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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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# Contents

<i>Preface</i> .....	v
<i>Abbreviations</i> .....	vii
<i>List of Contributors</i> .....	ix
<i>Chronological Table</i> .....	xi
1 Back to the Beginning for the Early and Middle Bronze Age on Crete .....	1
<i>Ilse Schoep and Peter Tomkins</i>	
2 Behind the Horizon: Reconsidering the Genesis and Function of the ‘First Palace’ at Knossos (Final Neolithic IV–Middle Minoan IB).....	32
<i>Peter Tomkins</i>	
3 Palatial Knossos:the Early Years.....	81
<i>Colin F. Macdonald</i>	
4 The Urbanisation of Prehistoric Crete: Settlement Perspectives on Minoan State Formation.....	114
<i>Todd Whitelaw</i>	
5 The Emergence of Elite Groups at Protopalatial Malia. A Biography of Quartier Mu .....	177
<i>Jean-Claude Poursat</i>	
6 Trade and Interconnections in Lasithi between EM II and MM I, the Evidence from the Ayios Charalambos Cave .....	184
<i>Philip P. Betancourt</i>	
7 Craft Production and Social Practices at Prepalatial Phaistos: the Background to the First ‘Palace’ .....	195
<i>Simona Todaro</i>	

8	Emerging Authority: A Functional Analysis of the MM II Settlement of Phaistos.....	236
	<i>Pietro Militello</i>	
9	Regional Elite-Groups and the Production and Consumption of Seals in the Prepalatial period. A Case-Study of the Asterousia Region .....	273
	<i>Kostas Sbonias</i>	
10	The Social Arenas of Tradition. Investigating Collective and Individual Social Strategies in the Prepalatial and Protopalatial Mesara .....	290
	<i>Maria Relaki</i>	
11	The Construction, Deconstruction and Non-construction of Hierarchies in the Funerary Record of Prepalatial Crete .....	325
	<i>Borja Legarra Herrero</i>	
12	A Matrilocal House Society in Pre- and Protopalatial Crete?.....	358
	<i>Jan Driessen</i>	
13	A Regional Network Approach to Protopalatial Complexity .....	384
	<i>Carl Knappett</i>	
14	Bridging the divide between the ‘Prepalatial’ and the ‘Protopalatial’ periods? .....	403
	<i>Ilse Schoep</i>	
15	‘Back to the Beginning’ – An Overview.....	429
	<i>Peter Warren</i>	

## Back to the Beginning for the Early and Middle Bronze Age on Crete

*Ilse Schoep and Peter Tomkins*

‘Back to the Beginning’ seemed a particularly appropriate title for the present volume, and the 2008 workshop in Leuven from which it originates. More than a century has passed since the first discovery of the Bronze Age on Crete; more than eight decades since the appearance of the first volume of Arthur Evans’ *Palace of Minos* (1921), which so fundamentally shaped Minoan archaeology; and more than four decades since the beginning of ‘modern’ intensive fieldwork, which has utterly transformed the empirical basis for our understanding of the Early and Middle Minoan periods. In addition, recent decades have seen Minoanists returning to the early twentieth century beginnings of their discipline in order to re-evaluate their intellectual inheritance of ideas, assumptions and models (*e.g.*, Bintliff 1984; Momigliano 1999; MacGillivray 2000; Hamilakis 2002a; Papadopoulos 2005; Hamilakis and Momigliano 2006; Schoep 2010b). Such work is not a fringe intellectual indulgence, but is essential to the future health of the discipline, giving us the freedom to select those elements of that inheritance that remain of value and to reject that which is unhelpful or incorrect, without feeling burdened or unduly influenced by the cumulative weight of and specific directions taken by a century of previous scholarship. Granted such thinking space we are better able to recognise that we, just like our forebears, are engaged in a production of the Minoan past that is modern, contextual and constructed, informed as it is by our own specific ideas about and agendas for prehistory (Hamilakis 2002a: 15–16; see also Thomas 2000: 3–6; Barrett 2006). The time therefore seemed right to go back to the beginning, to evaluate the efficacy of our theories and models against the data we now have available and to explore anew what we really know about social and political complexity on

Crete between the late FN and MM II (c.3600–1750/00 BC; for chronology see Tomkins 2007b; Manning 2010).

### *An archaeology of progress*

It is now widely understood that for much of the twentieth century Minoan archaeology followed a trajectory largely determined by the circumstances that attended its birth. Caught up in overlapping colonialist, nationalist and modernist agendas, Minoan archaeology came to mean different things to different people (Bintliff 1984; McEnroe 2002). For its western European explorers it was an archaeology of progress, part of a broader cultural evolutionist project to account for the origins and development of modern, civilised European society (Bintliff 1984; Thomas 2000: 14–18; Hamilakis 2002a for a discussion; cf. also Yoffee 2005: 4–21). Prehistory was trawled for the *origins* of fundamental aspects of our modern existence, such as farming and sedentism, urbanism and inequality, art and civilisation and the changes that accompanied movement along this ladder of progress were conceived as taking place in aligned horizons of transformation or *revolutions*, be they Neolithic or Urban, Sedentary or Secondary Products (*e.g.*, Childe 1950; Renfrew 1972; 2001; Sherratt 1981; Cherry 1983; for a recent critique see Gamble 2007: 10–83). In the case of Minoan Crete, the key origin-point and revolution, around which a modernist narrative of progress might be constructed, has since Evans been held to be MM I, usually MM IB; a point in time that seemed to be embodied in the first construction of the monumental building complexes associated with large courts, which since Evans have been known as Palaces (Evans 1921; Branigan 1970; Renfrew 1972; Warren 1975; Cherry 1983; Whitelaw 1983).

Around this fixed point the Cretan Bronze Age was divided into ‘Prepalatial’ and ‘palatial’ periods (Platon 1966; Branigan 1970), thus abbreviating its complexity to a small number of large blocks of time, about which generalized and largely contrasting characterisations were developed (*e.g.*, Neolithic vs. MBA; Barrett and Damilati 2004: 150–53; Tomkins 2004: 39–40, table 3.1; 2010). Thus EM tended to be viewed in similar terms to the Neolithic as simple, village-based/non-urban, conservative and lacking craft specialisation (*e.g.*, Cherry 1983). In contrast MM seemed an altogether more familiar blend of modern traits, such as social inequality and complexity, art and craft specialisation, writing and administration and urbanism and state-level organisation (*e.g.*, Renfrew 1972: 7, 340). Within this framework, the only area to attract serious differences

of opinion was the trajectory of development that led up to this take-off point, with a majority favouring a gradual, incremental increase in complexity between EM II and MM I (e.g., Branigan 1970; Renfrew 1972; Warren 1975; 1987), and a minority suggesting the possibility of minimal increases in complexity during EM and a more rapid and revolutionary transformation during MM I (Cherry 1983; 1984; Watrous 1987; 2001: 174–79).

For Minoan archaeology, the culmination of this modernist project, in many ways, is represented by Renfrew's *Emergence of Civilisation* (1972). One can trace a shared mission from Evans to Childe (see Papadopoulos 1995) and from Childe to Renfrew. For all three the aim with the Cretan Bronze Age was to characterise what they understood to be Europe's earliest civilisation, to explain its emergence, establish its place in the evolution of modern western society and thereby a set of touchstones between the distant archaeological past on the southeastern border of Europe and the modern European present (Papadopoulos 1995; Hamilakis 2002a: 5–13). Naturally the three also differ greatly in the methods and theories that they brought to bear on this quest, not least in their specific understanding and modelling of civilisation and in where they chose to source the impulse to civilise, which swings, pendulum like, from an emphasis on indigenous transformation and thus an authentically European 'emergence of civilisation' (Evans 1921; Papadopoulos 2005; Schoep 2010b) to *ex oriente lux* (Childe 1942) and back again via the autonomist agenda of *Emergence* (Renfrew 1972; Halstead 2004). Nevertheless, the ultimate goal of their enquiries remains a shared modernist and Eurocentric one.

However, at the same time as representing what might be considered the high-point of this tradition, *Emergence* ultimately also contributed to the process whereby the goals, precepts and direction of Minoan archaeology have come to be altered. Although framed very much in evolutionist terms as a unilinear, abstracted ordering of human progress towards modernity (via 'civilisation'), *Emergence* to some extent broke free of this mould. While cultural evolutionist schemes have, with some justification, been accused of preferring abstraction to empirical respectability and of ordering but not explaining change (Hamilakis 2002a: 10–11; Yoffee 2005: 31–33), *Emergence* displays not only tremendous breadth and depth in its presentation of the data then available, but also a more specific interest in change, seeking to model it systemically as arising from interplay between a series of networked domains of human behaviour and thereby to develop a series of models to explain change that are specifically grounded in the data. In this way, *Emergence*, together with Branigan's *Prepalatial* (1970), reformulated the old questions, ordered and characterised the existing

data and from this developed a series of coherent explanatory models and testable propositions, exposed gaps in knowledge and opened up new fields of enquiry. While the origins of the empirical zeal that has gripped Cretan (and Aegean) prehistoric archaeology since the 1970s may be traced back to the pioneering field projects of the 1950s and 1960s (*e.g.*, Knossos, Phaistos), it is clear that major early synthetic works, such as *Prepalatial* and *Emergence*, were an important additional stimulus, refining the foci for fieldwork and encouraging a model-driven approach to enquiry. For two to three decades after *Emergence* Minoan archaeology continued to dance to the tune of progress, reifying unilinear explanations of the emergence of something profoundly advanced, revolutionary and more recognisably modern at the turn of the Middle Bronze Age, whether that something was termed ‘civilisation’, ‘civilised values’, ‘high culture’, ‘social complexity’, Palaces or states (Warren 1975; Cherry 1978; 1983; 1986; Whitelaw 1983; Manning 1994; 2008: 118–19; Knappett 1999b; Fitton 2002: 85–87; Bevan 2004).

### *A changed landscape*

The steady flow of new data since *Prepalatial* and *Emergence* means that we now have a considerably more complete and more finely resolved picture of the EM–MM II period than that available four decades ago. This represents a beginning of a rather different sort: an opportunity to develop a more nuanced set of understandings about Bronze Age Crete, which, in being constructed bottom up from the data, are more fully contextual and contingent. This beginning has been a long time coming. Not only has it taken time to appreciate the shape of the new picture emerging, but more significantly it has been far from easy for practitioners to rethink the understandings and precepts upon which Minoan archaeology had been constructed and to modify its initial goals and direction, as the vigorous discussions at the 2001 ‘Crete of the 100 Palaces’ workshop in Louvain, sadly not reproduced in the published volume (Driessen *et al.* 2002), demonstrated. A natural response has been to try to save the existing tree by cutting away ideas, models and explanations that seemed dead and by carefully pruning main stem theories and models to allow them to survive in this new empirical reality. Thus, to give two examples, redistribution (*e.g.*, Renfrew 1972: 265–307; Branigan 1987), whether of subsistence or material culture and whether palatially administered or otherwise, is no longer seen as the driving force in Bronze Age economies (see Halstead 2004), although may



still conceivably have played a minor role in certain contexts (*e.g.*, MM IIB Phaistos, Militello this volume; also Schoep 2010a). Likewise, one response to the poor fit between conventional definitions of the state, as manifest in undisputed instances of ancient state-level organisation in the Old and New Worlds (*e.g.*, Yoffee 2005: 33–43, table 3.1), and the MM I–II data for Crete, where hard evidence for large territorial states with centralised, palace-centred bureaucracies has proved hard to come by, has been to broaden the definition of states to allow them to be ‘segmentary’ and decentralised (*e.g.*, Knappett 1999b; this volume; cf. Marcus and Feinman 1998: 7–8) or ‘secondary’ rather than primary (Parkinson and Galaty 2008).

*From homogeneity to heterogeneity*

Also abandoned is the idea (central to *Emergence* and other archaeologies of progress) that the emergence of greater complexity followed a unilineal trajectory of development and was driven by a single set of underlying processes that operated in all regions, but with variable archaeological visibility (Whitelaw 2004). Models such as Peer Polity Interaction and the Early State Module were developed under the assumption that the development of complexity held equal pace across the island and that Cretan polities enjoyed equal or symmetrical power relations. Consequently reconstructions of political geography presented a static view with the island carved up into large, evenly-spaced and similarly sized territories of ca. 1500 km<sup>2</sup>, centred upon autonomous central places spaced an average of ca. 40 km apart, and with contiguous borders that left no room for the possibility of smaller autonomous polities in between (Renfrew 1986; Cherry 1986).

In time, however, the overwhelming evidence for bottom-up diversity through time-space, in areas as varied as the production, exchange and consumption of material culture, sealing and administrative practices, ritual and settlement, has forced an embracing of divergent local and regional trajectories of socio-economic development (Manning 1994; Whitelaw *et al.* 1997; Day *et al.* 1998; Sbonias 1999; Schoep 1999; Broodbank 2000; Driessen 2001; Haggis 2002; Relaki 2004; Whitelaw 2004; Legarra Herrero 2009; Tomkins and Schoep 2010). Thus it is now recognised that the differential distribution of resources within the landscapes of the Aegean (*e.g.*, Renfrew 1972: 265–307) translated into a diversity of local responses in the Bronze Age past. Several ecologically embedded strategies for livelihood, namely agriculture, trading and marginality, have been recognised, each of which enjoyed specific short-term advantages and disadvantages and different long-term growth potentials

(Whitelaw 2004; Tomkins 2010; Tomkins and Schoep 2010). Thus rather than a static configuration of large peer polities (cf. Cherry 1986: fig. 1), EM and MM Crete has become a changing mosaic of polities of varying sizes, forms, affiliations and trajectories of development.

This embracing of the ‘messiness’ of the Cretan Bronze Age past (cf. Hamilakis 2002a: 13) carries with it certain consequences for how we continue to frame Minoan archaeology. Not only must we now feel uneasy about the notions of cultural unity and singularity implied in our continued use of the adjective ‘Minoan’ (Day et al. 1998; Hamilakis 2002a: 17; Legarra Herrero 2009), but also we find that our original goal of contributing to a single grand narrative for the origins of modernity has now become swamped by a multitude of overlapping or contradicting narratives driven by the diversity now recognised in the data.

### *Early Minoan I: The Beginning of the Bronze Age?*

Recent work suggests that the beginnings of this process of divergence – and thus one might argue the Bronze Age as a field of social enquiry – lies not at the beginning of EM, as traditionally held (e.g., Betancourt 2009), but in the late FN (see Tomkins 2010; Tomkins and Schoep 2010). It is during this period (*i.e.*, FN III–IV; ca. 3600–3100/3000; Tomkins 2007b) that a fundamental shift in social rights and obligations can be detected, manifest most obviously in the emergence of the household as a socio-economic unit that is modular, in the sense that it was now more fully separable and independent and thus could be combined in new and different ways and scales to meet different circumstances. This period also seems to see a loosening of longstanding communal restrictions, governing the capacity for households to accumulate, cement and display differences in resources, and the emergence of an economy in prestige goods. Such changes facilitated the development of new strategies for livelihood, such as marginality and trading, and the new constructions of community that were necessary to exploit those agriculturally more marginal areas of the Cretan landscape, such as uplands, small islands and certain stretches of coastline, which are first settled in the late FN (Broodbank 2000: 150; Tomkins 2008: 38–40; 2010).

In this way it is becoming apparent that by allowing our investigation of the Bronze Age to be structured and limited by the boundaries of our chronological terminology, rather than the actual phenomena under study, we have left the very beginning of the process in which Bronze Age societies emerged, namely the late FN, under-investigated and poorly understood.

*Reassessing the Middle Minoan I 'horizon'*

Over the last two decades it has become clearer that the traits thought to define MM 'complexity', such as craft specialisation, social hierarchy, urbanism and state formation, do not emerge in an MM I emergence horizon, but rather at separate points before, during and after (for recent discussions see Haggis 2002; Schoep and Knappett 2004; Tomkins and Schoep 2010). Thus, in the case of craft specialisation, we now recognise a much deeper history, with some form of specialised household production of craft items, such as pottery and shell bead necklaces, possibly in operation from the beginning of LN (Tomkins 2004: 52–53). A significant change in the technology and organisation of ceramic production and distribution is apparent in EM I, which appears to testify to the appearance of independent, regionally located, full-time specialists, producing a range of distinctive products for a large and mainly local market (Wilson and Day 1994, 2000; Day *et al.* 1997; Whitelaw *et al.* 1997). Study also indicates strong continuities between EM II and MM, not just in patterns of ceramic distribution, but also in technologies of production; the latter well demonstrated by two wares produced in the Mesara, EM IIA Fine Painted and MM IIB Kamares, which have been shown to share the same technological features including clay paste recipes (Day *et al.* 2006) and now, it would appear, locations of production (*e.g.*, the west slope at Phaistos, Todaro this volume). Thus, while there is also evidence for change during MM I, represented most notably by the introduction of Polychrome Ware (MM IA) and the potter's wheel (MM IB; Knappett 1999a), there is no support in the ceramic data for the idea that MM I denotes a particularly pivotal horizon of change.

A number of the papers in the present volume make important further contributions to this revisionist approach to the MM I 'horizon' by clarifying the timing of the appearance of key phenomena, such as the Palaces, and eschewing the old binary opposition between EM and MM in favour of more nuanced readings of continuity and change between EM and MM. In her review of EM II–MM IIB sealing practices in the Mesara, Relaki questions the tendency to contrast an emphasis on the collective during EM II–MM IA with an emphasis on the individual during MM IB–II, and argues instead that MM I saw greater continuity than disruption. She suggests that MM sealing practice represents a continuation of an EM tradition of collective signification, but one modified by the addition of new practices and new contexts of use. While personal differentiation does appear to have become more pronounced during MM I–II, as earlier scholarship had maintained, Relaki argues persuasively that elements of collective representation continued to be prevalent during and after MM IB.

Similarly Sbonias, in his study of patterns of EM–MM seal production and distribution in south-central Crete, outlines a picture of continuity between EM II and MM IB, where small, autonomous centres, each with its own distinct technological tradition and iconographic identity, continued to thrive in a diverse and heterogeneous social landscape during MM I. Schoep also makes a case for greater social continuity by arguing that some of the more dramatic changes that take place between MM IB and MM II are the result, not of social reconfiguration, but of a shift in the nexus of status competition from the funerary to the residential sphere.

One of the cornerstones of the MM I emergence horizon hypothesis is the belief that it was at this time that the Palaces were first constructed. Although there have been several earlier attempts to push the origins of these complexes back into EM, these have suffered from a lack of good data and have not enjoyed general acceptance. Evans' speculation (1921: 103–7, 165) about an EM III predecessor to his MM I Palace at Knossos lacked empirical support, while Hood's EM III date for the Northwest Terrace (Hood in Catling 1974: 34; 1988: 69) scarcely did more than date an isolated, but admittedly impressive, piece of architecture that shared the same alignment as the later Palace. More recent attempts have relied on the EM III/MM IA date for the First Palace at Malia and on the interpretation (by no means universally favoured: Watrous 2001: 171, 175; Whitelaw this volume) that traces of an earlier building or complex of buildings, on the same orientation as the First Palace and also built around a court, correspond to an EM IIB predecessor (Schoep 2004; 2006; 2007; this volume; Driessen 2007).

In this regard the papers by Todaro, on late FN–MM IA Phaistos, and Tomkins, on late FN–MM IB Knossos, represent a long awaited (*e.g.*, Branigan 1970: 41–43, 206) transformation in our knowledge of these sites in the period up to MM I. In the case of Phaistos, there is evidence for large-scale, open-air communal ritual activity on the site of the later Palace, beginning as early as the late FN (Todaro and Di Tonto 2008). During EM I these open-air ceremonial foci are formalised into two open spaces (broadly corresponding to the site of the later Central and West Courts), around which traces of architecture, probably domestic, have come to light. Early in EM IIA a massive terracing operation takes place and a large south ramp was constructed. In EM III a second major building project substantially altered the appearance of the hill, extending the west slope by means of terracing and constructing a paved ramp, which zigzagged up from the south slope, passing a series of buildings, before opening out onto a paved area at the westernmost edge of the hilltop. This western paved area, a

possible predecessor of the Middle West Court, was connected eastwards, via a cobbled passageway, to an open, unpaved area at the centre of the hilltop. Between EM III and MM IA the area in between these western and central open areas was occupied by one or more buildings with floors of red ochre or stucco. While the precise nature and form of the EM III–MM IA hilltop building(s) remain unclear, as Todaro sensibly emphasises, it is notable that the articulation of space, with architecture located between western and central public open areas and reached by a ramped access point (relaid in MM IB and II), essentially mirrors that of the MM IB–II Northwest and Southwest Buildings of the First Palace (Militello this volume).

In the case of Knossos, it would appear that part of the area of the later First Palace was also already a venue for communal, open-air ritual activity in FN IV. In contrast with Phaistos, this evidence is primarily in the form of fills and terrace walls, which outline a small rectangular Court beneath the later Central Court, bounded to the west by houses and to the east by terrace walls. Subsequent episodes of terracing, during which this Court expanded and ultimately became the Central Court, may be identified for EM I and EM III/MM I. The levelling down of the hilltop, which Evans placed in MM IA, now appears to take place much earlier, as part of major episodes of reorganisation in FN IV and/or EM I. Tomkins makes a case for the latter being the point at which the first public building is constructed, immediately to the west of a much enlarged Court, and argues for the existence, already by the end of EM IIB, of a complex of public buildings constructed to the west and north of the Court, sharing its alignment and with west and north facades equivalent to the MM IB First Palace. The subsequent history of this EM IIB Court Complex is traced via further episodes of expansion and modification through EM III, MM IA and into MM IB, at which point it becomes what is conventionally termed the MM IB First Palace, but without the *tabula rasa* building programme indicated at Phaistos and previously argued for Knossos.

It would appear, therefore, that at both sites the ritual significance of the locations of the First Palaces, their role as venues for open-air, communal ceremonial activity and the basic articulation of western and eastern open-air areas interspersed with built space were established already by the late FN (Schoep this volume). Similarly, at both sites subsequent building activity took the form of discrete terracing projects, which extended the area available for building and crystallised existing divisions between open-air and built space. However, there are also limits to these parallels and a close reading of the data reveals important differences in the specific biographies of construction and renewal

at Knossos, Phaistos and Malia. Tomkins' tentative date of EM I for the first Court Building at Knossos, if correct, contrasts with both Malia, where even the most optimistic reading of the data could not produce a Court Complex before EM IIB, and Phaistos, where the only currently viable pre-MM IB candidate would be the EM III–MM IA building(s) with red ochre or stucco floors. In this regard it is worth noting that elsewhere other First Palaces, in the sense that they are, on present evidence, the earliest known Court Buildings in their respective settlements, appear at various points after MM IB (*e.g.*, Petras, MM IIA; Monastiraki, MM II; Kommos, MM IIB; Galatas, MM III; Zakros, late LM IA; Gournia, LM IB). Although consensus regarding the relative date of the first Court Complexes at these sites is unlikely to be achieved just yet, it nevertheless seems clear that the picture is as far from a single horizon of 'palatial emergence' as one could possibly get and that this idea should be laid to rest.

Moving into MM IB, Militello outlines evidence for major investment at Phaistos in MM IB, measured again in a *tabula rasa* levelling and infilling of earlier structures on the hilltop and the construction of the Southwest Quarter of the First Palace, a predecessor of the Northwest Quarter and the Central, Middle West and Lower West Courts. In MM IIA the Northwest Quarter is constructed and, immediately to its west, the Middle West Court is enlarged and the Theatral area and Kouloures are added. Militello also notes the possible existence, from MM II, of additional public structures to the north and east of the Central Court. At Knossos MM IB–II activity in the Court Complex is by no means well preserved or dated, a situation which lends itself to alternative readings. In the papers by Tomkins and Macdonald a number of possibilities are outlined for MM IB, chiefly a refacing of the West and North Facades in gypsum, the formalisation or expansion of large paved peripheral courts and a major reorganisation of the internal spaces of the West Wing. The MM II picture is still more unclear, owing to a general lack of pure deposits from the hilltop itself and the often equivocal nature of the material preserved from the old excavations. Following Evans, Macdonald suggests that the construction of the gypsum orthostat West Facade and the South Corridor and Basements should be placed in MM IIA, on the basis of the type of mason's marks used and the fact that the orthostat West Facade at Phaistos is of MM IIA date. However, it is also possible to argue, on the basis of a literal reading of the ceramics, that these were constructed in MM III (for references see Tomkins this volume). The possibility for disagreement highlights the urgent need for new, targeted stratigraphic excavations to settle such questions, such as those recently published by Macdonald and Knappett (2007).



There was understandable reluctance by those participating in the workshop to project the Palace concept back beyond MM I. For some this was because of a conviction that the MM IB–II structures were quantitatively and qualitatively different and that, while aspects of their form and function are now anticipated by earlier buildings and activities in the same locations, they nevertheless represent the birth of something new in MM IB. For others this arose more from a general conviction that the term Palace, both in its undemonstrated association with palaces in the conventional sense of the term and in the specific set of understandings that have accrued to it during the first century of Minoan archaeology, was too loaded to remain a useful or appropriate way of understanding the MM IB–II structures, let alone any possible EM–MM IA predecessors. The obvious solution to this impasse, we feel, is to adopt a more neutral terminology for *all* phases. Court Building or Court Complex are functionally-neutral alternatives to be found in this and other papers. We also took the editorial decision to capitalise Palace to denote when it is used in the specific Minoanist understanding of the term; that is Evans' idea of a building complex constructed around a Central Court and functioning both as elite residence (palace) and as ceremonial centre (temple).

### *Breaking down social and political complexity*

Over the last decade or so this ever diminishing congruence between traditional frameworks and explanations and the data now available has begun to chime with a critique of the aims, precepts and models of twentieth century Minoan archaeology (Hamilakis 2002a; Haggis 2002; Schoep 2002; 2004; 2006; Barrett and Damilati 2004). This critique itself forms part of a more fundamental questioning of the ways in which we have sought to frame our enquiries into human prehistory, how we model change and how we understand society (*e.g.*, Gamble 1993; 2007; Barrett 1994; Thomas 2000: 14–18; Hamilakis 2002a: 5–15). Thus, for example, the dismantling of the MM IB horizon now makes sense not just at an empirical level, where a better resolved dataset reveals it to be an artificial product of an overestimation of later complexity combined with an underestimation of what came before (Tomkins and Schoep 2010), but also at a theoretical level, where the notion that change can be marshalled into single, generalised horizons and dramatized into revolutions has been extensively critiqued (Gamble 1993; 2007; Barrett 1994).

More recent approaches have sought to situate the explanation of change

more explicitly at the human level, emphasising the role of human agents as a conduit through which historical forces might flow and extending the analytical focus to include preceding and succeeding periods of continuity. As recent approaches to agency have noted, agency operates through identities and concepts of personhood that are themselves constructed and contingent (*e.g.*, Barrett 1987: 471; Thomas 2000: 13; Dobres and Robb 2000). Thus rather than imposing the individual as a decision-making unit on the past, we need to build up a contextual understanding of the scales and types of identity through which agency might have flowed in the past. This means that in order properly to model and comprehend the conditions in which change occurs, we must go with the flow of causation, working forwards in time, and not, as has been the practice, project or refract a reading of later outcomes upon earlier periods that are less well defined and understood (Schoep 2006). After all, if we do not understand the material and social conditions of existence operating prior to *and* after change (*i.e.*, continuity), we have no grounds for understanding how or why change took place. Absence of change – or what is often glossed as ‘social equilibrium’ – does not mean an absence of dynamism or conflict, but is rather better understood as a balancing out of conflicting identities, interests and tensions. Change arises when this balance is disturbed, the conditions of existence are altered and a new set of constraints and possibilities open up (Barrett and Damilati 2004: 152). Status aspiration and competition are thus no longer viewed as an emergent property of civilisation (*e.g.*, Renfrew 1972: 42), but a quality of being human and a dynamic coursing through our prehistory and history (Barrett and Damilati 2004: 146; Gamble 2007; for Aegean Neolithic examples see Halstead 1999: 90; Tomkins 2004: 48–50; 2007a: 192–95; 2010).

*Identities and Agencies from the Bottom-up. Households, Corporate Groups, Communities*

This explains why in recent years there has been a concerted effort in Minoan archaeology to break social complexity down into different social processes and relations, such as heterarchy and hierarchy, and to build up an understanding of society, from the bottom up, as a host of interacting agents or identities, possessing potentially conflicting interests, operating at different scales and aligning in different ways (Hamilakis 2002a: 13–14; Haggis 2002: 136–37; Schoep 2002; Schoep and Knappett 2004). By shifting the nexus of interpretation from an emphasis on generalisation to the more challenging and diverse level of specifics, we are encouraged to adopt terms that are more appropriate to the agencies and historical conditions that operated in the past and thus to the contexts of



material evidence that we recover (Barrett 1994; 2006). Such lower-level terms also offer the chance to re-unify the study of social organisation during the Neolithic and Bronze Age and thereby to develop a narrative of continuity and change in social reproduction on Crete that spans both periods (*e.g.*, Tomkins 2010; Tomkins and Schoep 2010).

One such term is the *household*, which refers to a group of people, usually, but not necessarily, co-resident, that collaborates in the production of its own livelihood and transmits property intergenerationally. Anthropological case-studies indicate that the household stands for a very broad range of behaviours, covering groups organised in a variety of ways (Sahlins 1974; Tomkins 2004: 41). While co-residence is a not a defining attribute, it is a frequent characteristic of households, and, for this reason, many researchers have chosen to link it with the spatially-bounded sub-units that we recognise in the architecture of Neolithic and Bronze Age settlements in the Aegean (Halstead 1999). Here the heuristic value of the household lies in the fact that it stands for a particular scale of identity, which may be linked to an archaeologically recognisable spatial unit, without foreclosing judgement regarding the specific nature and form of that unit.

Recent approaches to social development during the Neolithic have found it profitable to juxtapose the household with a second, higher order scale of social identity, termed the *community* (Halstead 1995; 1999; Tomkins 2004; 2007a; 2010; also Gamble 2007: 161–204). These have charted the progressive isolation of the household as an independent social, economic, and political unit and its progressive appropriation of communal rights, controls, and obligations until, by the EBA, a society once subjugated to the interests of the many had been transformed into one driven by the interests of specific groups. In this work there has been a tendency to treat the community as synonymous with the totality of people residing together in a single location, and thus equivalent to the archaeological term ‘settlement’. While this is a justifiable conceit when dealing with the politics of large village communities, it is as well to remember that communities, like other identities, are cultural constructs and thus contextually variable. Thus, for example, it has been suggested that a more dispersed sense of community, encompassing multiple, small habitation foci and centred on specific ritual places, may lie behind the settlement of agriculturally more marginal environments in Crete during the late FN (*e.g.*, Siteia uplands; Tomkins 2008: 39–41) and EM I periods (*e.g.*, Asterousia, Whitelaw 2000; Relaki 2004; Legarra Herrero this volume). Clearly, therefore, community, like the household, is a relative term that subsumes a range of variation. It is a useful means of referring to a larger scale of social identity (relative to the household) that is reproduced

when larger groups of people, often but not always resident in the same location, form a collective social unit.

Moving into the Bronze Age, the continued relevance of these two scales of identity is obvious. Thus at the EM II hamlet of Myrtos Fournou Korifi, on the one hand households, equivalent in scale to a nuclear family unit, may be recognised on the basis of architecture, hearth locations and object distributions and, on the other, communality may be recognised materially, in signs of economic co-operation between households, and spatially, in the way households group together within a solid perimeter wall and around a shared open space (Whitelaw 1983; 2007).

However, in the case of larger and more complex Bronze Age communities, it seems now useful to distinguish a third scale of group identity, intermediate between the household and the community, which might be termed *corporate*. Minoan archaeology is still getting to grips with addressing this scale, a fact reflected by the plurality of ways in which it has hitherto been conceptualised in Minoan scholarship (and in the papers in the present volume). As with households and communities, corporate identities are constructed and contextually variable. We may recognise their existence in communities whenever we can define a scale of group activity that it is clearly greater than an individual household, but less than the community. The corporate group is thus a relative term which may be relevant only to certain contexts, such as larger and more complex communities. Defined as such it is possible to recognise the operation of corporate groups during MM and LM, where they have been termed 'factions' (Schoep 2002; Hamilakis 2002b). It is not, however, currently possible to recognise a corporate scale of identity operating during the later Neolithic. Rather, as suggested by several contributors to the volume, it would seem that a corporate scale of identity first manifests itself during EM II.

Several of the papers in the present volume continue this atomising approach to 'social complexity', distinguishing between multiple forms and scales of social identity and exploring heterarchical and hierarchical relations within and between them. The nature of Minoan social organisation is explicitly addressed by Driessen in his comparative study of EM–MM domestic and funerary architecture and deposition. Reviewing previous estimates of the size of the contributing group to specific funerary contexts, he suggests that, while the data are anything but straightforward and while diversity is apparent, in many instances the group implied is larger than that of a single nuclear family. In the case of settlements, he takes issue with Whitelaw's conclusion (2001: 17–21) that the nuclear family was the main residential unit in Minoan Crete, arguing that

in certain instances (*e.g.*, MM Kommos, MM III–LM I Gournia, Palaikastro and Malia) individual dwellings, notionally equivalent in size to that expected of nuclear families, are embedded within larger residential units, in which walls and open-air activity areas are shared. He argues that these larger, co-residential units, comprising multiple nuclear families, formed a type of large household, which he terms the House, following Lévi-Strauss' *sociétés à maison*. Driessen suggests that we should see funerary and domestic structures as related entities, exhibiting a similar commitment to longevity and investment, and concludes that Houses were the agents behind the construction and use of specific tomb foci during EM and MM.

Legarra Herrero, in his study of the EM–MM II funerary data, notes a general absence of clear differentiation in most EM I–II cemeteries, suggesting that funerary practice in such cases more obviously reproduced a communal scale of identity. For EM IIA he finds convincing evidence for group differentiation in only a limited number of cemeteries (*e.g.*, Archanes, Mochlos), but no obvious indications of the size or form such intra-communal groups took. He notes that most cemeteries see disruption during EM IIB–III, a notable exception being Mochlos, which is unique in presenting a large number of separate tombs in contemporary use, suggesting competitive differentiation by distinct social groups. During EM III–MM IA many more cemeteries become spatially complex, with a multiplicity of spatially-defined foci, the focus of deposition shifts from burial chambers to ancillary ritual areas and the content of deposition alters, with assemblages now dominated by larger quantities of ceramics. This greater ritual complexity suggests greater competitive differentiation between groups in settlements across Crete at this time. Legarra Herrero explains these changes in terms of shift in emphasis in social reproduction from a social unit defined by kinship, such as extended households, to larger units defined by co-residence, which he views as 'the main agents that competed for resources and political and ideological power on a regional scale'.

Schoep, in her discussion of contexts of social reproduction during EM II–MM II, also notes evidence for intra-communal differentiation from EM II in certain cemeteries. In the case of EM IIA Archanes Phourni, while the two tholos tombs exhibit a similar interest in the manipulation of distance as a symbolic commodity, they differentiate themselves by source, with deposition in Tholos Gamma demonstrating Cycladic parallels and affinities and that in Tholos Epsilon a connection with Egypt. Thus while the size and nature of these intra-communal groups remains unclear, it would seem that they were capable of sustaining distinctly different long-distance connections. Contrasting the EM

II–MM II cemeteries with the Court Buildings during the same period, Schoep notes how construction and deposition at the former exhibit a notably greater pace and range of innovation and suggests that cemeteries were the main contexts for the negotiation of status differences within and between the components of a community, whether households or corporate groups.

It would appear that larger-scale, that is to say supra-household, social identities were bound up in the production and consumption of seals in south-central Crete. Sbonias connects specific traditions of seal production and representation during EM–MM II with specific communities in the Mesara and Asterousia. This interpretation is also championed by Relaki (this volume), who concludes that during EM certain seals may have acted as emblems for groups, with the practice of duplicating motifs possibly reflecting seal use by individuals with equivalent roles within a group.

Regarding the internal structure and economy of these corporate groups, most contributors seem to envisage some form of differentiation and glimpse the existence of a privileged agency variously in seal ownership and use (Relaki) or access to rare and restricted cup types in a pyramidal hierarchy of vessels (Macdonald). Perhaps the clearest example of what an elite agency, operating at the head of a corporate group in an urban context, might have looked like in MM II is provided by Quartier Mu at Malia (Schoep 2002). Poursat, in his contribution on this large elite complex, affirms its autonomy from the Palace and presents its complex architectural phasing through MM II. His account testifies to a notable investment of resources over a period of time that might be less than a century (Manning 2010). Poursat ascribes this prosperity to a strategy of combining control over specific high value craft activities (textile production, metal production) with long-distance trade connections. He suggests that the development of a textile industry at Malia might be linked to evidence for a greater closeness in relations between Malia and Lasithi during MM I–IIA (Betancourt this volume). Poursat leaves us with a vision of Quartier Mu operating as *primus inter pares* at Malia, up until its abrupt and dramatic destruction by fire in MM IIB

### *Cities and States: framing the top-level*

As Minoan archaeology moves away from its initial modernist goals, so we question the claim, central to an archaeology of progress, that more complex organisational forms, such as the state, are intrinsically more worthy of

explanation and thus deserve special priority in research. That is not to say, however, that such research is no longer necessary or vital. Indeed attempts to caricature the critique of evolutionist explanations in Minoan archaeology as a misguided and premature *rejection* of the analytical value of terms such as 'state' (e.g., Renfrew 2004: 259 'throwing out the processual baby with the post-processual bathwater') somewhat miss the point. What is being disputed is not the analytical utility of the concept of the state, but rather the *appropriateness* of the way it has been applied, top-down, as a default interpretative framework, to the MM and LM data. Surely, as Hamilakis argues (2002a: 13), the forcing and finessing required to fit the state to these data only serves to weaken and relativise the analytical power of what is otherwise a well-defined concept in anthropological and archaeological terms. We feel that Minoan archaeologists could do a lot worse than observe 'Yoffee's Rule', formulated with tongue-in-cheek but with a serious intent, namely that 'if you can argue whether a society is a state or isn't, then it isn't' (Yoffee 2005: 41)!

Several of the papers in the present volume clarify the question of appropriateness by interrogating the EM–MM II data for signs of regional political integration of an order that might be deemed state-like. Whitelaw notes that the urban growth at Knossos, Malia and Phaistos during EM III/MM IA is paralleled by contemporary evidence for rural growth and thus that the former is not simply nucleation driven by a depopulating hinterland, as has been argued (Watrous 2004: 268–70). He also sensibly cautions against the tendency, in previous studies of state formation, to assume rather than demonstrate the existence of hierarchical relationships between settlements of different size. His own attempt to model spheres of influence in the Mesara through size-related catchment areas reveals no necessary hierarchical interaction during EM. He draws a parallel with other ancient instances of state formation, noting evidence for centre development from the late EM, but suggesting that regional political integration, when agricultural production is intensified to support a single centre, is only really evident from MM II. Knappett, in a wide-ranging review of the evidence for MM state formation, echoes these findings, emphasising that many features traditionally regarded as characteristic of MM IB–II states, such as writing and administration, are actually only clearly attested in MM IIB. Other contributors to the volume generally take a similar line (see below). Given the strong emphasis hitherto placed on state formation in MM IB, this indicates a surprising, but welcome new consensus that state formation on Crete post-dates MM IB.

*Urban perspectives on political authority and the function of the Court Complexes*

However, recognition that the initial construction of the larger Court Buildings dates before MM IB, and that state-like organisation is unlikely to be present until sometime after, opens up something of an interpretative void, particularly for those following a neo-evolutionist paradigm and looking to bridge the chieftdom and the state (Yoffee 2005: 22). Clearly we need to decouple the emergence of the state from the emergence of Court Complexes, but to where should we look for inspiration to frame the interpretation of larger-scale, more complex forms of social organisation in the intervening period of EM II–MM IB/II? Previous attempts to resolve this, by scaling back or watering down the ‘state’ until it fits the data, do not represent viable solutions as they serve only to relativise and weaken the original analytical efficacy of the concept. An obvious alternative solution is to frame our investigation more explicitly in terms of theories and models developed for urbanisation and urbanism. It takes only a small step back to appreciate that the later prehistory and history of Crete, as of other regions of the Aegean, is characterised by the waxing and waning of urban centres. Indeed the fragmented mosaic of land- and seascapes that characterises the Aegean seems to be hard-wired to support a particular and primarily small-scale brand of urbanism. Or to put it in neo-evolutionist terms, it is a region where the ‘Early State Module’ is a condition approaching the norm, where polities vary greatly in size and are anything but peer, and where something resembling a universally agreed definition of a state (*e.g.*, Yoffee 2005: 33–43, table 3.1) only emerges under exceptional circumstances.

Whitelaw’s paper represents a major advance in our understanding of the parameters of urbanisation on Crete prior to MM III. He clarifies the timing, scale and implications of EM–MM spatial (and thereby demographic) growth at Knossos, Malia and Phaistos, the three largest urban centres in Central Crete, and relates it to their respective regions. His analysis isolates the EM III/MM IA period, rather than MM IB or MM II, as the principal period of urban and rural settlement expansion during EM–MM. Whitelaw suggests that it is from this point that urbanisation begins on Crete. Other contributors, however, while acknowledging the significant shifting of scale that takes place in EM III/MMIA, prefer to locate the beginning of urbanisation slightly earlier, in EM II. Warren, in his concluding review of the papers, argues that urban growth in EM III/MM IA should be understood in terms of changes that had already taken place in EM II. Likewise Tomkins, in a different reading of FN–EM I site growth at Knossos (Tomkins 2008: 35–36, 42–43) notes that EM II sees a



dramatic phase of expansion, during which the residential area expands to some two or three times its previous (*i.e.*, late FN–EM I) size, and suggests that this represents the beginning of urbanisation at the site, comparable to that noted in other regions of the EB II Aegean (Hägg and Konsola 1986).

Questions regarding the structure and agency of political power in urban centres are inevitably tied up with the Court Complexes – seemingly the *sine qua non* of EM and MM urbanism – and more specifically the longstanding and thorny issue of how they functioned. Was authority during EM or MM centred on a single individual or group who resided in the Court Complexes, such as Evans’ priest-king? Or were power and authority instead more fluid, contested and counterpoised, playing out primarily at the corporate level between multiple groups resident outside the Court Complex in urban centres and perhaps across the Cretan landscape (Schoep 2002; 2004; this volume)? Answers to these questions among the contributors to the volume typically varied in accordance with their specific readings of the function of the Court Complexes and such disagreement reflects a wider lack of consensus in the discipline. Some continued to favour Evans’ Palace-Temple hybrid model, where these buildings are understood to have been conceived and constructed as palaces in the conventional sense of the term (*i.e.*, as residences of the principal political and religious authority) *and* as communal ceremonial foci. Others preferred the idea that these buildings functioned more simply as ceremonial centres (cf. Melas 1995; Day and Wilson 2002; Schoep 2002) or something akin to temples (Schoep 2010b). What *is* clear, however, is that, given the evidence for diversity across the island and the fact that function itself is a social construct, we need to abandon the notion that the function of the Court Complexes was fixed and static and to work towards a more dynamic, contextual understanding of how function was constructed and how it might have varied in time-space.

Drawing on the emerging evidence for ritualised group activity in the locations subsequently occupied by Court Complexes, Schoep emphasises the importance of evaluating their function in the context of pre-existing traditions of place and practice (see also Day and Wilson 2002). At Knossos and Phaistos, it would appear that Court Complexes arose in places that had functioned as the principal arenas for social reproduction for their respective communities since the late FN and were thus already significant places in communal cosmology. Moreover this preceding tradition of practice and significance seems to share certain similarities with the Court Complexes, most notably an emphasis on large-scale, group commensality in formally-defined open-air spaces or courts.

For those favouring a single, residential ‘palatial’ authority, emphasis continues

to be placed on the monumentality of the main Court Complexes and how this must imply the existence of a central authority (*e.g.*, Renfrew 1973; Warren 1985; 1994; 2002; Manning 1994; Betancourt 2002). However, as Schoep notes, this presumption is no longer one shared by archaeologists working on monuments elsewhere in European prehistory. It has long been understood that the capacity to organise large-scale construction projects is by no means the preserve of hierarchically-organised societies and thus monumental architecture cannot be seen as a reflection of a specific type or scale of society or political structure (Barrett 1999). Moreover, monumental architecture needs to be seen not just as the setting for social practice, but also as the medium by which social practices gained their vitality (Barrett 1999). Thus monuments are not simply a record of these practices but were a medium for the reproduction and transformation of social life. This indicates that the monumentality of the Court Complexes on its own tells us nothing about the nature of political authority and only becomes relevant when situated within the specific context of its production and use.

Much of the original urgency behind the equation between monumentality and a single elite authority derived from the perception that the first Court Complexes were constructed to a unitary design and over a very short time frame within MM I. Consequently Tomkins' assertion, that the construction of the Court Complex at Knossos was initiated much earlier and developed more slowly through many distinct episodes, undermines this imperative and opens up alternative readings of the agency of monumentality. He suggests that the form of the complex, structured into multiple, separate peripheral buildings, and its development during EM II–MM IB might be best explained by a corporate power model, where peripheral buildings are understood to function as ceremonial foci for a corporate scale of social identity and where the Court Complex as a whole operated as a venue integrating these into a communal urban identity. Under this model the impetus to mobilise resources and invest in specific peripheral buildings may be viewed as lying, not with an invisible central authority, but with specific corporate groups and as arising, at least in part, out of competition between them. Something similar is envisaged by Macdonald for MM IB–II Knossos, when he notes that the palatial authority probably comprised 'members of several families or clans, bringing them together and acting as a diffusing agent in cases of rivalry'. Contrasting the Court Complexes with the cemeteries, Schoep suggests that the former were a result of communal effort by large urban communities, in which several corporate groups/lineages would have invested, while individual tombs make sense as the result of the efforts of a single contributing group, whether household or corporate.



The relationship between the Court Complex and the town at Phaistos during MM II is explored in detail by Militello in his overview of patterns of production, distribution, consumption and deposition. He notes that the Court Complex had a strongly ceremonial function and was the main, perhaps the only, ceremonial focus in the town. Following Carinci (2006) Militello suggests that there were functional differences between its Southwest and Northwest Quarters. Tools relating to production activities (awls, waste material, potters wheels, pestles, mill-stones, loom weights) occur in closer density in the Southwest Quarter. Consideration of storage also reveals differences in type and capacity of storage between the two. Studies of craft production show the town to have been the locus of production of stone vessels, tools and seals and also for spinning. However, evidence for weaving, in the form of loomweights, is concentrated in the Southwest Building, suggesting that textile production was confined to the Court Complex. In addition, the storage of potters' wheels in the Southwest Building suggests a similarly intimate connection with pottery production, which gains added confirmation from the recognition that much of the pottery consumed on the hilltop between EM II and MM II was also produced there, in the area of the Upper West Court (Todaro this volume). Finally, Militello's estimates of the size of the consuming groups, implied in pottery deposits in the Court Complex and the town, suggest three scales of group activity. Assuming that each cup represents a participant, *small* deposits, which occur in the Court Complex and the town and typically contain pouring vessels and 30–100 cups, might represent a group of up to 100 people; *medium* deposits, which occur only in the town and contain pouring vessels and at least 300 cups, might represent some sort of corporate group of 300 or so; and *large* deposits, which occur only in the Court Complex and contain as many as 400 pouring vessels, might represent very large-scale gatherings at around the communal level.

What does this tell us about political authority and organisation at MM II Phaistos? Clearly, as Militello emphasises, it makes sense to talk about an authority emanating from the Court Complex. But what precise form did this authority take? How was it institutionalised and legitimated? Relaki, in her discussion of the MM IIB sealings assemblage from Room 25, draws attention to the large number of different seals represented (326) and to the heterarchical pattern of seal use. While differences in the frequency of sealing activity highlight potential differences in the social and political position of these different seal groups, the large number of different seal owners suggests that authority was shared and counterpoised, rather than centralised and restricted to a group resident in the Palace. Given that MM IIB seals seem to reflect the continued

relevance of a system of EM representation that served to reproduce larger-scale corporate or communal identities, Relaki suggests that a corporate power model, where seal users represented persons of status within corporate groups, might also be appropriate for understanding political authority and the function of the Court Complex at MM IIB Phaistos. It may thus be more than mere coincidence that the 326 seal groups represented in the sealings assemblage is close to the estimated number of people who could have had the privilege of standing on the Theatral steps in the Middle West Court (Militello this volume). It is perhaps also worth noting that parallels for urban polities, exhibiting a heterarchical political structure and with a privileged decision-making class of 300 or so abound among the later Greek poleis of the Archaic and Classical periods.

#### *Urban-Rural Perspectives on Regional Integration*

Between the late FN and EM I Crete appears to have been quick to differentiate itself socially and economically into a diverse landscape of largely autonomous hamlets and villages. In contrast, during EM and MM the course of regional integration seems to have run much more slowly (Tomkins and Schoep 2010; Whitelaw this volume). It would appear that even by the end of EM urban centres were few and far between and were buffered by multiple smaller communities that seem to have been more-or-less politically autonomous. The development of larger scale, regional polities between the late EM and MM II was therefore very much dependent on the ability of urban elites to encourage these autonomous communities to align with them, rather than them remaining independent or aligning with a rival. Strategies for achieving allegiance and dependency naturally will have varied and not all can be relied upon to leave a discernible trace in the archaeological data. However, it may be expected that the construction of a shared regional identity, which linked people and places in a larger landscape and bound them to a specific urban centre, will have been of central importance. Since such identities invariably rely on material performance, they are inherently accessible to archaeologists. After all the production and dissemination of elite culture from specific centres or within specific regions, particularly its deposition at extraurban ritual sites, is something that Minoan archaeology has long been engaged with studying. However, as Knappett notes, interpretation of similar regional patterns of distribution and deposition in EM and MM has been inconsistent, with those of MM frequently treated as border markers in the search for the state (*e.g.*, Cadogan 1994), while those of EM have not.

The solution, it would seem to us, is to make a distinction between the construction of regional identities, which is a feature also of earlier periods

1. *Back to the Beginning for the Early and Middle Bronze Age on Crete* 23

(*e.g.*, later Neolithic cave use; Tomkins 2009; *in press*), and regional integration, which refers to the socio-economic reorganisation of a region into a subordinate hinterland by a centre, and is thus bound up in processes of urbanisation and state formation. While both regional identities and regional integration require focal points or centres of gravity, in the case of the former such foci are often ritual sites (*e.g.*, tombs, cemeteries, caves, peaks). While regional identities alone do not imply regional integration, the promotion of a specific regional identity, focused on a specific urban centre, will play a key role in legitimating regional integration. In this way from late EM local histories of urban-rural relations and phases of investment at extraurban ritual sites (cf. Peatfield 1990; Watrous 1996) may be read in terms of the changing configuration of alliances and dependency between urban and smaller, buffer communities. The benefits of such relationships are likely to have flowed in both directions. Urban centres did not just secure the allegiance of the periphery, in what may have increasingly become a highly competitive strategic alliance-race between the main centres, but perhaps more significantly ensured its participation in a system of representation controlled by a specific centre, a crucial step towards state formation. Rural elites in turn, not only enjoyed the protection of a larger centre, but also enjoyed preferential access to (and the allure of association with) more worldly, sophisticated and arcane elite cultures, which might then be deployed in localised status legitimation.

Something of this can be read into the selective emulation of elite tableware styles and types (and presumably the specific drinking and dining practices in which these styles are implicated). As Knappett reports, MM IIB Myrto Pyrgos emulated types and styles of tableware more typical of the urban centre of Malia, to the extent that one is forced to infer that a close relationship existed between the two sites, despite the large intervening distance. He notes other instances of close links in material culture over a distance, such as between Knossos and Galatas in MM IB and between Phaistos and sites in the Amari in MM IIB, and concludes that various small sites in central Crete ‘came under increasing pressure in MM II to align themselves one way or another within the different regional polities’.

Much the same emerges from Betancourt’s exploration of the changing regional connections implied in the EM I–MM II assemblage from the Ayios Charalambos cave on the Lasithi Plateau. During EM I–II he notes a strong connection with the north coast of Crete and from there the Cyclades. During EM III–MM IA this link with the north coast continues, but is more obviously with communities to the east. At the same time there are also particularly close

links with Mesara and probably via there the East Mediterranean. Between the end of MM IA and beginning of MM IIA this pattern changes and links with the proximate urban centre of Malia become much stronger. It is tempting to read this developing pattern of connections in terms of a strategy of resistance, where allegiance with other neighbouring regions is sought as a counterweight to the presence of a powerful urban neighbour (Malia), followed (in MM I–II) by a strategy of dependence, where that neighbour is more fully embraced.

Sbonias, in a comparative study of seal production and consumption in the Asterousia and south-central Crete, provides a view of MM IB–II regional integration from the peripheries of Phaistos. He finds no evidence for Phaistian interference in the independence of local centres in MM IB, save perhaps for the diminishing role of Phaistos' near neighbour, Ayia Triada, as an autonomous seal producer. This would suggest that any expansion in the sphere of influence of Phaistos by MM IB was localised to its immediate vicinity within the West Mesara. Further expansion of this area of influence in MM II would explain a loss of autonomy for the Asterousia-Moni Odigitria group of seal production and consumption. However, other more distant seal groups continue to display autonomy during MM II and thus help define the limits of the regional integration of seal styles and groups centred upon Phaistos. Relaki, providing a view from the centre, draws attention to the continued presence, in the MM IIB Phaistos sealings assemblage, of seal motif clusters similar to EM motifs that have been associated with different seal-producing communities beyond Phaistos. This, she suggests, may represent the participation of certain non-local groups in control operations associated with sealing practice in the MM IIB Court Complex. If correct, this would imply a consensual form of regional integration in which long established communities on the periphery of the Phaistos polity retained not just a simulacrum of their old autonomy, but enjoyed a prominent role in controlling activities in the Court Complex, which thus functioned also as an arena for regional integration and the construction of a shared regional identity.

A rider to this is provided by Militello's observation that there are signs that the tradition of representation expressed in EM–MM II seal iconography is itself in the process of transformation in MM IIB. The MM IIB sealings assemblage from Phaistos also manifests early examples of a different system, characterised by new iconographic elements, such as naturalistic motives and imaginary animals, such as the sphinx and the genie, which would go on to dominate MM III and later iconography. Militello argues that these mark a dislocation with tradition and the assimilation of aspects of Egyptian and Oriental elite

iconography in order to mark out qualitative differences between a specifically Phaistian elite and the wider populace. If so, this may indicate that some sort of rupture to the consensual form of regional integration was either in process or imminent in MM IIB.

How might we define this MM II polity centred upon Phaistos? Scale is important and analytically we would like hard boundaries, but deciding where to draw the line is difficult. A minimal sphere of *control* is implied by Whitelaw's analysis of site catchment (based on estimated population) and within this one could fit the much smaller area (ca. 2.5 km<sup>2</sup>) implied by Militello's calculation of the storage capacity of the MM II Court Complex at Phaistos. A larger sphere, covering much of the West Mesara, where control is weaker but *influence* is strong, would be indicated by the loss of autonomy of the old seal producing centres of Ayia Triada and Moni Odigitria-Asterousia. A still larger area of *attraction* would be implied by the participation of autonomous seal producing centres on the peripheries in sealing practices in the Court Complex at Phaistos in MM IIB. This area of attraction may, as Knappett notes, have extended also to the Amari valley, to judge by strong Phaistian connections in its MM II material culture. Taken together the data thus suggest a pattern of differing degrees of autonomy and dependence through time-space, in which an urban centre (Phaistos) with a compact hinterland (West Mesara-West Asterousia) is surrounded by buffer communities whose allegiance was there to be attracted or lost. This would indicate a tiny territorial unit when compared to accepted ancient examples of states (Yoffee 2005: table 3.).

An urban centre should announce itself as the centre of a state by its scale, measured both demographically and in terms of its regional influence (cf. Yoffee 2005). One would expect to see clear evidence that this centre was supported by an intensification of agricultural production in its hinterland. One would expect also a system of representation to be present across a large area that promotes that centre and replaces or cross-cuts existing identities and systems of representation (cf. Barrett and Damilati 2004: 167; Yoffee 2005: 33–34). At present it is by no means obvious that any of these criteria are satisfied by a MM II polity. While several papers in the volume float the idea that there was an emergence of, or movement towards, the state during the latter part of MM II, conviction and consensus is lacking. Indeed, as noted by Whitelaw and Knappett, it is only when one moves forward into MM III, and only then in the case of Knossos, that evidence for some sort of state-level organisation starts to look more compelling. Not only does Knossos grow during MM III to some 100 ha (Whitelaw this volume), allowing it to glimpse, if not creep into,

the bottom end of the size range for the centres of well-attested Old and New World states (Yoffee 2005: table 3.1), but also it sees a major remodelling of the Court Complex using new architectural elements (Macdonald 2002; this volume), the exertion of strong cultural influence over a much wider region, encompassing north- and probably also parts of south-central Crete, and stronger network connections with the island Aegean.

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## 1. Back to the Beginning for the Early and Middle Bronze Age on Crete 29

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