

AEGEAN PREHISTORIC ARCHAEOLOGY

This site contains information about the prehistoric archaeology of the Aegean.

Lesson 18: Narrative

The Nature and Extent of Neopalatial Minoan Influence in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean Worlds

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The Beginning of the Neopalatial Period on Crete (ca. 1750/1720 B.C.?)

In MM IIIA, new palaces were built at the sites of Knossos, Kommos, Mallia, and Zakro. This building or rebuilding activity defines the beginning of the Neopalatial (or New Palace) period on Crete. At Phaistos, the Old Palace, destroyed like those at Knossos and Kommos at the end of MM IIB period, does not appear to have been replaced until LM I, possibly not until as late as LM IB; the administrative center of the Mesara throughout the Neopalatial era, at least after the destruction and abandonment of major portions of the palace at Kommos in early LM IA, was the site of Ayia Triadha.

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Minoan Neopalatial Expansion in the Southern Aegean (MM III Through LM IB (ca. 1750/1720 – 1490/1470 B.C.?)

The Cyclades

Minoan influence had been fairly strong in the Cyclades since the beginning of the Protopalatial (or Old Palace) period on Crete (MM IB), that is, since the beginning of the Second City at Phylakopi on Melos (Phase C in Renfrew's revised phasing of the site) and the re-occupation of Ayia Irini on Keos (Phase IV), which had been abandoned since the *floruit* of the "Lefkandi I" or "Kastri group" culture (Phase III) at the end of the EC II period. In the Neopalatial period, Minoan influence becomes even more marked at such sites as Phylakopi (Melos), Paroikia (Paros), Ayia Irini (Keos), and Akrotiri (Thera). The vast majority of the evidence for this influence consists of pottery, whether Minoan imports or local imitations of typical Minoan shapes and decorative patterns in wares such as Cycladic Matt-painted. There are also, however, other indications of this influence. A fragmentary Linear A tablet has been found both at Phylakopi and at Ayia Irini. Other types of inscription in Linear A have been found at these sites as well as at Akrotiri, while signs incised on objects from Kythera and Naxos have been claimed, though not yet confirmed, to be yet further examples of Linear A. A typically Minoan bronze statuette of a "saluting" male comes from Ayia Irini, as do fragments of over fifty large-scale terracotta statues of women dressed in the Minoan fashion which were displayed in the town's temple (see lesson on Cycladic and Mycenaean Religion). The frescoes of the Flying Fish and of the Lilies from Phylakopi and of the Blue Monkeys from Akrotiri would not be out of place on Crete itself. At Phylakopi, fragments of the Flying Fish mural had fallen into one of two rooms in the same block which were furnished with central piers and which some scholars are prepared to accept as Cycladic versions of Minoan pillar crypts. There are several legends or myths preserved in Classical sources about Minos, the king of Crete, ridding the Aegean of pirates and installing his sons as viceroys in the islands. Perhaps the most striking of these is a story told by Bacchylides, an early 5th century lyric poet from Keos, which concerns the founding of a colony on that island by one of Minos' sons. The temptation to connect this mythical foundation with the site of Ayia Irini is almost overwhelming. Many of the architectural features encountered in the buildings so far excavated at Akrotiri appear to be derived from Minoan architecture: pier-and-door partitions, "horns of consecration", the "lustral basin" in Xeste 3, stone staircases leading to upper floors, second-story toilets such as the one in Room 4 of the West House, but, strangely, as yet no examples of light-wells.

At the same time, Cycladic culture is not totally overwhelmed. Certain features occur on island sites which are not paralleled in Crete and which suggest that there was still a Cycladic "cultural identity. Thus, although the straight-sided (Vapheio) cups and semiglobular cups inspired by Minoan prototypes are common in the Cycladic repertoire, panel cups and carinated bowls are the truly standard open shapes of the later Middle Cycladic and early Late Cycladic periods. Cycladic Matt-painted pottery flourishes and Melian bird jugs are imported into the Argolid as well as into the palace at Knossos itself. Indeed, Melian imports to Knossos are known from as early as MM IB (= Phylakopi II.1). Both Ayia Irini and Phylakopi are fortified settlements in the early Late Bronze Age, while contemporary fortifications are certainly exceptional and perhaps altogether lacking on Crete. Although the architecture of House A at Ayia Irini, probably identified correctly as the residence of the town's ruling authority, has a number of features likely to have been inspired by Cretan prototypes (e.g. frescoes, multiple stairways, elaborate drainage facilities, and a paved though not colonnaded light well), it lacks such distinctively Minoan elements as pier-and-door partitions or a "lustral basin". Thera fresco art is also noticeably different from that which characterizes contemporary Crete (see lesson on Thera).

Schachermeyr has theorized that Cycladic towns of the early LBA such as Akrotiri, Ayia Irini, and Paroikia were comparable to medieval and renaissance maritime republics such as Venice, Genoa, Pisa, Amalfi, Lübeck, and Hamburg in being small but independent political entities having extensive commercial contacts. Cherry, Davis, and Schofield have drawn attention to the especially intense Minoan contacts with the western Cyclades (Thera, Melos, Keos) and have suggested that a major trade route (the "Western String") ran from Crete to the Mainland by way of these islands. Through this, the Minoans acquired silver and lead from the mines of southeastern Attica in the vicinity of Laurion and Thorikos.

The site of Kastri on Kythera differs from sites on the remaining islands of the western and central Aegean in that it was a Minoan colony (that is, a settlement populated largely, perhaps exclusively, by Minoans and their descendants) rather than a Cycladic settlement heavily influenced by Minoan art and culture and possibly including a small resident Minoan population. The recent excavation of an unusually richly furnished peak sanctuary on Kythera provides further evidence for the particularly heavy degree of Minoanization that characterizes that island during the Neopalatial era; the only other peak sanctuary of Minoan type located outside of Crete itself is the site of Troulli on Keos, a hilltop not far from the Minoanized seaside fortress of Ayia Irini.

The Dodecanese and the Western Coast of Asia Minor

Intensive Minoan contact with these areas is established beginning probably in MM IIIB, although possibly somewhat earlier on Carpathos and Rhodes and at Knidos and Miletus. The evidence for such contact consists largely of pottery from Rhodes (Trianda, Ialysos), Carpathos, and Kos (Serraglio) in the Dodecanese and from Miletus, Iasos, and Knidos on the coast of Asia Minor. Extensive architecture of the period preceding the end of LM IA has been exposed only at Trianda. At most of the rest of these sites, remains of this era are deeply buried under later occupational debris and lie very close to, if not actually below, the modern water table, thus rendering the architecture effectively inaccessible. Minoan influence is relatively insignificant as far north as the Troad, to judge from the few Minoan imports into Troy. It is probable that the site at Trianda on Rhodes is an actual Minoan colony rather than a settlement of indigenous Rhodians within which lived a few Cretan migrants, and the same may be true of the Serraglio on Kos. The situations at Miletus, Iasos, and Knidos, however, are altogether uncertain because material of the later MBA and early LBA from these sites has thus far been published in only a very abbreviated fashion. In order to be able to evaluate the nature of Minoan “influence” on such sites, some quantitative estimates of the relative proportions of Minoan and Minoanizing material on the one hand and local western Anatolian material on the other is clearly required.

The Greek Mainland (especially the Peloponnese)

Abundant evidence for an expansion of Minoan influence on the southern Greek Mainland both spatially and quantitatively appears toward the end of the Middle Helladic period and is best examined area by area. It may be observed at the outset that the evidence for direct Minoan influence in parts of the Mainland north of Attica is negligible to non-existent. The fact that Minoan or Minoanizing artifacts, usually in the form of pottery, are found from the very beginning of the MH period (= MM IA) in considerable quantities at coastal sites in Laconia (Ayios Stephanos, probably Pavlopetri) and the Argolid (Asine, Kandia, Lerna) should also be kept in mind.

Messenia

In this area, Minoan influence is most readily discernible in the adoption of the tholos as a tomb type already in the late MH period, the earliest excavated example being that at Koryphasion. These early Messenian tholoi are already of the Mainland/Mycenaean subterranean type but were in all likelihood inspired by late versions of the Minoan tholos of Mesara type, as well as by indigenous circular forms of tomb such as the tumuli of the MH period. A connection between such tumuli and the Mainland type of tholos is strongly suggested, for example, by the construction of an early Mycenaean tholos within the circumference of an earlier MH tumulus at the site of Voidhokoilia. The largest of the three early Mycenaean tholoi at Peristeria bears two incised “masons’ marks” on the ashlar masonry of its facade which some consider to be signs in the Linear A syllabary. Pottery stylistically assignable to MM IIIB/LM IA, either genuine Minoan and imported from Crete or Minoanizing, is found at Koryphasion and at several other sites in Messenia (e.g. Nichoria).

Laconia

Evidence from both Crete and the site of Ayios Stephanos at the head of the Gulf of Laconia indicates that the green-flecked porphyry known as *lapis Lacedaemonius*, available only in southern Laconia, was being sought by

Minoan lapidaries (a {lapidary} is a craftsmen working in hard stones to produce items such as seals and vessels) as early as early LM IA. In addition, there are grounds for believing that one or more Minoan potters might have been resident at Ayios Stephanos in the late MH (= MM IIIB) period, although it is not known whether such artisans came from Crete itself or from the Minoan colony on Kythera. Two signs incised on an otherwise nondescript ground stone implement found in a surface level at Ayios Stephanos have also been tentatively identified as constituting a short Linear A inscription.

Argolid

Many of the artifacts found in the Shaft Graves of Circles A and B at Mycenae have been argued to be of Minoan manufacture. This is most likely to be true of the inlaid daggers, of the silver, bronze, and stone vessels, and of the seals and signet rings. One of the bronze vessels from Shaft Grave IV even carries a two-sign inscription in Linear A (Karo 1930: no. 576). However, many of these objects are decorated with scenes which are not at all common or do not occur at all in contemporary or earlier Minoan art. It has therefore been suggested that many of these objects were made by Cretan artists at the specific request of Mainland employers, in some cases in a material such as gold which was plentiful at this time at Mycenae but rare on Crete. The peculiar combination of Mainland subject matter and/or raw material (in the case of gold) with Minoan style argues against the theory that many of the finds from the Shaft Graves are booty from Mycenaean piratic raids on Crete. Most of the hypothetical Minoan craftsmen working for the Shaft Grave princes will have been smiths who may have also produced, in addition to *objets d'art* made of precious materials, the large quantities of superior armaments found in their masters' tombs. Some objects, such as the grave steles, may as well be the products of Mainland apprentices as of Minoan artisans trained in Neopalatial workshops. As in the case of Ayios Stephanos, the Minoan craftsmen whose masterpieces furnished the Shaft Graves should probably be envisaged as resident aliens on the Greek Mainland. In an interesting contrast with Messenia, which alone among other regions of the Greek Mainland has produced early Mycenaean goldwork fully comparable with that from the Shaft Graves, the ruling class of the Argolid does not seem to have adopted the tholos as a tomb form of its own until the later LH I period or even LH IIA, at least one and perhaps as much as two or three generations after its appearance in Messenia.

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The Nature of Minoan Power in the Aegean during the Neopalatial Period

To what extent is Thucydides' report (I.4, 8) that Minos established a sea-empire (thalassocracy) in the Aegean by virtue of the strength of his fleet an accurate reflection of some Bronze Age historical reality? There is as yet no scholarly consensus on this issue although it has been the subject of a good deal of recent scholarship (e.g. Hägg and Marinatos 1984). Only a few of the large number of significant questions which arise in this connection are briefly treated below:

1. *If a Minoan thalassocracy like that described by Thucydides did exist, when did it flourish?*

Minoan influence was felt strongly in much of the Aegean world throughout the palatial era (i.e. from ca. 1930 to ca. 1500 B.C.) but in areas such as the coastal Peloponnese from as early as ca. 2050/2000 B.C. Although it is just possible that Minoan political and/or military power could have been dominant in the Aegean for as long as four or five centuries, indeed even for seven, most authorities who believe in an historical Minoan thalassocracy would place it either in the Neopalatial period (ca. 1750-1500 B.C.) or in the brief period when a functioning palace existed only at Knossos under the domination of what most feel was a Mainland Greek dynasty or overlordship (ca. 1500-1375 B.C.) or conceivably during both periods.

2. *Did the Minoans establish a network of colonies throughout the Aegean as one facet of their control over the area?*

Although such colonialism at first seems anachronistic in the Aegean of the second millennium B.C., it cannot be denied that the city state of Athens developed a colonial policy of this sort in the second half of the fifth century B.C. nor that the settlement at Kastri on Kythera, and probably that at Trianda on Rhodes as well, seem to have been populated only by Minoans in the earliest phases of the Late Bronze Age. Whether one can hope to recognize archaeologically the presence of small ruling groups of Minoans in the midst of Cycladic or Mainland Greek populations is questionable. Even in cases such as Ayia Irini, Phylakopi, and Akrotiri where Minoan influence is strongest and where Linear A texts have been found, the evidence is insufficient to document the presence of Minoans in ruling roles.

3. *Did a navy such as that cited by Thucydides as the basis for Minos' control over the islands exist in the Aegean of the second millennium B.C.?*

The representations both of the fleet on the south wall of Room 5 in the West House at Akrotiri and of a cluster of warships floating just offshore on the north wall of the same room are surely evidence for the existence both of warships as a class of vessel and of the capacity to organize such ships into militarily more potent entities like fleets. Of course, the fleet(s) illustrated in the West House need not be Minoan nor need such a fleet have been permanently employed in ridding the Aegean of pirates and establishing a Minoan hegemony. In fact, the ships in the West House frescoes could well have been used at irregular intervals and for short periods of time in piratical raids, whether against other islands in the Cyclades or against Crete itself. It may have been just such a fleet that Homer's Agamemnon assembled at Aulis for the attack on Troy two or three centuries later.

4. *Can all Minoan influence which is detectable during the Neopalatial period throughout the Aegean and beyond it, on Cyprus and in the Levant and Egypt, be explained purely in terms of trade/exchange, together with the employment of Minoan artisans abroad (as, for example, by the Shaft Grave princes)? In other words, can all indications of Minoan influence be explained without attributing both military capabilities and a militaristic philosophy to the Minoans?*

Yes.

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The Explosion of the Thera Volcano (ca. 1625 B.C.?)

Two extremes of opinion on the subject of the connection between this explosion and the collapse of Neopalatial Crete are presented below. It is possible to combine the two and maintain a middle-of-the-road position on this topic (see lesson on Santorini Volcano).

(a) The Thera explosion was responsible, whether directly or indirectly, for the destruction of numerous palatial as well as minor centers in Crete during the LM IB period. A consequence of the explosion was a widespread agricultural failure in eastern, and probably to some extent also in central, Crete as a result of a substantial deposition of wind-blown tephra over these portions of the island. A militarily dominant fleet, if it ever existed, was destroyed by tidal waves generated either by the eruption itself or by the formation of the caldera in its aftermath.

(b) The Thera explosion was not at all responsible for the LM IB destruction horizon on Crete. These destructions were rather the result either of local tectonic earthquakes (Pichler and Schiering) or of human agency in the form of invading Mycenaeans (Hood, Popham) who took over the palace at Knossos and ruled most of Crete in the ensuing LM II through early IIIA2 periods (ca. 1500-1375 B.C.).

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The LM IB Destruction Horizon Across Crete (ca. 1490/1470 B.C.?)

In most historical reconstructions of the earlier Late Bronze Age in the Aegean, this horizon of destruction, which seems to have affected virtually every Minoan residential site of any consequence, be it a palatial center (Mallia, Phaistos, Zakro), a complex of villas (Ayia Triadha, Tylissos), a small town (Gournia), a village clustered around a villa (Myrtos Pyrgos), or just an isolated villa (Sklavokampos), is usually treated as a short-lived phenomenon. Detailed ceramic analyses by Niemeier, however, suggest that the destruction levels at these various sites may be spread over quite some period of time, from very early in LM II to the period of transition from LM II to LM IIIA1. In other words, the destruction “horizon” may really be the product of perhaps as much as a generation or more (25-40 years) of unsettled times, during which marauding groups varying considerably in terms of their absolute numbers, political allegiances, and perhaps even ethnic compositions may have attacked and looted the numerous repositories of Minoan Neopalatial prosperity abundantly stocked during the previous two centuries. Life on Crete during the LM II period may thus not have been much different from that on the Greek Mainland during the period ca. 1220-1180 B.C. (end of LH IIIB and early LH IIIC) or that in France during the Hundred Years’ War.

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The Mycenaeans at Knossos (LM II-III A2 Early; ca. 1490/1470-1385/1375 B.C.?)

Crete

The palatial centers of Phaistos, Mallia, and Zakro had been destroyed and were never rebuilt as palaces. Knossos, on the other hand, continued to be used as a palace, although it is by no means clear who was in charge of it. Possibilities include: (a) a Mycenaean king who conquered Crete ca. 1500 B.C., destroyed all known palaces except for Knossos, and ruled central and eastern Crete as a Mycenaean kingdom; (b) a Mycenaean viceroy installed at Knossos by the Mycenaean conqueror hypothesized in (a) above and subject to that conqueror, who himself continued to rule a Mycenaean kingdom on the Mainland where he resided at the same time as he managed his new Cretan possessions through a surrogate; (c) a Minoan dynast who destroyed all other Minoan palaces except Knossos and who maintained his power with the aid of Mycenaean mercenaries resident at Knossos. Other scenarios are also possible.

The major body of evidence for this period consists of the contents of a number of richly furnished tombs in several different cemeteries, most of them located around the palace at Knossos. Collectively known as the “Warrior Graves”, these tombs contain the burials of both men and women, the men conspicuously furnished with weaponry, jewelry, and often with vessels of bronze and occasionally of precious metals as well. These burials have most frequently been interpreted as those of an intrusive Mycenaean military caste which suddenly appeared on Crete, for the most part around Knossos, in the aftermath of the LM IB destruction horizon and which disappeared equally abruptly after the destruction of Knossos early in LM IIIA2. Contemporary with these burials is a shift both in Minoan ceramics and in Cretan art in general which has been considered to reflect Mainland Greek tastes. However, the most recent analysis of the “Warrior Graves” by Kilian-Dirlmeier, in addition to establishing the existence of at least three distinct class rankings of the individuals buried within them, has made a strong case for the identification of these burials as those of Minoans rather than of Mycenaeans. Both male and female burials exhibit enough variability in terms of their grave goods to be subdivided into three grades of ranking, although the criteria that define these grades are naturally somewhat different for the two genders.

The Linear B tablets from Knossos, inscribed in a syllabic script which has been deciphered as an early form of Greek, have usually been attributed to levels of this period at Knossos, with the result that many scholars have argued that the persons in political control of Knossos must have been Greek-speaking Mainlanders who introduced their language as the official language of the palace bureaucracy. However, Palmer, Hallager, and an increasing number of other specialists now feel that the tablets belong not to the late 15th or even early 14th

century B.C. (= LM IIIA2 early) but rather mostly to the mid-13th century B.C. (= LM IIIB) when the palace at Knossos was finally destroyed. Some groups of tablets from Knossos, however, probably belong to earlier periods, having been preserved by previous destructions of parts of the palace in fierce fires. The tablets are therefore omitted from consideration here as evidence for the identification of the ruler(s) at Knossos in the period 1500-1385 B.C. The remaining evidence for the presence of Mycenaeans on Crete from ca. 1500 until the destruction of the palace at Knossos in a fierce fire ca. 1375 B.C. may be summarized as follows:

The “Warrior Graves” of the Knossos Area

These graves are found predominantly in the three cemeteries of Zapher Papoura, Ayios Ioannis, and Sellopoulo, although a few also occur in the separate Isopata, Mavro Spelio, New Hospital, and Gypsadhes cemeteries. Each of the cemeteries has certain idiosyncrasies which may be indicators of different social groupings (if they belong to Minoans) or perhaps places of origin (if they are those of Mycenaeans) within the populations in question. Characteristic of these “Warrior Graves” in general are:

- (a) The “non-Minoan” form of the tombs, whether these are shaft-niche graves as at Zapher Papoura or chamber tombs exhibiting Mainland Greek features (e.g. particularly long dromoi having side walls which incline inward toward the top) as at Sellopoulo.
- (b) The fact that many of these tombs contain only a single corpse and, even when holding multiple burials, date from a time range no broader than LM II-III A2 early.
- (c) The fact that many of the cemeteries in which they occur do not appear to have been in use before LM II (i.e. these are cemeteries newly established in the period of the supposed “Mycenaean occupation”).
- (d) The fact that the finds in these tombs exhibit a preference for weapons as burial goods not seen heretofore in Crete but characteristic of wealthier Mainland Greek tombs since the time of the Shaft Graves at Mycenae.
- (e) The fact that hoards of bronze vessels are relatively common in these tombs, as in Mainland Greek tombs since the era of the Shaft Graves, whereas hoards of this kind are rare in earlier Minoan tombs.
- (f) The fact that certain Mainland Greek ceramic shapes, especially the two-handled goblet or kylix, are particularly popular in such tombs.
- (g) The fact that large amounts of jewelry, possibly insignia of rank, are worn by the dead in these tombs.

Similar LM IIIA tombs with many of the same traits have been found at Katsamba (on the coast north of Knossos, possibly the harbor town which served the palace), Archanes (in a tholos tomb of Mycenaean type furnished with a side chamber containing the rich, intact burial of a “Mycenaean princess”; note also a grave enclosure filled with shaft graves marked by steles, all the tombs within which had unfortunately been robbed), and Phaistos (the chamber tombs of the Kalyvia cemetery, especially Tomba dei Nobili no.8).

The Introduction of Mainland Pottery Shapes

These include the LM II goblet closely related to the LH IIB Ephyraean goblet and the low, rounded alabastron.

The First Finds of Amber on Crete

Relatively common in Messenian and Argive tombs of the LH I-II periods, this material first appears on Crete in Knossian “Warrior Graves” of the LM II period.

A General Air of Militarism at Knossos

Most evident in the finds from the “Warrior Graves”, this warlike spirit is also detectable in art, as on the Palace Style jar from Katsamba decorated with a boars’-tusk helmet masquerading as a jellyfish. The increasing rigidity of Minoan art as seen in the LM II Palace Style, the heraldic Griffin Fresco of the Knossian “Throne Room”, and the large-scale figure-of-eight shields from the second floor of the Residential Quarters of the palace, while not strictly militaristic in character, is also often taken to be indicative of the presence of Mainland Greeks at Knossos during the LM II-III A2 early periods. To these new currents in art Hood would add the predilection for processional frescoes and for frescoes composed of multiple registers.

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Mainland Greece

The vast majority of our evidence for early Mycenaean culture (LH I-III A1, ca. 1680-1400 B.C.) is funerary in nature, from shaft graves, tholoi, and chamber tombs. The excavation by the British of a major LH IIB-III A1 architectural complex, at least a mansion if not an early palace, at the site of the Menelaion near Sparta and the exposure of a pair of good-sized LH I megara by an American team at Nemea-Tsougiza go only some way toward redressing this imbalance in the available evidence. A few features of early Mycenaean culture are of particular interest when viewed against the backdrop of the evidence for Mycenaeans at Knossos in the period ca. 1500-1375 B.C.:

(a) Wooden coffins are first used to hold corpses in MM III chamber tombs on Crete. Such coffins become much more popular in the LM II-III A1 “Warrior Graves” at Knossos. The few coffins so far known from Mainland Greece come from early LM III A Athens. After the LM III A period, Minoan coffins are regularly of the terracotta larnax form.

(b) After the Shaft Grave period at Mycenae, the next group of Mycenaean tombs on the Mainland which contain large hoards of bronzework date to the early LH III A period. Most of these tombs are located in the Argolid at the sites of Dendra, Asine, and Mycenae, but some occur in Messenia at Tragana and Nichoria. Is this material to be identified as plunder or tribute from Crete? Does it indicate from where the Mycenaean warriors resident at Knossos came? What kind of a society is it which allows so much tangible wealth, particularly in the form of metals, to be removed from circulation within the society and to be buried with its dead? The Mycenaeans consistently adopted this practice (Shaft Graves, tholoi of LH I-II periods, LH III A tholos and chamber tombs, ?”Warrior Graves” at Knossos) during the first three centuries of the Late Bronze Age; the Minoans did not. Rich Mainland Greek burials consistently, from the MH III period onwards, also contained a good deal of weaponry.

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The Craftsmen Who Made the Jewellery, Metal Vessels, and Weapons of the LM/LH II-III A1 Periods

All the evidence suggests that these artists were Minoans based at Knossos. With the destruction of Knossos ca. 1400 B.C., not only do the artists appear to have been killed off, since bronzework in general suffers a severe and permanent decline in the Aegean, but the supply of bronze as a raw material also appears to diminish markedly, a fact which implies that Knossos had been in control of the copper trade, whether with Cyprus or with some other source of supply in the eastern Mediterranean such as southeastern Turkey, and that this trade network had supplied the entire southern Aegean with the raw materials for bronze.

The Destruction of Knossos (ca. 1385/1375 B.C.?)

Everyone considers this destruction by a violent fire to have been the result of human agency, primarily because the evidence for a Mycenaean military presence in the Knossos area disappears afterwards. The particular agents

of the destruction have not been securely identified. Candidates include (a) a single Mycenaean prince from the Mainland who resented Knossian dominance in the Aegean (cf. the Theseus myth), or alternatively a coalition of such princes; (b) a rebellious Minoan subject population fed up with subservience to its Mycenaean overlords. With this in all likelihood penultimate rather than final destruction of the palace of Knossos, mercantile, and probably political, dominance within the southern Aegean passes from Crete to the kingdoms of the southern Greek Mainland.

Mycenaean Kingdoms on Crete Following the Destruction of Knossos (ca. 1385/1375 B.C.)

At about the same time as the destruction by fire of the Knossian palace at the beginning of LM IIIA2, there are indications that independent polities arose in other parts of Crete for the first time since the wave of LM IB destructions that marked the end of the Neopalatial era a little more than a century before. In the Mesara, the site of Ayia Triadha witnessed the construction of an enormous megaroid structure [conventionally referred to as either Building B (Niemeier) or Building ABCD (Shaw)] over the ruins of the two rich LM I villas that had served as the administrative headquarters of the region in Neopalatial times. Roughly contemporary and located some 75 meters to the northeast is an extremely large, two-storeyed stoa having a facade of alternating large, high-based piers and small, low-based columns on the ground-floor level. This structure, if it did not actually function as a commercial building, presumably served as a large-scale storage facility. Still further to the northeast, just to the east of the southern of two EM tholoi on the northern margins of the site, two chamber tombs built above ground and featuring unusually thick walls were constructed side by side. The eastern tomb, much better preserved and the earlier of the pair, contained two larnakes, both found robbed. In a shaft in the floor was an unpainted terracotta larnax, while on the floor of the tomb chamber was the famous frescoed larnax known as the Ayia Triadha sarcophagus, unique in being made of stone, coated with lime plaster, and decorated with complex polychrome figured scenes on all four sides (see Late Minoan Architecture and Minoan Religion handouts). The architecture, placement, and contents of these tombs suggest that they may be the final resting places of a small but distinguished group of LM IIIA2-B inhabitants of the site, in all probability the royal family of a Final Palatial kingdom in the Mesara. Fragments of paintings executed in a style identical to that manifested on the sarcophagus, perhaps even painted by the same artist, come from a fresco dump in the settlement. They may once have decorated the walls of an important building, possibly the giant megaroid structure that is likely to have served as the kingdom's palace.

Less than ten miles to the south at the harbor town of Kommos, a huge supply of handsomely cut Minoan ashlar blocks from the Neopalatial palace (Building T) at this site were re-used in assembling a vast, single-storeyed, six-gallery structure (Building P) built over the leveled remains of the former palace's east wing. The largest complex to have been constructed anywhere on Crete during the LM III period, Building P appears to have functioned as a monumental ship-storage facility. Together with a specially designed form of undecorated transport amphora, fragments of thousands of which were found in its ruins, this impressive shipshed is eloquent testimony to the wealth that the dynast who ruled from Ayia Triadha controlled. Numerous fragments of vases from Egypt, the Levant, Cyprus, and Italy found at Kommos provide copious evidence for merchandise coming into southern Crete from throughout the eastern Mediterranean during this period, although no such vessels occur in contemporary levels at Ayia Triadha. At the same time, quantities of agricultural produce were being shipped out of the Mesara's chief port in the region's trademark "short-necked amphora", bound for destinations that remain to be identified.

A separate kingdom appears to be represented by the Linear B tablets discovered in LM IIIB [13th century B.C.] levels during the early 1990's in a salvage excavation at Chania in west Crete. Since the Bronze Age town of Chania is buried underneath the modern, Turkish, Venetian, Roman, and Greek cities known by the name of Kydonia in ancient times, the movable finds (pottery, seals, tablets, etc.) from Final Palatial Chania are at this point more impressive than its architecture; nothing on the scale of Ayia Triadha's royal buildings or Kommos' monumental shipshed has yet been found there.

It is likely that other independent LM III polities existed in east Crete, where the pottery of LM IIIA2-B is quite different from that of the island's central and western regions. Thus the history of Crete after the great fire at Knossos in the early LM IIIA2 period is one of political fragmentation and increasing regionalism in material culture. At least as late as the earlier 13th century B.C. (LM IIIB early), Linear B was being used as a script for keeping records in the Greek language at both Chania and Knossos. It is therefore assumed that palatial administrations existed at both sites for up to at least two centuries after the LM IB destructions of the last purely Minoan palatial administrations that kept similar records in another language using the Linear A script..

Aegean Connections with Egypt in the Amarna Period (ca. 1360-1340 B.C.)

During the reign of the heretical pharaoh Akhenaten (= Amenhotep IV), the capital of Egypt was moved downstream from Thebes to the new city of Akhetaten (= modern Tell el-Amarna). This city was only occupied from ca. 1352-1338 B.C., and the large quantities of Mycenaean pottery found within it are therefore supplied with a fairly precise absolute date. The almost complete absence of Minoan pottery at Amarna is one indication of Mycenaean mercantile dominance within the Aegean at this time. More significant is the Mycenaean character of the settlements which have by this time replaced sites characterized until the end of the LM IB period (ca. 1500 B.C.) by Minoan cultural remains at Trianda on Rhodes, Ayia Irini on Keos, Phylakopi on Melos, and Miletus and Iasos in Asia Minor.

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The Myth of Theseus and the Minotaur

This myth almost certainly commemorates the destruction of Minoan power by a Mainland (Mycenaean) prince. But are we to see in Theseus the destroyer of the Minoan palaces in the LM IB period and the first Mycenaean dynast at Knossos ca. 1500 B.C. or rather the destroyer of Knossos in ca. 1375 B.C.? (Mary Renault opts for the second possibility in *The King Must Die* and *The Bull from the Sea*). And who is the legendary Minos? A truly Minoan monarch or merely the Mycenaean ruler or series of rulers who managed to control Knossos for roughly a century before being swept away when the last of the great Minoan palaces went up in smoke early in the LM IIIA2 period?

The Linear B tablets from Knossos, if correctly dated to the 13th century B.C. (rather than to the early 14th), show that Knossos continued to function as a palace, although probably one of a quite different sort both formally and operationally, for as long as four or five generations after the destruction of ca. 1375 B.C. However, its dominating position in the southern Aegean, certainly cultural and artistic and very probably political as well, seems to have declined rapidly, if not immediately. From ca. 1375 to 1250 or 1200 B.C., Knossos would appear to have been the center only of a northern and eastern Cretan political entity, probably a Mycenaean kingdom comparable to those of the contemporary Argolid or Messenia (cf. the figure of Idomeneus, king of Knossos in the *Iliad*). As outlined above, it is likely that a similar but separate western Cretan kingdom existed with its capital at Chania, and yet another, south Cretan kingdom with its capital at Ayia Triadha and a great international port at Kommos flourished in the Mesara.

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