

THE LATER STAGES OF STATE FORMATION IN PALATIAL CRETE *

Existing studies of state formation in Bronze Age Crete focus primarily on developments in the Prepalatial period leading up to the Protopalatial period¹. This approach follows the paradigm for primary state formation from the Near East in which a palace characterizes a state at the end of its formative period. The Protopalatial remains in Crete, however, do not conform to models of the fully formed state as developed in other geographical areas. In this paper I will discuss state formation as a continuum, not an event, and focus on the processes of state formation in Crete which continued throughout the Middle Minoan period, after the first palaces were built.

I accept that Crete is a case of secondary state formation in the sense that knowledge of the Near Eastern palaces and administrative systems stimulated the founding of the first Cretan palaces². My interest in prehistoric Crete as a case study of state formation processes is in the indigenous response to this external stimulus. I propose a cart-before-the-horse model. I suggest that the construction of the palace took place before the development of a social and economic organization which integrated the behavior of individuals residing in the larger geographical area surrounding the palace into a state controlled by the palace. In the archaeological record of Crete, the cart - the palace - comes before the horse - the centralized social and economic interactions which drive the state. Under these circumstances, state formation becomes the process of training the horse to pull the cart.

Now let's look at the supporting evidence while keeping an eye on what is known about economic and social systems in formative states. First a problem inherent in the archaeological record needs to be acknowledged. The remains of the first palaces are poorly preserved. Given the amount of data available to them, it is understandable that earlier scholars felt the need to take evidence from different time periods to piece together

* This paper was first presented as part of the "Small States: Cases of Different Paradigms" Symposium at the Society for American Archaeology Annual Meeting held on April 11, 1992. Many thanks to David Small, the symposium's organizer, for inviting me to participate. Thanks also go to James Wright, Jeremy Rutter, and Paul Halstead for their comments on that paper which contributed to the present version. Another version of this paper was presented at the Archaeological Institute of America Annual Meeting on December 30, 1993. The following abbreviation has been used:

EPS = *The Evolution of Political Systems: Sociopolitics in Small-scale Sedentary Societies* (1990).

- 1 P.M. WARREN, "The Genesis of the Minoan Palace", *Function Palaces*, 47-55; for an alternative view of prepalatial state formation, see J.F. CHERRY, "Evolution, Revolution, and the Origins of Complex Society in Minoan Crete", *Minoan Society*, 33-45.
- 2 L.V. WATROUS, "The Role of the Near East in the Rise of the Cretan Palaces", *Function Palaces*, 65-70. This is different from the invasion theory proposed by M. BERNAL, *Black Athena. The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization II* (1991), see review by J.M. WEINSTEIN, *AJA* 96 (1992), 381-383. On Minoan administrative systems, see J. WEINGARTEN, "Three Upheavels in Minoan Sealing Administration: Evidence for Radical Change", *Aegean Seals, Sealings and Administration. Proceedings of the NEH-Dickson Conference of the Program in Aegean Scripts and Prehistory of the Department of Classics, University of Texas at Austin January 11-13, 1989, Aegeum* 5 (1990), 105-115.

a comprehensive picture of Minoan social and political organization. But today we need not reconstruct the form and function of the first palaces solely on evidence from the second palaces. This method prevents any possibility for recognizing change. Keith Branigan and Gisela Walberg³ have discussed changing institutions for the Middle Minoan period but only from an island-wide perspective. The Middle Minoan period, however, is characterized by localized developments. As the body of data grows, our challenge is to recognize the significance of the developments which took different forms at different times in each region.

We know that the first palaces are larger than any Prepalatial buildings. Therefore, the first palaces do represent a new level of centralized labor resource organization. This is an important step in state formation, when labor is moved out of the economy of the household and local community to a regional center. Study of formative states indicates that this step commonly results from the institution of private land ownership, which ultimately causes part of the populace to subsist through wage labor or craft production and obtain their food through exchange with landholding agriculturalists⁴.

Scholars studying state formation question the motivation for the populace to support the elite by participating in a system which causes social and economic inequality⁵. Coercion is the most frequently cited cause. Crete provides a special case for cooperative causes. We know that spaces specifically designated for the storage of foodstuffs existed in the first palaces. As suggested by Paul Halstead, the storerooms provide one of the best forms of evidence for the function of the first palaces⁶. Halstead reconstructs an organizational system in which surplus agricultural products are given to the organizers at the palace in exchange for valuable craft goods. Then, during an agriculturally bad year, these goods could be exchanged for food. Halstead shows that this system suits the evidence on Crete for the co-existence of several palaces in different ecological zones, which could exchange goods and commodities according to their local yield. Attempts to reconstruct what percentages of the first palaces were devoted to storage and, thereby, to what extent this changed in the second palace period have been made, with different results, by Jennifer Moody and Keith Branigan⁷. It is important to understand that this is not the system of redistribution characteristically used to define economic transactions in a chiefdom where wealth inequality is controlled by having the chief return surplus production to the producers.

Based on Robert Netting's analysis of the role of central governments in small-scale sedentary societies⁸, another probable function of the first palaces was to provide a marketplace that was a secure environment for equitable exchange among craft good producers and landholding agriculturalists from the immediately surrounding villages and farmsteads. The need for a public space where exchange was regulated, preventing the

3 K. BRANIGAN, "Some Observations on State Formation in Crete", *Problems*, 63-71; ID., "Social Security and the State in Middle Bronze Age Crete", *Aegaeum* 2 (1988), 11-16; G. WALBERG, *Middle Minoan III - A Time of Transition* (SIMA 97, 1992), 141-152.

4 N. YOFFEE, "Too Many Chiefs? (or, Safe Texts for the 90s)", *Archaeological Theory: Who Sets the Agenda?* (1993), 60-78; S. PLOG, "Agriculture, Sedentism, and Environment in the Evolution of Political Systems", *EPS*, 177-199.

5 T. EARLE ed., *Chiefdoms: Power, Economy, and Ideology* (1991); *EPS*.

6 P. HALSTEAD, "On Redistribution and the Origin of Minoan-Mycenaean Palatial Economies", *Problems*, 519-529; ID., "From Determinism to Uncertainty: Social Storage and the Rise of the Minoan Palace", *Economic Archaeology* (BAR International Series 96, 1981), 187-213.

7 J. MOODY, "The Minoan Palace as a Prestige Artifact", *Function Palaces*, 235-240; K. BRANIGAN, "The Economic Role of the First Palaces", *Function Palaces*, 245-248.

8 R. NETTING, "Population, Permanent Agriculture, and Politics: Unpacking the Evolutionary Portmanteau", *EPS*, 21-61.

use of force in extracting unequal exchanges, would provide another reason for the populace to cooperate with the construction of the first palaces. The regulators of exchange become the designated elite. Where social cooperation, not forced coercion, empowers the elite, they tend to be a collective, not an individualized elite, characterized by public building projects, not individual monumental burials, just as we see in the case of Crete during the first palace period. One indicator of change in the second palace period towards increased complexity in the regulation of exchange is the introduction of standardized balance weights⁹.

John Cherry has discussed how the co-existence of the Cretan palaces, according to the concept of peer polity interaction, would contribute to increasing similarity in their developing organizational systems¹⁰. Each palace served as the center of a small formative state in a topographically discrete area constricted by the mountains and sea. We also need to consider how each followed its own course of regional development in the integration of the surrounding settlements into a centralized social and economic organization. To reconstruct these changes, architectural complexes other than the palaces provide the best evidence.

On the basis of evidence found in Quartier Mu at Mallia, Jean-Claude Poursat has reconstructed an independent center which produced and administered the distribution of religious objects during the first palace period¹¹. During the second palace period, however, evidence for these activities is centralized in the palace in the Mallia region.

In the Phaistos region, the centralization of social and economic activities reaches greater complexity by the end of the first palace period. Ayia Triada and Kommos are being established as secondary centers. Moreover there may be differences in the organizational function of these centers. Ayia Triada may have administered internal exchange while the port at Kommos administered external exchange. The development of the port as a secondary center at the beginning of the second palace period coincides with the marked increase in the overseas distribution of Cretan goods¹².

Additional evidence for greater social complexity in the second palace period are the earliest iconographic depictions of humans in a single scene where differences in appearance indicate differences in social status, as on the Chieftain Cup and the Harvester Vase from Ayia Triada¹³.

Burials are another type of site away from the palaces at which to study state formation. A two-level difference in the construction and contents of burials at Mochlos and Mallia has been cited as evidence of social ranking prior to the construction of the first palaces¹⁴. Atypically, in comparison to other palace states, however, there is no evidence for the monumental burial of elite individuals during the first palace period at Knossos and Phaistos. Notably, in the Mesara area around Phaistos, the Prepalatial form of communal

9 K.M. PETRUSO, *Keos VIII. Ayia Irini. The Balance Weights* (1992), 66.

10 J.F. CHERRY, "Politics and Palaces: Some Problems in Minoan State Formation", *Peer Polity Interaction and Socio-political Change* (1986), 19-45.

11 J.-C. POURSAT, "Town and Palace at Mallia in the Protopalatial Period", *Function Palaces*, 75-76; J.-C. POURSAT, L. GODART, and J.-P. OLIVIER, *Fouilles exécutées à Mallia: Le Quartier Mu I (EtCrét XXIII, 1978)*; B. DETOURNAY, J.-C. POURSAT, and F. VANDENABEELE, *Fouilles exécutées à Mallia: Le Quartier Mu II (EtCrét XXVI, 1980)*.

12 S. HOOD, "A Minoan Empire in the Aegean in the 16th and 15th Centuries B.C.?", *Thalassocracy*, 33-37; W.-D. NIEMEIER, "The End of the Minoan Thalassocracy", *Thalassocracy*, 205-214.

13 Note in general the lack of more than one figure in a single scene on seals in J. YOUNGER, *Bronze Age Aegean Seals in their Middle Phase (SIMA 102, 1993)*, 19-21. The figures on the Harvester Vase, however, are also found on 251 impressions of a single seal at Ayia Triada; see D. LEVI, "Le Cretule di Hagia Triada", *ASAtene* 8-9 (1925-26), 131-132, no. 125, fig. 141.

14 J.S. SOLES, "Social Ranking in Prepalatial Cemeteries", *Problems*, 49-61.

burial in a tholos tomb continued until the beginning of the second palace period. I have argued elsewhere that this burial practice indicates the organization of society in local kin groups resident in the villages which also reflects the economic organization of agricultural production at the village level¹⁵. Burial in the tholos tombs ceased only when an intermediary level of economic organization between the villages and the palaces at secondary centers became effective in the second palace period.

Another type of site away from the palaces which provides evidence of changes in social organization is the peak sanctuary. According to Alan Peatfield, peak sanctuaries were founded at the same time as or just before the first palaces but at locations unrelated to the palaces¹⁶. The peak sanctuaries served as a system for resolving a problem commonly found in formative states, how to draw the populace residing far from the center, particularly those not inhabiting the lowlands, into the regional social and economic system. The increase during the first palace period in objects produced at the center as dedications in the peak sanctuaries demonstrates the success of the center in motivating the distant populace's involvement in regional exchange, exchanging their surplus for specialized craft products produced at the center to be dedicated at the sanctuary.

With the construction of the second palaces, however, dedications were concentrated at peak sanctuaries located near the palaces and those farther away went out of use. Not until the end of the first palace period did wealth become centralized through ceremonial acts. Valuable craft goods that were disposed in tholos tombs at the end of the Prepalatial period are found in palace sanctuary deposits by the end of the first palace period.

The integration of the region surrounding a palace into a complex social and economic organization is most evident in the Knossos region at the beginning of the second palace period. Structures surrounding the palace and at outlying sites demonstrate a marked change in that they increasingly emulate the storage practices of the palace¹⁷. A consistent architectural arrangement of specialized rooms emulating the features of the palace, as described by John McEnroe, also first appears in structures outside the palace at the end of the first palace period¹⁸. Previously the disposition of architectural space in non-palatial architectural complexes was, in relative terms, undifferentiated.

More importantly, some of these structures, called villas, were built at locations apart from the palaces and previously existing villages, removing power over agricultural production from the heads of the villages and consolidating it under the control of the palaces. This shift from a two-level settlement hierarchy - palaces and villages - to a broadly distributed three or more-level hierarchy - palaces, villas and other special purpose complexes, and villages - does not occur until after the construction of the second palace.

Knossos may have been able to support the most complex social and economic

15 M.K. DABNEY and J.C. WRIGHT, "Mortuary Customs, Palatial Society and State Formation in the Aegean Area: A Comparative Study", *Celebrations*, 45-52.

16 A. PEATFIELD, "Palace and Peak: The Political and Religious Relationship between Palaces and Peak Sanctuaries", *Function Palaces*, 89-93.

17 M.K. DABNEY, *A Comparison of Correlations in the Spatial Distribution of Archaeological Remains from Prepalatial and Palatial Period Settlements and Tombs in Central Crete* (Columbia University Ph.D. thesis, 1989); D.J.I. BEGG, *Minoan Storerooms in the Late Bronze Age* (University of Toronto Ph.D. thesis, 1975).

18 J.C. MCENROE, *Minoan House and Town Arrangement* (University of Toronto Ph.D. thesis, 1979); ID., "A Typology of Minoan Neopalatial Houses", *AJA* 86 (1982), 3-19; ID., "The Significance of Local Styles in Minoan Vernacular Architecture", *L'habitat égéen préhistorique. Actes de la Table Ronde internationale de l'Ecole française d'Athènes (23-25 juin 1987)*, *BCH Suppl.* XIX (1990), 195-202.

organization because it had the largest population base, according to the evidence from surface surveys in the areas immediately surrounding Knossos and Phaistos¹⁹. The lack of a large population as a resource base probably prevented the development of as large a number of secondary centers in the Phaistos region as in the Knossos region.

The development of Linear A for accurate recordkeeping and long distance communication was undoubtedly a necessary component for the creation of these secondary centers of administration. According to Jean-Pierre Olivier, there are only 1,500 documents preserved, carrying a total of about 7,000 characters - that is the equivalent of four pages of modern text - most of them from the end of the second palace period²⁰. Although it is generally acknowledged that no one has deciphered Linear A yet, certain signs for numbers, names, and commodities are recognizable by comparison with Linear B. On this basis, Olivier and others have deduced that the preserved documents record local economic transactions because of the small numbers of individuals and goods listed. Moreover, this is equally true of the texts whether found at the villas or at the palaces. Olivier posits that the palace archives were written on perishable materials. But, for a reconstruction of state formation, the written word at present provides incomplete evidence for documenting the complex administrative system suggested by the existence of the villas.

Also developments in the sealing system, such as the multiple sealing system reconstructed by Judith Weingarten²¹, continue throughout the Middle Minoan period, further indicating that administrative systems are not fully established until the second palace period.

Whatever caused the destruction of the first palaces, whether an act of nature or man, it was the organizational ability to maintain centralized control of material and labor resources in the face of that destruction and go on to construct the second palaces that most strongly speaks for the beginning of the second palace period as the time at which statehood was achieved in prehistoric Crete. At this time only well-organized people could carry out the rebuilding of the palaces. In turn, the superior organizational skills of the palace rulers enabled them to exert greater control outside the palaces through the secondary centers and villas which consolidated their control over a larger region.

These features of increased complexity and centralization in economic and social organization which took place after the construction of the first palaces show that the institution of the palaces was but one episode in the long process towards state formation. Attempts to impose the Near Eastern model for the sequence of state formation processes on Crete have obscured significant differences. Moreover the palaces exerted control at different rates and in different ways according to their own resource bases. We need to study these differences which enrich our knowledge of state formation variability.

Mary K. DABNEY

- 19 L.V. WATROUS *et al.*, "Survey of the Western Mesara Plain in Crete: Preliminary Report of the 1984, 1986, and 1987 Field Seasons", *Hesperia* 62 (1993), 191-248; S. HOOD and D. SMYTH, *Archaeological Survey of the Knossos Area* (BSA Supplement 14, 1981).
- 20 J.-P. OLIVIER, "Structure des archives palatiales en linéaire A et en linéaire B", *Le système palatial en Orient, en Grèce et à Rome. Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, 19-22 juin 1985* (1987), 227-235.
- 21 J. WEINGARTEN, "The Multiple Sealing System of Minoan Crete and its Possible Antecedents in Anatolia", *OJA* 11 (1992), 25-37.