on the manipulation of distance as a symbolic commodity. The presence of gold jewellery at EM II Mochlos is also revealing in this respect: gold was hard to come by and was either imported via the Northeast Aegean from further north or from Egypt (Broodbank 2000). The gold sheet was worked into diadems, pendants, hairpins, beads and bangles, with some revealing traces of wear (Hood 1979: 189). They must be considered important markers of status in life for women as well as men and it notable that such body adornment also occurs in the Early Bronze Age at Troy ('Priam's Treasure') and in the Royal Cemetery at Ur, dated to ca. 2600–2500 BC. A similar point may be made for sealstones and amulets, which become popular from EM II onwards and were meant to be worn on the body (Krzyszkowska 2005).² By situating themselves within a cosmological landscape and profiling themselves in life and death as 'qualitatively better' through associations with 'a centre-out-there', individuals were able to aspire to and legitimate a superior social position and status.

Fields of social discourse in Early and Middle Minoan Crete

Returning to the idea that societies reproduce themselves through different fields of discourse, it may be observed that the Court Buildings (and other simpler manifestations of intra-settlement court-based communal ritual³), on the one

hand, and the cemeteries, on the other, represent different but complementary fields of discourse, in which largely different ideologies and scales of social identity were constructed and reproduced. In particular, I would seek to draw a contrast between the smaller scale and more individualistic or corporate nature of funerary consumption and the larger-scale and ostensibly communal nature of the consumption associated with Court Buildings. In the case of the former, attention is focused on the individual components of a community (*i.e.*, on the individual and his or her relationship to individual kinship groups or lineages) and is thus more exclusive, in the latter the focus is on the community as a whole and its larger constituent corporate elements and is therefore more inclusive, in the sense that there was a place for all within a web of heterarchical and hierarchical arrangements. Relevant here also is the way in which participation in and around specific tombs is spatially restricted, both by the scale and configuration of tomb architecture and natural topography (*e.g.*, the ridge at Mochlos or the space around Building B at Archanes). The tendency to construct courts and altars in conjunction with some house-tombs and tholoi in EM III and MM IA (Soles 1992; Maggidis 2000: 186–88) might perhaps also be seen as reinforcing the ‘individualistic’ character of funerary consumption by providing a small court that could only fit a small number of people.

These differences in inclusivity/exclusivity and in the scales of identity being reproduced are reflected in the investment of energy in both types of arena: the early Court Buildings were a result of communal effort by large communities, in which several corporate groups/lineages would have heavily invested (‘heterarchy’), while individual tombs make sense as the result of the efforts of a single contributing group, whether that group was a household or a larger corporate group/lineage. In the case of smaller-sized communities, such as those of the Asterousia and the Mesara beyond Phaistos, this single contributing group could easily be commensurate with the community itself, whether drawn from a single settlement focus or dispersed through the landscape. That the explosion of wealth in the mortuary realm during EM II–III coincides broadly with an equally impressive period of investment in the Court Buildings at Knossos, Malia and Phaistos (Todaro this volume; Tomkins this volume) is probably not accidental. Rather than being seen as conflicting or unrelated, these two fields of discourse should be understood to be complementary. Under the guise of their communal character and their reliance upon a long continuity of associated practices, the early Court Buildings, together with smaller scale manifestations of court-based communal ritual, provided a stable location and medium for the reproduction of social relations and the legitimation of a particular social order. The continuities evident in the basic form and function of the ceramic

vessels consumed (Day and Wilson 2004), the hierarchical relationships reflected in certain pottery deposits (Macdonald and Knappett 2007) and the gradual increase in the quantity, size and complexity of courts in and around Court buildings suggest a situation where court-based communal ritual during EM II–MM I was highly formalised, strictly codified and governed by a communal ideology, albeit one in which social difference was formalised and legitimated. In contrast, the funerary field manifests a myriad of different practices, even within specific cemeteries or specific tombs. The impression gained is that there was much greater room for experimentation and innovation in funerary practice and that the governing ideologies were more obviously individualistic, opportunistic and competitive.

Moving through MM IB and into MM II, a number of changes are apparent. Dating this shift precisely, or establishing whether it was sudden or gradual, is currently not possible: the first signs of change are there in MM IB, but become more obvious during MM II. In the case of MM I–II burial practice, although the tendency towards variation and divergence continues (Legarra Herrero 2009; this volume), a general decline may be noted in the quantity and nature of funerary goods, despite the high visibility of some tomb complexes (Maggidis 1998: 98; Watrous 2001; Sbonias 2007; Legarra Herrero this volume).

This decreasing consumption of wealth in the mortuary realm during MM I–II seems to coincide with an explosion of investment in certain residences within settlements, manifest in new elite architectural styles and larger and more complex dwellings (Schoep 2002; 2004; 2006, 2009). Such investment clearly marks out the residence and its immediate context within a settlement as a third, key field of social discourse. It is unlikely that this represents the emergence of an entirely new field of social expression: while the current corpus of EM II–MM IA residential architecture is not one that allows for easy synchronic and diachronic comparison, there is good evidence, in the form of material (fabric, form, size) and symbolic (house models) investment in houses at Knossos, to suggest that the house was already a nexus for social reproduction during the later Neolithic (Tomkins 2004; 2010). That said, however, the scale and nature of the investment seen, for instance, in MM II Malia does seem to have been of a different order to what went before. There the urban landscape is characterised by the co-existence of several high-profile buildings (*e.g.*, Quartier Mu, the Crypte Hypostyle, the Magasins Dessenne) that distinguish themselves from more ordinary residences (*e.g.*, Maisons Sud, Gamma, Epsilon, Zeta and Theta) by their architecture, material culture and the nature of the practices attested within them (Schoep 2002; 2004; 2006; 2010). Although the MM IA ‘Maisons

Sud' were without doubt sizeable houses (150 to 270 m²) (Poursat 1996: 73), they lack the same investment in new architectural styles (van Effenterre 1980; Poursat 1992; Schoep 2004), they do not place equivalent emphasis on the creation of specific forms of elite culture (Schoep 2006; 2010) and they do not have the ceremonial rooms that are such notable features of Quartier Mu, the Crypte Hypostyle and the building complex that included the Sanctuaire aux Cornes (Bradfer-Burdet and Schmid 2005). The incorporation of ceremonial rooms in these complexes is of great importance (see Schoep 2004) because it implies the deliberate construction of smaller-scale ceremonial venues away from the Court Building, the main (communal) arena for social practice. This development can be seen as the bolstering and emphasising of specific households/lineages and their place in society in the context of the settlement, a tendency that will continue in the Neopalatial period.

In other MM I–II urban centres on Crete the picture is somewhat less clear. At Knossos, fragments of a large (125 m²) MM IIA residence have been brought to light in tests conducted to the southwest of the Court Building (Macdonald and Knappett 2007). The construction of S.V Wall 6 represents an attempt to monumentalise its facade and a redeposited fill produced evidence for not only workshop activities (relating to horns and sealstone or jewellery), but also writing and sealing (Macdonald and Knappett 2007: 172, 175). Although the evidence is fragmentary, such a concentration of features suggests that this structure may well originally have been comparable to the high-profile structures at Malia. Another possible (but unexplored) candidate for a high-profile building is the predecessor of the Little Palace, to which a stretch of orthostat façade has been attributed (Hatzaki 2005: 197). Despite the limited extent to which the MM I–II town has been explored, especially beyond the Kephala, other potential candidates exist at Knossos (*e.g.*, the predecessor of the Northeast House; the MM II building below the Arsenal) and in the settlements in the wider region (*e.g.* the MM II building at Archanes Tourkogeitonia, which may by this time have formed part of the wider community of Knossos). At Phaistos the evidence for high profile residences is generally lacking (Militello this volume), a possible exception being Rooms CV–CVIII on the Acropoli Mediana, which may have formed part of a larger complex. Such a pattern suggests the possibility that a different dynamic prevailed for Phaistos, although perhaps not for Ayia Triada, where the MM I–II building beneath the later 'villa' exhibits a considerable degree of investment (Carinci 1999; 2003).

Assuming that these high profile complexes at Malia, and perhaps Knossos, functioned as residences for an elite household and perhaps their immediate

dependants, it would seem that elites in these MM IB–II urban centres were directing an increasing proportion of their resources towards their residences, which, as a result, were becoming more conspicuous within the urban landscapes of north-central Crete. A concomitant decline in elite investment in tombs and cemeteries suggests that the main arena of individual and corporate conspicuous consumption had moved from the funerary to the residential. Such a change amounts to a shift in the field of discourse in which elite status and identity was reproduced.

A key element of this new strategy, most obviously seen at Malia, is a supplementation or appropriation of some of the ceremonial functions of the Court Building. Seemingly telling in this regard is the curious contrast at Malia between, on the one hand, the conspicuous investment in high profile buildings in MM IB–II (*e.g.*, Quartier Mu, Crypte Hypostyle, Magasins Dessenne) and, on the other, a general lack of investment in the Court Building after MM IA and before MM III–LM I. None of the architectural innovations that are so well attested in these residences were applied to the Court Building. This strategy would have served to bolster the positions of these elites in their community and, more specifically, betrays a special interest in appropriating the reproduction of larger-scale corporate identities. Through the incorporation of specifically designed venues (at Malia these take the form of subterranean gathering places with a clear hierarchical ordering of space), these residences became a focus of corporate consumption, parallel to the Court Building. Here the Court Building and elite residential spaces may be understood as constituting different fields of social discourse, the former continuing to stress a communal and inclusive ethos and functioning as an arena in which social order was legitimated, the latter now articulating more individualistic, exclusive and corporate identities that were previously negotiated and legitimated in the funerary sphere.

Currently the extent to which the Malia model can be seen to apply elsewhere is unclear. Insufficient investigation of the MM I–II town prevents a meaningful assessment of whether the pattern of differential investment also holds true for Knossos. In the case of Phaistos, however, the model is clearly different, even opposite to that of Malia, with evidence for residential investment scarce and equivocal during MM IB–II, at the same at which there is major investment in the Court Building (Militello this volume).

Conclusions

Two of the main tenets of twentieth century Minoan archaeology were that the large building complexes with courts functioned as palaces, in the conventional sense, and that their emergence in MM I coincided with ‘radically new institutional features and major changes in the organisational basis of Minoan society’ (Cherry 1986: 27), generally referred to as the emergence of state-level society. Early in the twenty-first century the data now available suggest a rather different scenario. An emergence of the Palaces in MM I no longer appears to be a phenomenon common to all regions or centres across the island nor does MM IB always appear to be the most significant phase in the biographies of the various early Court Buildings. Rather than palaces in the conventional sense, it is argued here that the early Court Buildings were arenas for the ritualised reproduction and legitimisation of a social order and performed a higher level integrative function for their surrounding urban communities. It is significant that these buildings, and the ritual practices that they hosted, can now in several cases be traced back over centuries or even more than a millennium into the early EM and late FN. At Knossos and Phaistos there is evidence for the use of courts or open spaces in FN IV for the ritualised consumption of food and drink. The transformation of the FN IV–EM I courts into monumental Court Buildings during EM II and III broadly coincides with the great visibility of funerary practice in EM II. The construction of a Court Building (*i.e.*, the integrating of a court within an architectural structure) is in fact a way of appropriating a locale in the landscape that was already imbued with meaning and probably played a role in the cosmology of a community. It is a mechanism to exert greater control over court-based communal ritual. Although it is certainly the decision of an ‘authority’, there is no evidence that we are dealing with a single centralised authority. Rather in their construction and maintenance one sees the collaborative and competitive efforts of different influential groups and their followers. By hosting and organising ceremonies involving the consumption of food and drink in a locale that was not only resonant with accumulated significance, but also the ritual focus of a community, the elites which headed these corporate groups could negotiate and legitimate their status, while their followers might demonstrate affiliation. In this way the Court Buildings offered all in society a place and a set of practices through which they might confirm their place within the social order and their wider universe.

I have tried to suggest that the Court Buildings, the funerary arena and residential space might be understood as constituting three complimentary fields

of social discourse. Whereas the funerary data, especially during EM II–III, testify to the active, ever-changing and competitive reproduction of individual and corporate social identities, the Court Buildings suggest an emphasis on continuity and formality in the reproduction of social values and norms and were concerned primarily with the integration of the community as a whole. Despite changes in the Court Buildings and in the funerary and residential arenas between the Early and the Middle Bronze Age, I have argued that the Court Buildings do not suddenly take on a new function during MM I and that society does not undergo a radical transformation. Rather I have tried to show that the main changes may be understood as reflecting diachronic changes of emphasis and strategy in the main fields in which social reproduction occurs. While it is not disputed that differences do exist between the Early and the Middle Bronze Age, it is suggested that these are secondary to an earlier period of social reconfiguration in EM II.

Moreover, at least some of the changes that we perceive as occurring around the transition between the Early and the Middle Bronze Ages can be seen to result from a shift in the main arena for social negotiation and consumption and not from the arrival of a new type of social formation, conventionally assumed to be the state. Whereas in the Early Bronze Age, the Court Buildings and the funerary sphere complimented each other as the main arenas of investment, by MM II, at least in Malia and perhaps Knossos, investment is focused on elite residences and kept away from the Court Building or for that matter the tombs. The incorporation of ceremonial spaces in high-profile residences, such as Building A at Quartier Mu, illustrates that certain groups were investing very heavily in the creation of personal ceremonial arenas, away from the more communal context of the Court Building. One wonders if this development points towards a tension between the communal ideology of the Court Building and the individual ideologies of elite groups or whether, conversely, it suggests that the Court Buildings themselves had come to be increasingly controlled by fewer elite groups?

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Notes

- 1 At this point in our knowledge it is unclear how these alternative local and regional trajectories might have been manifest nor can the incidence of courts and Court Buildings be accurately assessed.

- 2 Although, when viewed from the point of view of the Middle Bronze Age, the presence of sealstones in the Early Bronze Age seems unsurprising, when viewed from the perspective of the Final Neolithic and the EM I period this is a notable development. Sealstones are not an indigenous Cretan invention and they appear approximately at the same time on Crete and the Greek Mainland. It is clear that we are dealing with a fashion that spread from regions further east and it cannot be coincidence that seals first appear at approximately the same time as the first materials from Egypt and/or the Levant (e.g., EM IIA level in Tholos Epsilon at Archanes Phourni; Lebena Tholos IIA (Panagiotopoulos 2002; Papadatos 2005).
- 3 While the presence of Court Buildings from EM II appears to be confined to the larger, emerging urban centres, in the case of smaller communities, such as FN IV–EM IA Knossos, EM II Vasiliki or EM II Myrtos Fournou Korifi, residential space is juxtaposed with and often defines the edges of formal, centrally-located open spaces or courts. In all these contexts, however, the court provided a communal, consensual and legitimate context for social negotiation.

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