

**CLASH OF CULTURES OR MELTING POT?  
SOME IDENTITY ISSUES IN THE SOUTHERN BALKANS AND CRETE:  
MATERIAL CULTURES DURING THE 2<sup>nd</sup> MILLENNIUM BC**

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As an archaeologist mostly dealing with the Greek Bronze Age and in particular with the relationship between Minoan Crete and the Greek Mainland during the Late Bronze Age, it has been at times challenging to be involved in this very different workshop about Italy and Montenegro interconnections<sup>1</sup>. But research is always guiding you onto unknown but worthwhile paths, opening new possibilities and perspectives.

Two things apparently link Montenegro and the Aegean: Sir Arthur Evans and the search for identity, two issues that involve not simply the past, but also the very recent past and even the present of these two areas.

This paper will be divided into two sections. The first one will deal briefly with the personal history of the archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans, very well known to scholars and the public alike for his excavations of the palace at Knossos in Crete. Before travelling in the Aegean, he was involved in research in the Balkans. The second section involves the studies I presented to this workshop, under the specific request of our Montenegrin colleagues, concerning the matter of identity/ethnicity in the Aegean Bronze age and specifically in Minoan/Mycenaean Crete, and the possibility to recognize different cultural identities through the lens of material culture.

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank my colleagues from Montenegro for the splendid hospitality and kindness. I would like also to express my happiness to be here and within this joint project that has not only improved our reciprocal scientific knowledge, but also has increased our working-relationship and, especially, friendship. The chosen topic for the workshop, and now for its publication, was explicitly requested by our Montenegrin colleagues, even if lies a bit at the borders of the geographical and cultural area of this book. For this reason, I have dedicated it to them. I warmly thank the British School at Athens for the permit to study and publish the materials of the Mavro Spileo necropolis.

## 1. A preamble on Sir Arthur Evans: from the Balkans to Crete

*'The tireless explorer will be of great use to our history and antiquity,  
and it is right that foreigners, at least on occasions,  
express how much the Slavinians had done for others.'*

Slovinač newspaper 5, 1877

### 1.1 Travelling in the Balkans

Sir Arthur Evans is known worldwide as the discoverer or more accurately the main archaeologist who excavated the Minoan palace at Knossos in Crete, giving impetus to the new discipline concerning the Bronze Age of the island. Actually he cannot in a way be considered as either the discoverer of the Knossos palace, already known previously by the work of Minos Kalokairinos, or its excavator, because the palace was mostly dug on a daily basis in the trenches by the archaeologist Duncan Mackenzie<sup>2</sup>. Be that as it may, the name of Evans is indissolubly linked with Knossos, its excavations and its monumental publication in four volumes, in which Sir Arthur organized and set forth all his knowledge and reflections about the Minoan civilization in its relations with its Mediterranean counterparts<sup>3</sup>.

But before Knossos, Evans had had other experiences in the Balkans. It was only time and chance that lead him to follow other paths towards the Aegean Sea<sup>4</sup>.

Arthur John Evans was born in England in 1851. His father John (1823-1908) was a well-known scientist, a collector of prehistoric artefacts and an archaeologist, who in his last years had the joy of seeing the success of his son Arthur at Knossos<sup>5</sup>. It was natural that Arthur grew up with a great interest in archaeology. He was here self-taught as was his father, without any formal training in excavation. We can say, as pointed out by Ann Brown, that 'he grew up under the shadow of his father'<sup>6</sup>, and was probably spurred on by the desire to emulate him. However, the desired celebrity did not come from the halls of Academia, though he did graduate from Oxford in 1873.

In 1871, Evans started travelling in Europe, and especially in the Balkans, where he went for holidays in the same year, visiting Slovenia and Croatia and becoming interested in politics, local nature and traditions. Evans met then with the Turks for the first time, show-

<sup>2</sup> KOPAKA 2015; MOMIGLIANO 1999.

<sup>3</sup> EVANS 1921-1935.

<sup>4</sup> In between the Balkans and Crete, Evans made an interesting tour also in Sicily in 1889, following his father-in-law Edward A. Freeman, as has been recently reconstructed in PELAGATTI, MUSCOLINO 2019.

<sup>5</sup> FAGAN 2003, 33-36.

<sup>6</sup> BROWN 1993, 11; WILKES 1976; MACGILLIVRAY 2000.

ing towards them an ambiguous attitude: admiration and at the same time a strong repulsion for the oppression they practised on the subjugated people of the Ottoman Empire. A similar deep-seated feeling he will express later in Crete, still under the Ottomans when he first went there in 1894<sup>7</sup>.

In 1875, he visited Bosnia and Herzegovina, arriving also in Ragusa (today's Dubrovnik). In 1877, he started an archaeological excavation at a Bronze Age tumulus at Canali, near Ragusa (today's Konavle), but was interrupted after a few days by the war between the Turks and Montenegrins. After two weeks he restarted the excavation; and it was then that he met the famous historian Edward A. Freeman, who arrived with his two daughters. Till now it is not possible to work out what tumulus it was that Evans excavated: he defined it as 'colossal'<sup>8</sup>.

In 1877, after this first Balkan adventure, Evans published a book on the Bosnia and Herzegovina insurrections, that induced the *Manchester Guardian* newspaper to send him back as a correspondent in 1878<sup>9</sup>. In February of the same year, he and Margaret Freeman announced their wedding and a few weeks later he moved to Dubrovnik, where he rented Casa San Lazzaro, a very pleasant house with a garden by the sea (Fig. 1)<sup>10</sup>. The wedding was celebrated in September and they moved to Dubrovnik in October, with the clear intention of settling there for years.

During his years in the Balkans, Evans displayed his all-round curiosity: primarily for the political situation and the condition of the local population under the Ottoman Empire, but also for the antiquities and traditions of the country. His interest in politics was soon noticed by the Austrian authority and the possi-



Fig. 1 Arthur Evans and his wife Margaret, 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1888 (after Wikimedia commons: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Margaret\\_and\\_Arthur\\_Evans\\_22\\_June\\_1888.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Margaret_and_Arthur_Evans_22_June_1888.jpg)).

<sup>7</sup> EVANS 1878, 126-127; JELAVICH 1955; HORWITZ 1981, 34; WILKES 1976, 34-36; BROWN 1993, 37, 42.

<sup>8</sup> KIRIGIN 2015, 4; HORWITZ 1981, 44.

<sup>9</sup> EVANS 1877; BROWN 1993; FAGAN 2003; TSONOS 2011.

<sup>10</sup> HORWITZ 1981, 48-51; KIRIGIN 2015, 4-6.

bility that he might become the new British consul in Dubrovnik vanished, probably because of the rumours that he was a spy.

In the following years, he continued travelling in the Balkans, sending numerous reports on the political situation, that were later published also as *Illyrian Letters*<sup>11</sup>. He continued to be interested in archaeology and especially in the collection of the smaller class of ancient finds, a type of artefact not much considered by his contemporaries and that he went on to accumulate also in Crete. He collected in particular seals, filling notebooks of notes and drawings, as was his custom in the later documentation about his activities in Crete<sup>12</sup>.

In 1882, he was finally accused of being a spy: imprisoned for six weeks by the Austrian authorities, who did not appreciate his interest in politics, he was banned from Austro-Hungarian territories. The couple then went back to England, where Evans had time to write about the archaeological discoveries he had made in the Balkans, where he had mapped the Roman road system and carried out some modest excavations in Risan (Figs. 2-4)<sup>13</sup>. Even if his stay in the Balkans and his activities were circumscribed, he yet left some very important publications, conducted with great accuracy and precision, showing the same aptitude for details we will find later in his numerous volumes dedicated to Cretan antiquities.

Becoming Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum in 1884, he employed his experience in European archaeology to enlarge the collections of the museum and make it an excellent research centre.

In 1893, the sudden death of his wife deeply changed his perspectives. The following year, stimulated by descriptions of the Kephala hill, where later he excavated the palace of Knossos, and by some small finds brought from Crete by his friend and colleague J.J. Myres, he travelled for the first time to the island.

Here too, the political conditions caught his interest. He saw similarities in the desire for freedom from the Ottoman Empire by the local Christian populations both in the Balkans and in Crete. But this time, he had the chance to experience the Cretan insurrection and liberation from the Ottomans. Now too another strand in Evans's life-narrative begins: with the discovery (or for someone the 'creation') of the Minoan civilization.

Evans visited the Balkans (then the Kingdom of Yugoslavia) once again, for a few days, in June 1932, 50 years after his last departure. On that occasion he offered to the Dubrovnik library a rare incunabula 'De natura angelica', that still remains one of the most precious possessions in the library collection<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> EVANS 1878.

<sup>12</sup> BROWN 1993, 21, figs. 16-17.

<sup>13</sup> EVANS 1883 and 1885, in particular 1885, 6 ff.; KIRIGIN 2015, 2-4.

<sup>14</sup> Branko Kirigin gives a very interesting account of Evans's travels in the Balkans, with many references to the local newspapers. See in particular, KIRIGIN 2015, 10-12, and note n. 30.



Fig. 2 Travels of Sir Arthur Evans in the Balkans in 1871 (after Tsonos 2011, fig. 1).



Fig. 3 Travels of Sir Arthur Evans in the Balkans during the period 1875-1877 (after Tsonos 2011, fig. 2).

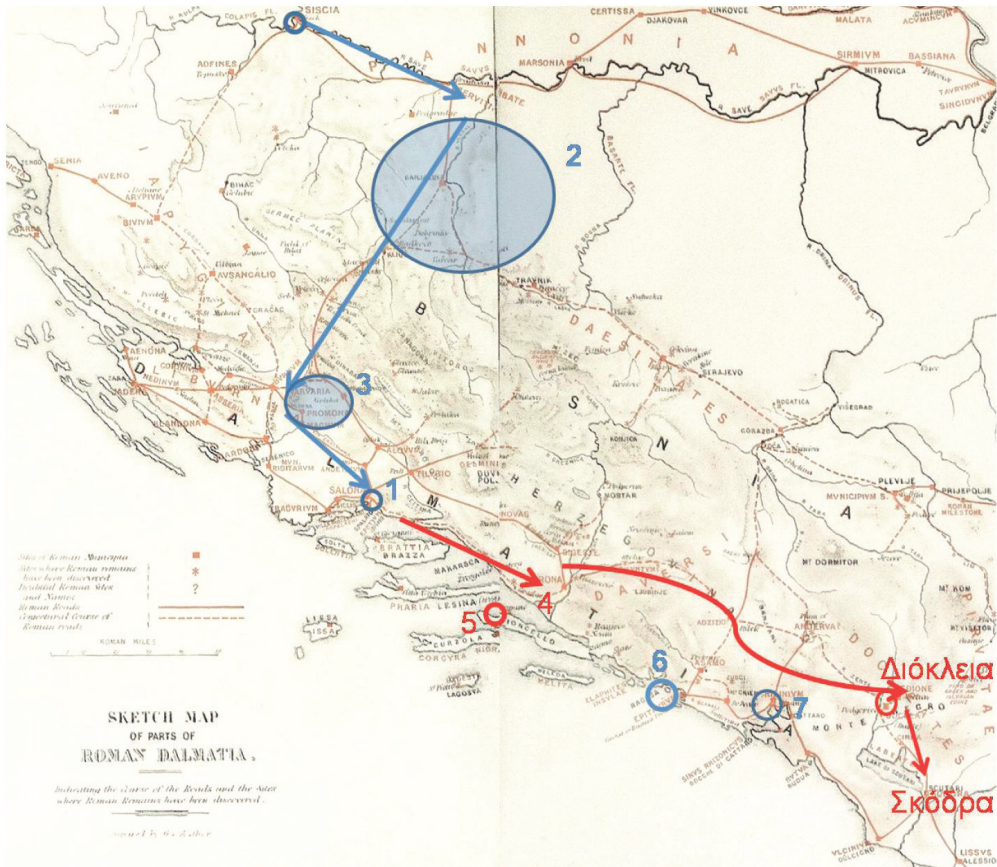


Fig. 4 Travels of Sir Arthur Evans in southern Dalmatia, with the most significant sites he visited (after TSONOS 2011, fig. 4).

## 2. The search for identity: can the material culture reveal ‘ethnic’ identity?

### 2.1 Introduction

More than a century after Evans’s archaeological activities, in these last decades, the world of archaeology has often been involved in theoretical and hermeneutical debates related to the multiple meanings and interpretations of material culture. One specific and very disputed topic is the concept and definition of identity and eventually ethnicity, and the possibility of detecting different identities/ethnicities through a material culture.

If we view material culture through the lens of scientific materialism, we can think of the thousands and thousands of data we collect in an archaeological research as micro-particles, interacting among themselves in a physical body, according to rigid rules that scientists are continuously analysing and remarking on. Such a methodology can be applied to cultural evolution and transformation in human processes. The approach is very much an open one; no resolutions have been pronounced. Some scientists and philosophers are persuaded that what happens in our mind and thoughts is a result of the forces of the various physical particles (like atoms) interacting. Others consider that in the human reality there are other factors in operation, such as conscience and mind<sup>15</sup>.

This over-simplified description of the many factors concerning cultural evolution and the theories actually expressed by the scientific community on this topic does not get us far. Actually, today there seem to be no secure points in how one interprets material culture and its transformations. This is especially true when we are speaking about cultural traits 'migrating' from one geographical area to another.

That being said, one of the goals of the archaeology, especially when dealing with almost none-literate societies, is trying to understand and to reconstruct a historical narrative, obviously starting from a meticulous analysis of the material culture. After this analysis, the second step is the recognition of patterns of regularities, that is the identifying of interrelated groups of repeated multiple sets of data in a specific area/site/cemetery. Every detail and every item must be considered. For a necropolis, for example, all the data concerning the geographical location (exact position and distribution of tombs in the terrain, the relation among tombs, the relation with the landscape, the settlement, the important monuments), the architecture (typology of tomb, details of construction, energy expenditure for construction), human remains (type of deposition, manipulation of the bodies, sex, conditions of the skeletons), grave goods (typologies, conditions, positions, chronology). All this amount of data should be analysed together, to construct patterns of repetition, in order to detect changes and differences, if and when they happen.

What I am here presenting is an example of this process of detecting regular patterns and identifying changes in material culture, at a time when we do not have a sufficient textual documentation. This is often the case in Bronze Age archaeology.

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<sup>15</sup> The question is not only scientific, but also social and political. It is the contrast between materialism and a more open philosophical approach. On this specific topic, as a representative of materialism is D. Dennett, whereas J. Searle, underlines the importance of conscience in human choice. See FINI, MILANI 2005 and <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1995/11/16/the-mystery-of-consciousness-part-ii/> by Searle and the response of Dennett <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1995/12/21/the-mystery-of-consciousness-an-exchange/>.

2.2 *The case study of Knossian burial customs during the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC: a very short presentation of the geographical and chronological framework*

When we speak about the Greek Bronze Age, we are dealing with a period of about two millennia, roughly between 3000 and 1000 BC, divided into the Early, Middle and Late Bronze Age periods<sup>16</sup>.

It is almost impossible to summarize a period that is 2000 years long and the subject of a myriad research projects that started in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century AD. Concentrating our discussion on the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC, the important phenomenon in the Aegean is the construction of the palaces, first in Crete and later in the Greek Mainland (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5 The Aegean Sea with the principal sites cited in the text (*modified after* NASA image by Jeff Schmaltz, MODIS Rapid Response Team, Goddard Space Flight Center: <https://www.visibleearth.nasa.gov/images/6864/smoke-over-the-aegean-sea/68651>).

<sup>16</sup> Traditionally we designate as ‘Minoan’ the material culture of Crete, from the mythic King Minos; as ‘Helladic’ the material culture of Mainland Greece (we use the term ‘Mycenaean’ for the Late Bronze Age); and as ‘Cycladic’ the material culture of Aegean islands. In a very synthetic way (and only roughly correct), the Early Bronze Age (Early Minoan/Early Helladic/Early Cycladic) is the period of 3100-2000, the Middle Bronze Age (Middle Minoan/Middle Helladic/Middle Cycladic) is the period of 2000-1600 BC, the Late Bronze Age (Late Minoan/Late Helladic or Mycenaean/Late Cycladic) is the period of 1600-1100 BC. But for a more detailed chronology of the Aegean Bronze Age, with the numerous and still unresolved issues, see MANNING 2010 and for a general and updated overview of the Aegean archaeology, see CLINE 2010.



The palaces are complex systems of buildings, with very important political, economic, religious and social functions. In Crete, the first palaces appeared around 1900 BC and lasted, with many local trajectories, till at least 1300: they are asymmetric structures, usually without defensive walls, very well inserted in the natural landscapes, with buildings organised around a rectangular central court (Fig. 6a)<sup>17</sup>. The main and presently known palaces in Crete were Knossos, Phaestos, Mallia, Petras, Kato Zakro, but there are also palaces of slighter dimensions, as Archanes, Galatas, Zominthos, Gournia and Chania. The island of Crete, therefore, during the Bronze Age appears a very well inhabited and exploited territory, with many other sites of more local significance such as the so-called ‘villas’<sup>18</sup>. We do not have clear knowledge about the political entities governing the palaces and their territories: the most common hypothesis is that it was a mix of religious and political/secular powers.

In Mainland Greece, the construction of structures that we can define as ‘palatial’ happens later, in a period roughly dated between 1400 and 1200 BC. They are ultimately physically quite different from the Cretan ones: their cornerstone is not the central court, but the *megaron*, a monumental rectangular hall with a central hearth and a throne (Fig. 6b). From the Linear B tablets, we know that the political power was concentrated in the hands of the ‘wanax’, surrounded by a numerous tiers of officials. The Mycenaean palaces are perhaps more symmetrical and often surrounded by defensive walls, generally located in a prominent position in the landscape<sup>19</sup>. The period of the Mycenaean palaces is also the period partially referred to and described by Homer in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*<sup>20</sup>.

One of the main features of Aegean archaeology is the lack of any literature or written history. Omitting the Homeric poetry, which gives us some (slight) impressions on the Aegean Late Bronze Age, we have only a relatively few and fragmentary documents concerning the administration of the palaces. They are clay tablets baked in the fires that destroyed the palatial archives at different times. These are simple accounts: lists of people working for the palaces, or of foodstuffs moving to and from the palaces. Moreover, not all this documentation has been deciphered: the first writing systems of the Minoan palaces in Crete were

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<sup>17</sup> The bibliography is once again imposing. I refer here to the fundamental publication not only of the palace of Knossos, but of all Minoan archaeology (EVANS 1921-1935; for a summarised and updated presentation, see MACDONALD 2005). Some important papers/book in which is possible to find relevant bibliography are GRAHAM 1987; DRIESSEN, SCHOEP, LAFFINEUR 2002; CLINE 2010. See RETHEMIOTAKIS 2008 for a summarised presentation.

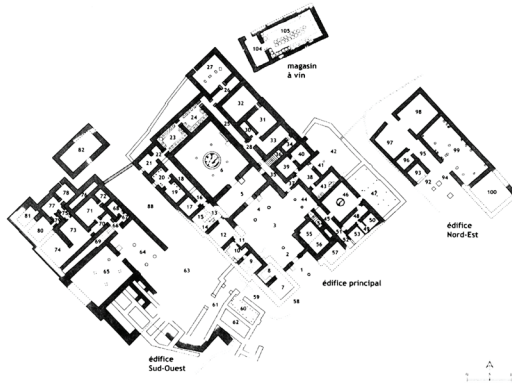
<sup>18</sup> ANDREADAKI-VLAZAKI, RETHEMIOTAKIS, DIMOPOULOU-RETHEMIOTAKI 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Also for the Mycenaean palaces the bibliography is impressive. Some important references are BLEGEN, RAWSON 1966; IAKOVIDIS 1983; DEGER-JALKOTZY, LEMOS 2006; CLINE 2010. See MARAN 2017 for a summarised presentation.

<sup>20</sup> DEGER-JALKOTZY, LEMOS 2006.



a



b

Fig. 6 a) The palace of Knossos in Crete (after RETHEMIOTAKIS 2008, fig. 2, courtesy of Georgios Rethemiotakis); b) The Mycenaean palace at Pylos in Messenia (after TREUIL *et al.* 2008, fig. 52, courtesy of Press Universitaire de France).

hieroglyphic and Linear A, both remain undeciphered. In the Late Bronze Age, both in Crete and in the Mainland, we have tablets written in Linear B, a writing system deciphered in 1952 as a form of proto-Greek<sup>21</sup>.

For all these reasons, the most productive ‘documentation’ for the reconstruction of the ancient societies living in the Bronze Age Aegean is almost exclusively that of the material culture and, sometimes, a comparison with other Mediterranean and contemporary cultures and civilizations. It is much more difficult to reconstruct, however tentatively, a real historical narrative and, even more so, the social dynamics, phenomena of acculturation, human thoughts and feelings of the communities living in the Aegean during the Bronze Age.

As a case study, I will concentrate now on a brief period in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC, at the moment when the so-called ‘Minoan’ culture of Crete and the so-called ‘Mycenaean’ culture of Greece came into very close contact<sup>22</sup>. It is a short period, of two or three generations. In Aegean archaeological terms involves the phase called Late Minoan II-III A2 *early*, in term of absolute chronology the period between roughly 1450 and 1370 BC<sup>23</sup>.

### *2.3 Just before the ‘clash’: the Knossos burial customs of the first phase (ca. 1700-1450 BC)*

At the start of our analysis in the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC, Crete was the leading civilization of the Aegean basin, exporting not only material culture, but also ideas, styles, ideology, etc. to the Greek Mainland and beyond.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century BC, Crete was at its peak: the palaces were flourishing and expanding the reach of their products not only in Greece and in the Aegean and Anatolia, but also

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<sup>21</sup> VENTRIS, CHADWICK 1956; POPE 2008; DEL FREO, PERNA 2019.

<sup>22</sup> The term ‘Minoan’ was created before Evans, to link the discoveries in Crete to the mythical King Minos. The term ‘Mycenaean’ was created after the impressive discoveries made by Schliemann in Mycenae (KARADIMAS, MOMIGLIANO 2004; CADOGAN 2006). Both of them had at the beginning a chronological meaning or were related to a specific location. Today, after more than a century of research we still do not know how during the Bronze Age the population of Crete and the Greek Mainland called themselves from their own mouths. It is possible that the Cretans defined themselves or the island of Crete with a name containing the consonants K-f-t, as testified by Egyptian and Syrian sources referring to Crete respectively as Keftiu and Kaphtor. Today both terms Minoan and Mycenaean are under discussion for their ambiguity, perhaps because they evoke specific and well defined political powers, for which in fact we have very scarce and unclear data. In this paper, I will simply use the two terms with a geographical/cultural meaning, referring respectively to the material culture found in Crete and Mainland Greece during the Late Bronze Age.

<sup>23</sup> Also, the chronological labels I used are very much simplified. The beginning and the end of every phase is still under discussion. In the case of LM II-III A2 *early* for example, the most updated hypothesis deals with slightly different absolute dates: 1470/60-1390/70 (see MANNING 2010).

more broadly in the Eastern Mediterranean. I would also like to underline here that the period before the phase on which we will be concentrating is one of strong contacts between the Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations, so that they came to share many cultural features. From a material culture point of view, in this phase Crete appears stronger than the Greek Mainland: Minoan products reached the Mycenaean palaces, and there they were also copied and reproduced, maybe with the support of Cretan artisans employed by and in the Mainland palaces.

This apparently peaceful and productive period is overturned by the eruption of the Santorini volcano, an exceptional and highly destructive phenomenon for the Aegean: in Santorini, all the inhabitants arguably escaped the island before the eruption; the settlements were completely destroyed. The eruption was destructive also for many coastal areas of the Aegean: in Crete a devastating tsunami, or several, may have damaged the north-central and eastern coasts of the island with a reasonable fall of volcanic ash, remains of which were found in many archaeological excavations (Fig. 7)<sup>24</sup>. We can only imagine the psycho-

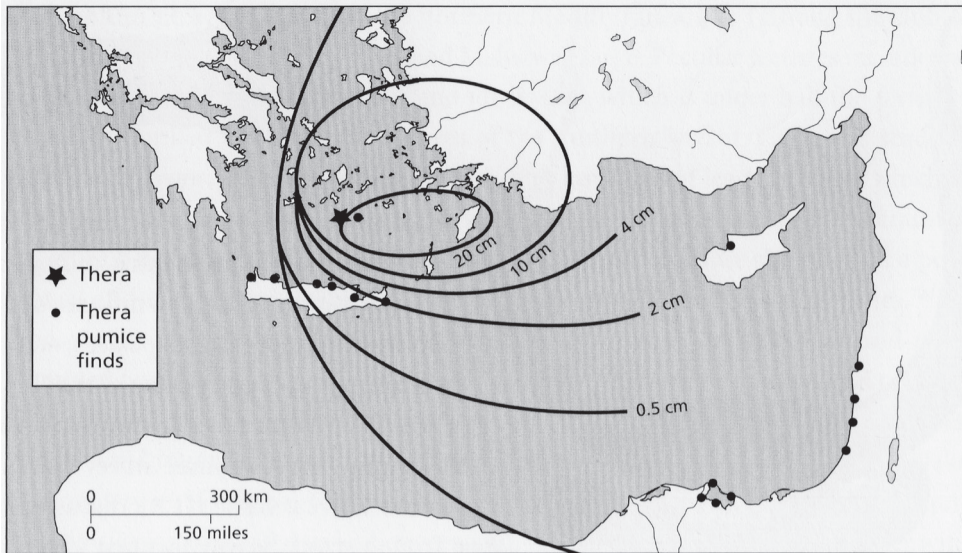


Fig. 7 Distribution of ash-fall from the Thera eruption in the eastern Mediterranean (after BROodbANK 2013, fig. 8.21, courtesy of Thames and Hudson).

<sup>24</sup> DICKINSON 1994, 16-18; MINOURA *et al.* 2000; BROodbANK 2013, 371-372. The chronology of the Santorini eruption is still under discussion. Analysis made on an olive tree found inside the *tephra*, the volcanic ash, gave a date of 1628 BC, a date very distant from the traditional one of 1540 BC and the Egyptian chronologies. Here too there are two different schools of thought, both of them claiming scientific backing: one supports the traditional chronology and the second one the new high chronology (CHERUBINI *et al.* 2014; MANNING *et al.* 2014).

logical impact that such a phenomenon had on the Aegean populations, and to the economic difficulties following the destructions of the harbours, the infertility of the terrain, the interruption – even perhaps if very short – of some Mediterranean interconnections.

The following fifty years or so (Late Minoan IB, ca. 1500-1450 BC), in fact, are a crisis period, preceding and ushering in the phase of changes we are speaking about: fewer in number and smaller in size, the settlement pattern, along with other symptoms, already indicates a crisis in action<sup>25</sup>.

Because our discussion will particularly concentrate on the Knossian burial customs, where the most significant changes are detectable, it is important to give some general information of the burial customs of the period preceding 1450 BC, in particular the phase between 1700 and 1450 BC. The areas in which the most important cemeteries have been found is that around Knossos (Mavro Spileo, Aelias, Gypsades tholos, Monasteriako Kephali on the Acropolis), and also the Poros necropolis in the coastal harbour settlement (Fig. 8). Other tombs sharing the same burial customs and material culture have been found also in Kythera, an island immediately north of Crete<sup>26</sup>.

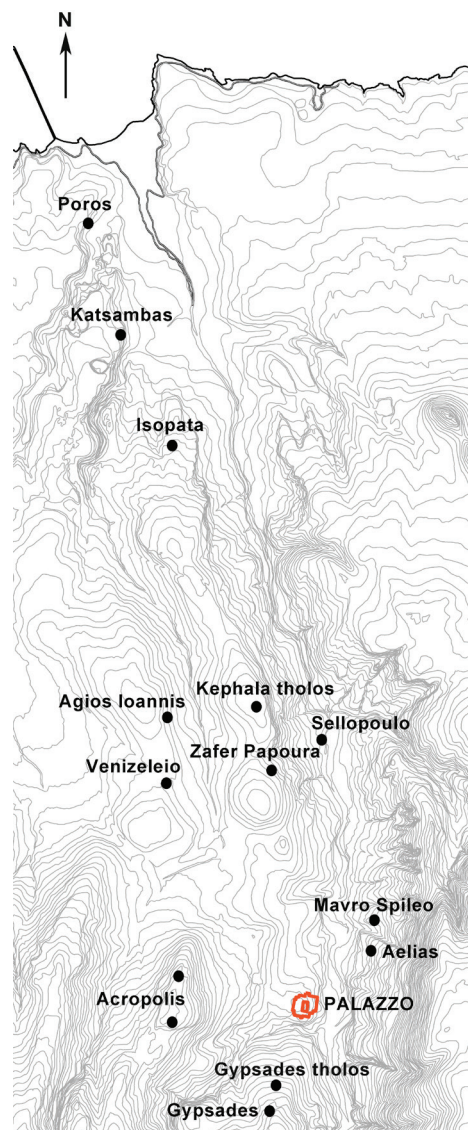


Fig. 8 The Knossos valley with the main cemeteries  
(after ALBERTI 2014, fig. 1).

<sup>25</sup> DRIESSEN, MACDONALD 1997.

<sup>26</sup> COLDSTREAM, HUXLEY 1972 (Kythera); DIMOPOULOU-RETHEMIOTAKI 1988, MUHLY 1992 and DIMOPOULOU 1999 (Poros); FORSDYKE 1926-27 and ALBERTI 2001; 2006; 2013 (Mavro Spileo); HOOD 2010 (Aelias).

The typical Minoan tomb of the period preceding the change is a multi-chambered tomb, without dromos (corridor), or a version with but a single, very wide and irregular chamber, sometimes internally divided into smaller spaces (Fig. 15 Phase 1). They were large-family tombs, used for many generations, with dozens of burials. The grave goods were quite simple and not very rich: some small jewellery and seals, some very simple and undecorated pots<sup>27</sup>. A most common vase – not only in tombs, but also in settlements – is the so-called ‘conical cup’ (in Greek *skouteli*), a plain vase, found in the thousands on every archaeological excavation in Crete. It was the typical drinking vessel, probably used also as a unit of measure for an individual ration of food (Fig. 9). We can consider this simple cup as a sort of ‘marker’ of the Minoan culture, being distributed in cemeteries and settlements for almost all the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC<sup>28</sup>.



Fig. 9 Conical cups from the Mavro Spileo necropolis at Knossos (photo by the author).

At Knossos, these multi-chambered tombs are located around the palace on the hills, running in a curve from the east, across the south and up the west side, in places where it is possible to enjoy an extraordinary view of the main cultural, political and religious focal points of the Minoans: peak sanctuaries and mountains, necropoleis and tombs on the hills, the settlement and palace in the valley, the main roads and the harbour town, the blue Aegean sea beyond all (Fig. 10)<sup>29</sup>.

We must underline here that the 1700-1450 BC tombs and cemeteries are very scarce and mostly concentrated in the first part of this long phase, between 1700-1600 BC. The period in which the settlement of Knossos enjoys its maximum expansion, with a hypothetical population of 14000-18000 persons<sup>30</sup>, presents very few tombs: between 1550

<sup>27</sup> FORSDYKE 1926-27; ALBERTI 2001; 2006; 2013.

<sup>28</sup> WIENER 1984; GILLIS 1990; KNAPPETT 1999; ALBERTI 2014.

<sup>29</sup> ALBERTI 2015; 2018a; in press.

<sup>30</sup> WHITELAW 2001.

and 1450 BC the majority of them are older tombs maybe reused (or most probably just frequented)<sup>31</sup>. Considering that the Knossos valley has been intensively surveyed in the last hundred years<sup>32</sup>, we must presume that the funerary rituals used by the Minoans of that period are not detectable (burials at sea?) or that they were not very much interested in monumental or impressive burial customs<sup>33</sup>.

#### *2.4 The 'clash': the changes in Knossos burial customs after ca. 1450 BC*

Around 1450 BC, in Crete and especially at Knossos, there were some very significant changes: all the palaces of the island were destroyed and most never reoccupied, with the exceptions only of Knossos and arguably Chania<sup>34</sup>. The disaster(s) caught up many other sites, from palatial settlements, through villas and rural villages to the smallest hamlets. Knossos is the only palace that we certainly know maintained a palatial role and function on the island in the subsequent phase. It continued to be used as a power centre, but with significant changes in architecture, pottery production, burial customs and administration, with the introduction of a new writing, in Linear B, that we said is a form of proto-Greek. Also the changes in architecture appear very meaningful, involving apparently also the ideological system: the detected differences, in fact, involve for example architectonic structures interpreted as religious, such as the so-called 'lustral basin', that is located beside the Throne room, a meaningful place probably connected also with the workings of the political system<sup>35</sup>.



Fig. 10 View of the Knossos valley from the hill cemeteries of Phase 1 (photo by the author).

<sup>31</sup> Tombs clearly datable to this phase are some of Poros and the tomb of Monasteriako Kephali in the Acropolis (DIMOPOULOU-RETHEMIOTAKI 1988; DIMOPOULOU 1999; PRESTON 2013). At Mavro Spileo, one of the Knossian necropolis, there are only traces of frequentation (ALBERTI 2001; 2013).

<sup>32</sup> HOOD 1958; HOOD, SMYTH 1981; BENNET *et al.* 2008. See also EVANS 1921-1935 and CADOGAN, HATZAKI, VASILAKIS 2004.

<sup>33</sup> DICKINSON 1994; DEVOLDER 2010.

<sup>34</sup> HOOD 1985. The Chania palace, in western Crete, is only partially known, because it is hidden under the modern city (ANDREADAKI-VLAZAKI n.d.).

<sup>35</sup> DRIESSEN, MACDONALD 1997; MACDONALD 2005. For the north-west lustral basin at Knossos, see EVANS 1921, I, 405-414 and IV, 928; NIEMEIER 1987, 167.

One of the most evident changes is related to the burial customs: after these widespread destructions, the funerary landscape at Knossos changes very significantly.

In the northern sector of the Knossos valley, new necropoleis with new types of tombs are set up, with an architecture typologically completely different from the earlier ones (Fig. 8: Kephala tholos, Agios Ioannis, Venizeleio, Sellopoulo, Zafer Papoura, Isopata and Katsambas): they consist of a more-or-less quadrangular, single chambers, approached by a long and narrow dromos (Fig. 15, Phase 2). Also other types of tombs appear: the Mainland-type tholos and other single-use tombs, again of a typology completely unknown before in Crete. The latter are either simple shaft graves with stone slabs on the top, or they are the so-called pit-graves, namely deeply excavated pits (2-4 meters deep) with side-niches at the bottom in which the dead are placed<sup>36</sup>.

There are also other important differences: the new locations in the northern valley are without any known earlier funerary connections; their positions do not command any views, either of the settlement of Knossos or other significant places in the previous Minoan story (Fig. 11)<sup>37</sup>.

In the new single-chamber tombs, the number of depositions per tomb is completely different from the earlier multi-chamber tombs. The new chamber tombs contain much smaller groups of individuals: the earliest contain less than five individuals per tomb, and often they do not show further reuse. In the multiple chamber tombs of the previous peri-



Fig. 11 View from the Knossos cemeteries of Phase 2, located in the lower ground to the north (photo by the author).

<sup>36</sup> ALBERTI 2004 with bibliography; MILLER 2011; ALBERTI 2015; in press.

<sup>37</sup> ALBERTI 2015; in press.



ods, the depositions are in the dozens and the tombs are reused for centuries: they appear to be clan/family tombs, serving much bigger human groups, probably linked by familial relationships, whereas the new tombs contain very small groups<sup>38</sup>.

Also the grave goods are different from the few earlier assemblages known until then: now at Knossos there is a marked display of bronze items and jewellery – bronze vases, prestigious objects, personal items and considerable assemblages of weaponry, with magnificent swords, daggers and spearheads. So much so that these tombs were defined as ‘Warrior’ graves<sup>39</sup>. A new specific set of clay vases is present, made up of the alabastron, kylix and three-handled jar (Fig. 12). This pottery triad is particularly meaningful because it repeats the Mainland pottery patterns found in contemporary and earlier burial assemblages that are very well-known from Mainland Greece<sup>40</sup>.

Another fact with very significant cultural implications is that in the tombs now opened in the northern and lower part of the valley, the conical cup, the Minoan vase par excellence found not only in settlements but also in funerary contexts in Knossos and in all Crete, is simply not present. It is replaced by the kylix, a type of vase which originates



Fig. 12 a) Sword from Zafer Papoura tomb 36; b) piriform jar from Isopata tomb 2  
(after DIMOPOULOU-RETHEMIOTAKI 2005, 202 and 290, courtesy of Heraklion  
Archaeological Museum – Hellenic Ministry of Culture & Sports – Archaeological Receipts Fund).

<sup>38</sup> For a complete list of necropoleis and related publications, see ALBERTI 2014, nn. 1-6. See also ALBERTI 2018b and in press.

<sup>39</sup> The definition was that of Sinclair Hood: HOOD, DE JONG 1952; HOOD 1956.

<sup>40</sup> ALBERTI 2004; 2014.

in Mainland Greece and for the first time now it is used also in Crete both in tombs and settlements (Fig. 13).



Fig. 13 Kylikes of the ‘Ephyrean’ type from the Unexplored Mansion of Knossos  
(after DIMOPOULOU-RETHEMIOTAKI 2005, 287, courtesy of Heraklion  
Archaeological Museum – Hellenic Ministry of Culture & Sports – Archaeological Receipts Fund).

All these items are found in association and, together with the architecture of the tombs, recall contemporary and earlier assemblages extensively found in Mainland Greece, as can be detected by comparing a Cretan and a Mainland example of chamber tombs from this impact phase and thereabouts, in which similarities are real and close both in architecture and grave goods<sup>41</sup>.

For this reason, starting in the 1950s, these tombs were interpreted as the tombs of Mycenaeans coming from the Greek Mainland to conquer or control the Knossos palace and through that, generally speaking, much of Crete<sup>42</sup>.

### *2.5 After the ‘clash’: the ‘melting pot’ of the later burial customs*

In the first stage of the possible meeting of worlds, the two different burial customs do not mix: the two funerary areas of the valley, the Minoan one and the Mycenaean one, stay separate, with different architecture and grave goods and different locations and views.

But in a phase immediately after the impact phase of the phenomenon (difficult to speak about in an actual numbers of years, but we may suppose a period of a very few

<sup>41</sup> ALBERTI 2014, 36, fig. 9 as example of a Mainland assemblage.

<sup>42</sup> HOOD, DE JONG 1952; HOOD 1956; 1985; ALBERTI 2004; 2015; 2018a-b; WIENER 2015.

years, maybe between 5 and 20 years), there is a necropolis in which the material culture appears, if not mixed, at least starting to hybridize.

The necropolis of Mavro Spileo, located on the hill of Profitis Aelias east of the palace, is one of the oldest at Knossos and the most long-lived, used for more than four centuries and covering all the long period we are speaking about (roughly 17<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries BC)<sup>43</sup>. The first phase of use is the 17<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, when the typical funerary architecture of the period – i.e. the multi-chamber tombs – were regularly distributed on the slope, placed at a certain distance from each other (the tombs coloured black in Fig. 14).

From the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century BC or a bit later, the new type of funerary architecture – the single-chamber tombs with dromos that we saw appearing in the new necropoleis located lower down and to the north – appears, inserted in the spaces left

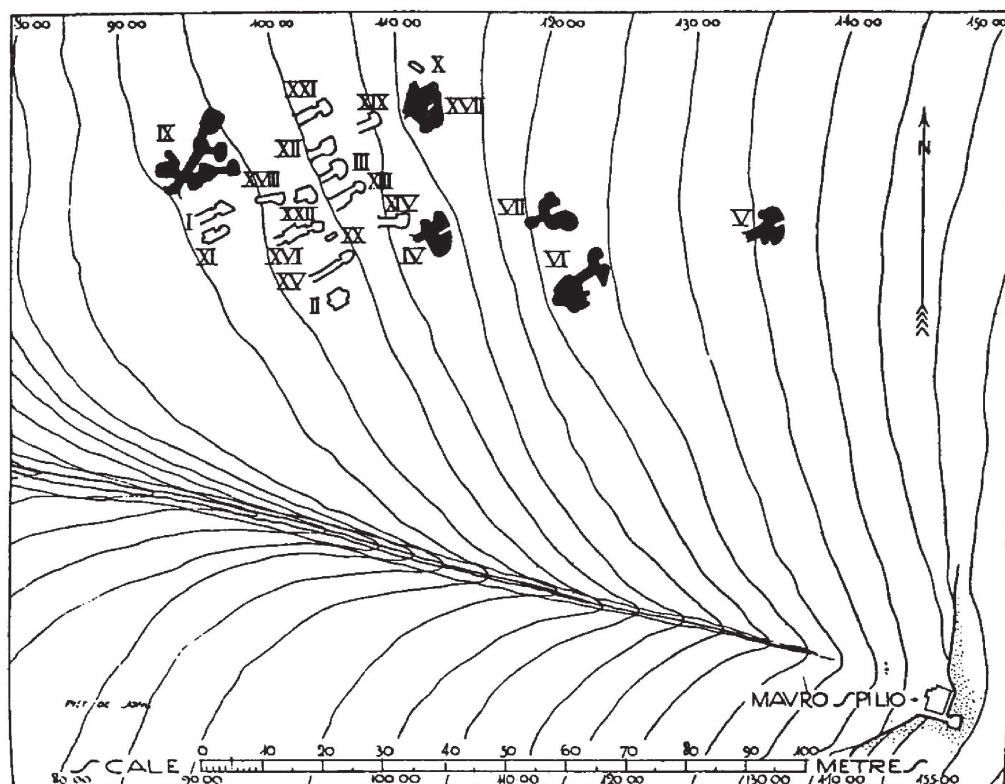


Fig. 14 Map of the Mavro Spileo necropolis: in black are the Phase I tombs, in white later tombs (after ALBERTI 2001, fig. 1).

<sup>43</sup> FORSDYKE 1926-27; ALBERTI 2001; 2003; 2013.

in between (the white-coloured tombs in Fig. 14). It is the first time that the two funerary architectural typologies are mixed on one site - the one beside the other. Here, the new single-chamber tombs are smaller and apparently less accurately cut than the single-chambers to the north.

In these new single-chamber tombs, the grave good assemblages are intriguing in that they seem to recall the old Minoan object-assemblages and not the impressive 'Mycenaean' goods with weapons we saw in the necropoleis located to the north. At Mavro Spileo, there are small objects, small stone vases, a few bits of jewellery, rather like in the earlier Mavro Spileo multi-chamber tombs. Only one tomb contained weapons. The most interesting aspect of all concerns the aforementioned conical cup: in the Mavro Spileo single-chamber tombs, the conical cup does not vanish, but it is a regular feature, mixed with some of the vases of the new assemblages<sup>44</sup>.

A bit later, the same coexistence of different customs turns up also in the funerary locations in the southern and western sections of the valley. They continue to be employed as important burial areas, and the newer features – both in architecture and grave goods – are fully adopted, but yet they retain a broad continuity with the earlier Minoan traditions. The continuity is testified mostly by the presence of the conical cup, to such a degree that the way of drinking and the vase used for drinking in settlements and tombs seem both to be deeply connected with the personal identities of the groups involved.

The human groups already living in Knossos – the so-called 'Minoans' – after meeting the newcomers – the so-called 'Mycenaeans' – seem to have changed and hybridized considerably: see the new funerary architecture, ways of deposition and part of the funerary assemblages. But the Cretans did not change other important aspects of their burial customs: the locations of the tombs, as they continued to use the places in which their ancestors were buried, and the vessel used for drinking, the conical cup, that appears as a sort of identity 'marker' of the Cretans.

In seeking to identify patterns, the material traits we detect at Knossos can be summarized in this way:

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<sup>44</sup> ALBERTI 2001; 2006; 2013; 2014, 27.

<b>Phase 1</b>	<b>Phase 2 (The 'clash')</b>	<b>Phase 3 (Hybridization, starting only few years after Phase 2 and running in parallel)</b>
Date: 17 <sup>th</sup> -16 <sup>th</sup> centuries BC	Ca. 1450-1400 BC	Slightly after 1450 BC, onwards
Location: hill	Location: plain	Location: hill and plain
Typology: multi-chamber	Typology: single-chamber	Typology: single-chamber
Numbers of individuals: very high	Numbers of individuals: few	Numbers of individuals: more than a few
Assemblages: mostly conical cups	Assemblages: new pottery sets, weapons, metal vases etc.	Assemblages: conical cups and others of the new sorts

This is a very simplified way to refer to the funerary data at Knossos, but can be useful in expressing how the introduction of a new custom created deep changes also in the local material culture. After Phase 1 with its established rules, Phase 2 shows a very strict acceptance of a new burial custom. Phase 3, starting slightly after Phase 2, but almost contemporary, is a mixture, a hybridized form that partially adopts the innovations, but also retains some identity elements of the local tradition, here the conical cup.

Visualizing the three different phases, the first example of a Phase 1 tomb is what we mean by a typical Minoan/pre-Mycenaean tomb (Fig. 15 Phase 1): located on the hills, with its multi-chamber form, dozens of buried individuals, with conical cups as the most recurring pottery item.

The second example is a tomb of the Phase 2 of the supposed 'Mycenaeanization' phase, that is the years immediately after the 1450 BC: it is located on the flatter terrain as the new necropoleis are, single-chambered with a long dromos and few buried individuals, but with an impressive assemblage of weapons and the usual new pottery set of alabastron, kylix and piriform jar, but 'without' conical cups (Fig. 15 Phase 2).

Perhaps starting only bit later than Phase 2 but essentially running in parallel, the third example belongs to Phase 3 and is the mixed one: located on the hill, at the site of the old necropoleis of the Phase 1, the single-chambered tomb is inserted in the space left between the older tombs, with an architecture typical of the new phase, dromos and quadrangular chamber, and a mixed pottery set, with some new shapes belonging to the new pottery assemblage, but also with the reappearance of the conical cup (Fig. 15 Phase 3).

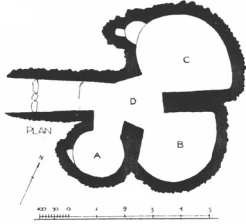
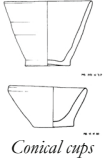
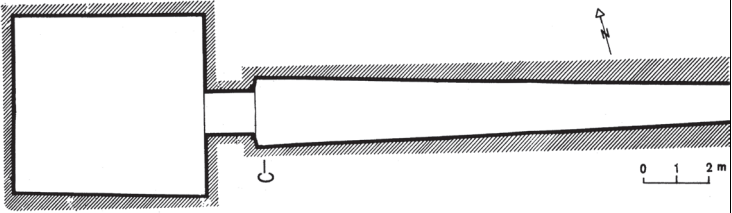

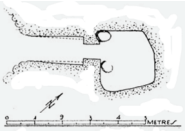
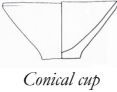
Architecture of tombs	Drinking vessels
<p><b>Phase 1</b></p> 	 <p><i>Conical cups</i></p>
<p><b>Phase 2</b></p> 	 <p><i>Kylīx</i></p>
<p><b>Phase 3</b></p> 	 <p><i>Conical cup</i></p>

Fig. 15 Simplified outline of burial customs of Phases 1-3 at Knossos (not to scale).

### 3. Clash of cultures or melting pot? Old and new cultural identities in 15<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries BC Knossos (Crete)

In the last 60 years, attempts to compose a narrative based on these same data sets have produced very different interpretations. Until 20 years ago, the changes detectable in Phase 2 were explained as traces of a foreign and likely violent presence: Mycenaeans from the Mainland had conquered Crete or had been called in as mercenaries by the Minoan elites<sup>45</sup>. In the last two decades, the reconstruction gone through a complete volte face: the changes were now interpreted as signs of an acculturation or hybridization process, without a blow being struck, or a fist raised in anger. Following this new interpretation, the groups at the power in Minoan

<sup>45</sup> HOOD, DE JONG 1952; HOOD 1956; 1985; WIENER 2015.

Crete, the ‘Minoans’, were argued to have adopted customs from the material culture of the Mycenaeans, in order to emulate the new emerging power in the Aegean in that period<sup>46</sup>.

This remains a very *vexata quaestio* for Aegean archaeology and a solution satisfactory to both sides has not yet been found.

Without going into the details of the question – i.e. if the buried individual in a Phase 2 new necropolis located in the plain was Mycenaean or not, our goal here is to try to answer our first question posed at the beginning of this paper. Can the material culture help to distinguish between different cultural identities for human individuals or groups? Can we recognize signs of the encounter or clash between two different ideologies and cultures, here the Minoan one and the Mycenaean one? Can we spot in the archaeological records the signs of a foreign ideology *versus* a local one?

In the last seventy years, many scholars have identified at Knossos sundry cultural traits that they connected to some Mycenaean presence or influence from the Mainland: architectural structures, functional changes inside the palace, new types of ceramic vessels, new language. And of course burial customs.

An attempt to analyse some skeletal remains did not give the clear results hoped for. In that the analysed bones did not belong to the phase of the supposed Mycenaean takeover, but to stages both before and after, missing altogether what we have defined as Phase 2<sup>47</sup>.

But there are also other data to be considered, coming from the already mentioned economic accounts, and which provides unique information on the identity of the groups living in Knossos after the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century BC.

A group of Linear B tablets show lists of men: officials, workers, warriors, shepherds etc. The texts, found at the palace and dated from the second to the third phases we referred to, show a fairly high percentage of Greek personal names, of up to about 57%. If we select only the tablets concerning the economic elite, the percentage rises up to 77%. In the so-called military tablets, where officials and warriors are cited, Greek names attain a percentage of 89%. In one series of texts – the so-called Room of the Chariots Tablets, very probably belonging only to Phase 2 (that is Late Minoan II, ca. 1450-1370 BC), but were fired in a destruction level datable to Late Minoan IIIA2 *early* (ca. 1370 BC) – the percentage of Greek names arises to 70-90%<sup>48</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> PRESTON 1999; 2004; 2005; MILLER 2011.

<sup>47</sup> NAFPLIOTI 2008. See discussion in ALBERTI 2014 and 2018b.

<sup>48</sup> The chronology of the Linear B tablets found at Knossos remains under debate (e.g. DRIESSEN 2008, 70-72). For the chronology of the Room of the Chariots Tablets (RCT), probably the earliest Linear B tablets deposit found at Knossos, see DRIESSEN 1990, 114. For the Greeks names in the RCT, see DRIESSEN 2000, 188-194). The total percentage of Greek names presented here are based on the work of R.J. Firth who considers all the Knossos Linear B tablets: FIRTH 1993. But see also FIRTH 2016, especially Appendix A with discussion on relevant bibliography. ALBERTI 2014, 30-33.

In a later group of tablets, in which meaningfully shepherds are listed and not elite individuals, the percentage is lower and the names are less 'Mycenaean': only 38% of the shepherds have names of Greek origin, the rest are of local/Minoan origin. We can suppose that most of the common people continued to use their traditional personal names and only a few started to mix with the newcomers and to use names of Greek origin.

It is generally accepted that language per se should not be considered as an identity marker, but it is undeniable that it has an important social meaning and *can be* an identity marker.

Even if a Greek name is not necessarily a proof of ethnicity, the general context at Knossos – archaeological, ideological and historical – in conjunction with such high percentages of Greek personal names in the first phase of impact with the Mainland elements argues that a significant group of people coming from Mainland Greece was present at Knossos in that period. The fact that Greek names are most frequent in the tablets with lists of officials and warriors is also very significant, in understanding what position in society the newcomers were occupying.

The lower percentage of Greek names in the sheep tablets in the later phases can be interpreted as the first traces of an acculturation process, datable from the 14<sup>th</sup> century BC, when, after a first phase in which the two groups are more detectable, at least in the burial customs, a new hybridized material culture is emerging, in which Minoan and Mycenaean elements are not so separate. That emerging material culture is evident in the Phase 3 burial customs, in which Mycenaean customs, as for example the choice of the single-chamber tomb, come together with the presence of the typical Minoan drinking vessel, the conical cup.

We really do not know how easy or difficult (or indeed violent) was the meeting or the clash between foreign and local groups at Knossos, but for sure the result was the creation of a new society, in which the different ethnic contributions became gradually assimilated with time. They may have known who was who, but to our eyes after more than two millennia things are not so crystal clear.

## Conclusions

Reality is sometimes very puzzling. The only way to properly appreciate material culture is to consider all the possible aspects of an archaeological context, underlining patterns of repetitions and changes, in order to possibly identify the reasons and the ways in which changes happened.

The hybridization concept is a very important one, easy and convenient, and maybe the only one that comes close to expressing the complexity of reality. However, it is also



limited, because it does not explain how – i.e. through which routes – new ideas, concepts, beliefs could pass across the Aegean Sea, to be accepted and adopted in a land such as Crete, with its very strong culture and ideology. History is still most difficult to compose in a pre-historic society.

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