

Enthroned Upon Mountains: Constructions of Power in the Aegean Bronze Age

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Abstract: The Bronze Age Aegean lacks a clearly discernible iconography of rulership, permitting widely contrasting speculation on the character of Minoan society – that it was egalitarian, heterarchical, gynocratic or a theocracy overseen by priest-kings. That elites did exist is amply attested by mortuary, iconographic and architectural evidence, including the Throne Room of the Late Minoan palace at Knossos in which a centrally oriented throne with a mountain-shaped back is incorporated into the architectural fabric of the room. Iconographic representations of human figures holding sceptres and standing upon mountains as well as evidence for the increased palatial control of cultic activity at rural peak sanctuaries during the Neopalatial Period (1750–1490 BCE) emphasise an association between rulership and the mountainous landscape. Close analysis of seated figures within Minoan iconography reveals architectonic parallels to the Knossian Throne. Stepped structures, typically surmounted by seated female figures, function as abstract representations of the mountain form. It will be argued here that literal and metaphoric representations of mountain thrones in the form of the Knossos Throne and stepped structures function within an ideological program associating rulership with the natural landscape, thereby offering new insights into the construction of power in the Aegean Bronze Age.

Keywords: Minoan Crete, ruler iconography, throne, mountains, symbolic landscape

Introduction

Crete is located in the Mediterranean on the ancient trade routes between Europe, Asia and Africa, a position contributing to its important role in networks of cultural interaction in the ancient world. First inhabited during the Neolithic, the island's small hamlets and villages were the dominant settlement pattern until the end of the Early Bronze Age (the Early Minoan III). From the Middle Bronze Age, a more complex social system emerged and culminated in the appearance of the first palaces, hallmarks of the Protopalatial period. Destruction of the palaces, probably by earthquake, and their subsequent rebuilding mark the beginning of the Neopalatial period, around 1750–1700 BCE. The Minoan palaces formed centres of administration, storage, trade and ritual ideology until their destruction by the Mycenaeans in the Final Palatial period, while Knossos itself was finally destroyed around 1350 BCE.³

Minoan hieroglyphic and Linear A texts remain undeciphered. While the Linear B texts from Mycenaean Knossos provide some insight, we rely primarily on iconographic and architectural sources for reconstructing Minoan culture. Glyptic art, consisting of carved seal stones, engraved metal signet rings and their impressions on clay sealings, and used in palatial administration systems, forms the largest category of Aegean Bronze Age representational art.⁴ Iconography

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³ Tomkins 2010; Manning 2010; Evans 1921; 1928; 1930; 1936; Hägg – Marinatos 1987; Driessen et al. 2002; Cadogan et al. 2004.

⁴ Usually under 3cm in size. Boardman 2001; Krzyszkowska 2005. The seals and sealings are published with bibliography in the Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel (CMS) series.

also appears on objects made from terracotta, faience, stone and ivory, while painted frescoes decorate the walls of elite architecture.⁵

The Minoan Ruler

Although Minoan monumental architectural structures are traditionally referred to as ‘palaces’, the Bronze Age Aegean – in contrast to the wider Bronze Age Mediterranean and Near East – lacks a clearly discernible iconography of rulership. This has resulted in widely contrasting speculation on the character of Minoan society, and whether it was egalitarian, heterarchical, gynocratic or a theocracy overseen by priest-kings.⁶ The identification of a Minoan ruler remains a topic of contention within the scholarship.⁷

Iconographic evidence provides several possible representations of a Minoan male ‘ruler’: standing figures, such as the moulded fresco image of a young male known as the Prince with the Feather Crown;⁸ staff- and spear-wielding males, such as the figure on the Master Impression sealing from Khania (Fig. 1) and those on the Chieftain Cup and Naxos Seal (Fig. 2); the mature figure on the Harvester Vase; male figurines and statuettes with bent arms and clenched fists, such as the ivory Palaikastro Kouros; males driving chariots (Fig. 3); and mature male figures that wear spirally-wound garments and carry implements that may be considered attributes of kingship, including bows, hammers or fenestrated axes (Fig. 4).⁹

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Images of standing female figures wearing elaborate, flounced skirts and jewellery, as seen in faience statuettes, fresco painting and glyptic art (Fig. 5), have traditionally been interpreted as depictions of a Great Mother Goddess or her priestesses rather than a ruler.¹⁰ More recently Marinatos has suggested that some female figures represent queens and, when appearing in conjunction with smaller male figures, depict a queen mother and her son the king.¹¹

<INSERT FIG. 5 HERE>

Rehak has proposed that seated females represent the figure of Potnia, who is mentioned in the Linear B texts from Knossos and Pylos and whose name means ‘she who has power’, possibly a queen.¹² Most of the representations of seated figures in Late Bronze Age Aegean art are female. The depiction of seated males in ancient Aegean iconography of any period is rare.¹³

⁵ Warren 1969; Foster 1979; Betancourt 1985; Immerwahr 1990.

⁶ Evans 1928, 774–795; Branigan 1987; Hamilakis 2002; Schoep 2002a; 2002b; Cadogan 2009; Marinatos 2010.

⁷ Davis 1995, 11–19; Krattenmaker 1995, 49–59; Rehak 1995, 95–117; Younger 1995, 151–211; Whittaker 2015, 90–94.

⁸ Depicted facing right and holding a staff as reconstructed by Niemeier (1987a), in contrast to Evans’ 1928 reconstruction in which the figure is facing left and holding a rope.

⁹ Hallager 1985; Koehl 1986; Davis 1995; Driessen et al. 2000; Marinatos 2010, 12–26; Tully in press b.

¹⁰ Goodison – Morris 1998, 113–132; Eller 2012, 75–98.

¹¹ Marinatos 2007; 2009; 2010, 152–155.

¹² Rehak 1995, 117; Thomas – Wedde 2001.

¹³ Rehak 1995, 97; Younger 1995, Pls. LI–LXXIV.

Seated male figures occur mainly in groups and never on thrones.¹⁴ In contrast, female figures sit on thrones, rocks, stepped altars, tripartite shrines and constructed openwork platforms (Figs. 6, 7, 8, 9).

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The fact that human figures in Minoan art all wear the same types of garments makes the distinction between deities and mortals unclear. Unnatural scale or contexts, as seen in the Mother of the Mountain sealing from Knossos (Fig. 10), representation on or in association with supernatural animals, or hovering in the air may signify actual deities. In contrast, elite female figures seated upon rocks or cult structures are thought to represent human beings performing as deities. Known as ‘enacted epiphany’, a category of ritual performance well known within the study of Minoan religion, such images depict a religious official or member of the elite – possibly a ruler – enacting the personification of a deity.¹⁵

<INSERT FIG. 10 HERE>

Mountain Thrones

Several different types of seats are represented in Aegean art, of which four main iconographic types can be identified: four-legged stools with high backs that function as ceremonial chairs for important personages; predominantly backless chairs with crossed legs or a folding stool/campstool; architectural platforms; and rocky peaks or outcrops.¹⁶ All of these types are sat upon by females and date to the Neopalatial period on Crete (Middle Minoan III–Late Minoan IB 1750–1490 BCE) save the crossed legged backless stool, which is associated with male and female banqueters and dates to the later Mycenaean period both in Crete and mainland Greece (Late Minoan II–III A2 1490–1300 BCE and Late Helladic II 1580–1390 BCE).¹⁷ This paper argues that the Knossos Throne, architectural platforms and rocky peaks are all types of thrones that represent mountains, and that these structures function within an iconography of power that associates rulership with the sacred landscape and serves ideologically to naturalise Minoan elite authority.

Topographically, the Cretan landscape is dominated by mountains, with a continuous chain extending the length of the island from east to west.¹⁸ In an ethnographic study of mountain symbolism, Haaland and Haaland propose that verticality within the natural environment

¹⁴ Seated males appear in a Minoan funerary model, as a few terracotta figurines seated on stools from peak sanctuaries, as banqueters in frescoes at Knossos and Pylos, and on a Late Minoan IIIA2 larnax from a chamber tomb at Klima Messara on Crete; see: Rehak 1995, 113, Vettors 2011, 320.

¹⁵ Nilsson 1927, 278–288, 330; Matz 1958; Hägg 1983, 184–185; Cain 2001, 37; Marinatos 2010, 78–85; Blakolmer 2010; Tully – Crooks 2015, 138, 140–141; Crooks et al. 2016, 160–163; Tully 2016.

¹⁶ Rehak 1995, 96–7; Krzyszkowska 1996, 87–94; Davis – Stocker 2016, 645–646.

¹⁷ The recently discovered Griffin Warrior Ring # 4 from Pylos which features a four-legged stool with a high back dates to the Late Helladic IIA, which is contemporary with the Late Minoan IB (1580–1490 BCE) (Davis – Stocker 2016, 645–646).

¹⁸ This consists of three different groups: the ranges of Dikte in the east (2148m); Ida in the centre (Psiloritis 2456m), and Leuka in the west (2452m).

dominates metaphoric constructions of ritual landscapes.¹⁹ The same may apply in Crete where the Minoans established cult sites upon mountain peaks. During the Protopalatial period (Middle Minoan IB–IIIA-B ca. 1925–1750 BCE) these peak sanctuaries were distributed throughout eastern and east-central Crete and were variously characterised by the presence of terracotta anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines, votive limbs, pottery, waterworn pebbles, animal bones and evidence of fire.²⁰ Originally amounting to around forty, the number of functioning peak sanctuaries decreased during the Neopalatial period to as few as eight, all of which were widely dispersed and associated with palatial urban centres. They were architecturally monumentalised and received high quality offerings, suggesting that Minoan elites were concerned with associating themselves with peak sanctuary cults.²¹ The image on the carved stone rhyton from Zakros depicts an idealised representation of such a cult site (Fig. 11).²²

<INSERT FIG. 11 HERE>

Minoan palatial architecture was oriented to nearby mountain ranges; the Central Courts were aligned between true north and a sacred mountain, as can be seen at the palaces of Knossos, Phaistos and Mallia (Figs. 12, 13, 14). Buildings grouped around the palatial Central Courts may have evoked mountains around a plain.²³ Cult stones or baetyls²⁴ erected within urban settings (Fig. 15), as well as stepped cult structures such as altars, tripartite shrines and openwork platforms may have symbolised mountains and facilitated the indexing of peak sanctuary ritual in architecturally elaborated urban settings.²⁵

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Iconographic representation further implies an association between Neopalatial elites and the mountainous landscape, advertising their involvement in peak sanctuary ritual and connection with mountains. Powerful figures stand upon mountains overlooking towns and palaces, as can be seen in the Master Impression and Mother of the Mountain sealings (Figs. 1, 10). Female figures wearing elite costume sit on rocky outcrops that may be shorthand representations of mountains, as evident in glyptic, fresco and ivory examples from Crete, Greece, the Cyclades and the Levant.²⁶ That the rocky seat is actually a throne is suggested by an image on a gold ring

¹⁹ Haaland – Haaland 2011, 29.

²⁰ Crooks in press.

²¹ Peatfield 1987, 92; Crooks et al. 2016; Crooks in press.

²² Platon 1971, 166.

²³ Driessen 2004, 77; Hitchcock 2007, 91.

²⁴ Natural and worked stones traditionally thought to be aniconic representations of a deity, but which may have multiple meanings and functions. Similar to Levantine *massevoth*. Evans 1901; Graesser 1972; Avner 1993, Crooks 2012; 2013.

²⁵ Crooks 2013; Crooks et al. 2016; Tully in press a.

²⁶ Xenaki-Sakellariou 1964, 30, Chapin 2008, 70; Rehak 1995, 105–106; Gates 1992. Evocative of the iconography of the Mesopotamian mountain goddess, Ninhursag; see: Westenholz 2002, 17, fig.2. In the Ancient Near East many deities reside on mountains. Marinatos 2010, 30, 80, 83, 111, 158, 174, 180.

from Mycenae and the gypsum throne from the palace at Knossos, both of which have backs that incorporate rocky clumps or mountainous shapes that suggest an intentional symbolic association between mountains and rulership (Figs. 16, 17).

<INSERT FIG. 16 HERE>

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The Knossos Throne

The Knossos Throne is located in the Throne Room suite in the northern part of the west wing of the Palace of Knossos. This group of rooms consists of an Anteroom opening out from polythyron doors²⁷ off the west side of the Central Court; the Throne Room and Lustral Basin; the Inner Sanctuary; the rooms of the Service Section; and a group of magazine rooms to the south. The suite dates back to the Protopalatial period and underwent four building phases between the Middle Minoan II and Late Minoan IIIA1–2 (ca. 1850–1330 BCE).

The throne is set against the middle of the north wall in the Throne Room and is located on the right as one enters from the Central Court of the palace through the west side of the Anteroom.²⁸ A fresco of palm trees and wingless griffins decorates the wall surrounding the throne, while stone benches run along the walls on either side. Directly opposite the throne on the south side is the Lustral Basin, a specifically Minoan architectural feature of uncertain function consisting of a sunken pit that may represent a cave – cave sanctuaries constituting another type of Minoan cult site – and that may have been used for purification, offerings and sacrifice.²⁹

The throne consists of three parts: a base slab, the stool and a back slab.³⁰ That it may have derived from a wooden prototype is suggested by its carved curved legs, which hint at joinery. The throne may date to as early as the Late Minoan IA (1700–1580 BCE) as its back is slightly embedded into – and thus predates – the latest renovation of the wall plaster, which is usually dated to Late Minoan II–IIIA (1490–1370 BCE), but may be as early as Late Minoan IB (1580–1490 BCE). While it is usually assumed that each Minoan palace served as the seat of one ruler, evidence of a formal throne room is known to exist only at Knossos.³¹

That the Knossos Throne represents a mountain is suggested by the similarity between the shape of its back slab and the stylised baetyl or mountain peak above the tripartite shrine shown flanked by wild goats on the Zakros Rhyton (Fig. 11).³² As we have already seen, this image

²⁷ Pier-and-door partition system of multiple doorways, characteristic of many Late Bronze Age Minoan buildings, that facilitated seasonal and functional alterations of interior space, light and ventilation, see: Preziosi – Hitchcock 1999, 94.

²⁸ Evans PM IV, 906, fig. 881; 915, fig. 989; Mirié 1979; Niemeier 1987b; Cadogan 1992, 124–147; McGillivray 1994; Goodison 2001.

²⁹ Evans 1936, 901–946; S. Marinatos 1941, 130; N. Marinatos 1984, 14; Hitchcock 2007, 94.

³⁰ The base slab is 8cm high, the seat 48cm, and the back slab is 90.5cm high. As a whole, the throne measures 146.5cm in height. The seat is 45cm wide by 32cm deep, flaring out to 50.5cm wide by 32cm deep at its base; see: Younger 1995, Pl. LXXIV.

³¹ Rehak 1995, 97. A group of rooms in Building A in Quartier Mu at Mallia replicate the plan of the Throne Room at Knossos with slight variations.

³² Contra Dietrich 1971, but see also Rutkowski 1971; 1986; Shaw 1978; Hood 1989, 18; Marinatos 1993, 119–120; Crooks 2013; Crooks et al. 2016. A further association between baetyls and peak sanctuaries may be evident at Atsipadhes Korakias, where the sanctuary area features a dense scatter of waterworn pebbles around a depression

depicts an architecturally elaborated peak sanctuary. The position of the baetyl between agrimia underscores the significance of the stone. In a familiar arrangement from the Ancient Near East, animals or fantastical composite creatures in heraldic composition symbolise the power or status of a central figure.³³ Mountainous thrones like the one at Knossos may have originally been more prevalent; stone seats similar to the Knossos throne, but without back slabs, have been found at several locations including the vicinity of the shrine of Anemospilia on the slopes of Mount Jouktas, suggesting their use in cultic activity.³⁴

The wavy-edged baetyl or mountain form is morphologically similar to the baetyls at the palatial sites of Gournia (Fig. 15) and Galatas³⁵ and finds further representation in elite costume at Knossos, where the decoration on faience votive dresses from the Temple Repositories likewise appears to evoke a mountain form (Fig. 18).³⁶ In Aegean iconography griffins are more commonly associated with female than with male figures.³⁷ For this reason, the Knossos Throne has traditionally been thought to have been occupied by a priestess performing the role of a deity.³⁸ This, in conjunction with the mountains depicted on female votive garments, implies an association between women, mountains and power.³⁹

<INSERT FIG. 18 HERE>

Constructed Openwork Platforms

Close analysis of seated figures within Minoan iconography reveals architectonic parallels to the Knossian mountain throne: stepped structures surmounted by seated female figures functioning as abstract representations of the sacred mountain.⁴⁰ Constructed openwork platforms are stepped structures consisting of vertical and horizontal elements with openings in between, and which usually have at least two or more levels that step inwards as they ascend (Figs. 19, 20).⁴¹ Although no extant examples exist in the archaeological record, detailed depictions in fresco painting and carved ivory suggest a framework-like construction in which the elevated horizontal components rest upon incurved altars (Fig. 21). These platforms functioned as prefabricated

entirely free of finds and surrounded by many pottery sherds. The excavator, Peatfield (1994, 92–93) suggested that a focal cult object, possibly a baetyl, may have originally stood in this depression. The peak sanctuary at Leska on Kythera also has a baetylic rock at its summit; see: Georgiadis 2014.

³³ Crowley 1989, 19–22, 64–69; Feldman 2007, 41, 49.

³⁴ Rehak 1995, 98.

³⁵ Crooks 2013, 20–28; Crooks et al. 2016, 158–160.

³⁶ Evans 1921, 506, fig 364a, b; Chapin 2008, 68.

³⁷ Reusch 1958, 357; Marinatos 2010, 53–64.

³⁸ Evans (1936, 908–913, 924–927) thought that the carved depression in the seat was more suited to female anatomy, but later decided that the throne belonged to King Minos. See also: Reusch 1958; Hägg 1986; Niemeier 1986; Maran – Stavrianopoulou 2007, 350; Hitchcock (2010) proposes an empty throne; Marinatos (2010, 50–65) places a king on the throne.

³⁹ Neopalatial elite female costume may have referenced a mountain – the flounced and layered skirt evoking the jagged profile of a mountain. Similar skirts are worn by Hittite mountain deities; see: Chapin 2008, 59–60; Tully in press a. The split-rossette, as seen on either side of the Knossos Throne, which evokes the shape made by incurved altars underneath constructed openwork platforms, as seen in the Tiryns Ring (Fig. 6), appears in conjunction with beam ends on the border of the central female figure’s dress in the Procession Fresco in the West Corridor of the Palace of Knossos, evoking both the palace and mountains; see: Marinatos 2010, 27–28.

⁴⁰ Tully – Crooks 2015, 146–147; Tully in press a.

⁴¹ Krattenmaker 1991, 284–5.

stages that could be assembled, disassembled and moved around for use during the performance of religious spectacles.⁴²

<INSERT FIG. 19 HERE>

<INSERT FIG. 20 HERE>

<INSERT FIG. 21 HERE>

Constructed openwork platforms appear in various media including fresco painting, on gold rings and clay sealings, carved ivory and stone rhyta.⁴³ The detailed construction of the platform is most clearly rendered in the fresco from the northern wall of Room 3a on the first floor of the building Xeste 3 at Akrotiri on Thera,⁴⁴ and on an ivory pyxis from Mochlos on Crete.

In the fresco at Xeste 3 the platform is situated in a mountainous landscape amongst a scene of girls gathering saffron crocus stamens (Fig. 22a). The seated figure is enthroned upon the highest level of a three-tiered structure and sits on what appears to be a series of yellow cushions or bales of saffron-dyed cloth. She is attended by a leashed griffin and a blue monkey standing on the second tier, while a girl on the lowest level of the platform empties crocus blossoms into a basket.

<INSERT FIG. 22a HERE>

The central and highest part of the structure is built from stacked blocks, with a horizontal slab or cornice on top. The central area incorporates two lower horizontal slabs that are supported by single blocks on their outer edges and rest upon longer horizontal slabs. These are supported by three incurved altars on the left and one on the right. The structure evokes the high central area and lower outer wings of a tripartite shrine and the ascending triangular form of a stepped ashlar altar. The stepped forms of these cult structures represent the idea of triplicity, a triangular structure that may evoke an ascending mountain form.⁴⁵ That the stepped openwork platform has a symbolic link with rocks and mountains is suggested by a second female figure sitting upon rocks depicted directly below this structure; the position of these two scenes suggests a symbolic equivalency (Fig. 22b).⁴⁶

<INSERT FIG. 22b HERE>

⁴² Palyvou 2006, 417–424; 2012, 19.

⁴³ Doulas 1980, 295; Pini et al. 1975, 154; Weingarten 1991, 9, Fig. 10; Pini 1992, 179; Gill et al. 2002, 412; Soles 2016, Pl. XXXIIA. The Tiryns Ring (Fig. 6) could also be included, although the platform here is not stepped and consists of only one layer with half-rosettes taking the place of the supporting incurved altars, as noted by Krattenmaker 1991, 164; Soles 2016.

⁴⁴ During the Neopalatial period aspects of Minoan religion spread to or were adopted by Cycladic islands, including Thera, either through Minoan colonisation or increased intensity in Minoan trade. Sakellarakis 1996, 91. 81–99; Branigan 1981, 23.

⁴⁵ As do Ziggurats and Pyramids; see: Keel 1997, 113–18.

⁴⁶ Doulas 1992, 16–143, figs. 100–108, 158–165, figs. 122–128, as noted by Rehak (1995, 106, fig. XXXVIIc). Mountain-shaped rocks within landscapes in fresco scenes, such as the one on the eastern wall of the first floor of Xeste 3, may actually signify mountains rather than a rocky landscape, according to Palyvou 2012, 15, fig. 8.

The fresco from the north wall of Room 14 from Villa A at Ayia Triada also depicts a stepped openwork platform (Fig. 23).⁴⁷ That the scene is associated with a mountainous landscape is evident from the right hand panel, in which cats stalk and agrimia leap within a rocky setting evocative of a mountainous hillside. The left hand panel, in turn, may reflect an association between baetyls and mountains as it appears to represent the enactment of a baetylic ritual within a rocky landscape dotted with clumps of flowers, possibly at or near a peak sanctuary.⁴⁸

<INSERT FIG. 23 HERE>

The Mochlos Pyxis is a decorated ivory box, the side panels of which are carved in low relief with a seascape pattern, while the lid depicts a four-tiered constructed openwork platform (Fig. 24). On the lowest level, four figures approach the remaining three tiers.⁴⁹ On the second tier sits a female figure holding a flower, while on the third tier or top of the structure stands a tree, in front of which hovers an epiphanic female figure that may represent the numen of the tree.⁵⁰ Unfortunately the pyxis is broken at the line separating the upper bodies of the approaching figures, so we cannot discern what types of gestures they were making.

<INSERT FIG. 24 HERE>

As in the Xeste 3 fresco and Mochlos Pyxis, so too in glyptic imagery standing figures bring offerings to female figures seated on platforms. In a sealing from Khania a small female figure may be handing the seated figure a sceptre (Fig. 9);⁵¹ in a sealing from Knossos a double-handled vase and conical rhyton are offered to the seated figure (Fig. 19); and in a ring from Thebes a male figure approaches the seated female figure (Fig. 20).⁵² Another unpublished ring from Thebes, which depicts a female figure seated on a platform resting on incurved bases and flanked on both sides by a griffin and a Minoan Genius, evokes the fresco at Xeste 3,⁵³ while in another sealing from Khania a woman stands next to a platform (Fig. 5).⁵⁴ It is evident that only female figures are associated with such platforms.⁵⁵

While the Knossos Throne was situated in a small room of the palace and must have had a restricted and exclusive audience,⁵⁶ the surrounding vegetation in both the frescoes from Xeste 3 and Ayia Triada suggest that the events depicted took place outdoors. The presence of crocus flowers in the frescoes may evoke peak sanctuaries as they are depicted in the vicinity of such a

⁴⁷ Krattenmaker 1991, 287. That it is a platform and not a wall is evident from the fact that in the actual fresco the orange-brown background colouring can be seen in the openings between the horizontal and vertical elements of the structure.

⁴⁸ Rehak 1997, 172; Crooks 2013, 48–49.

⁴⁹ It measures 11cm x 14cm and was found in Seager's Block A on the western side of the site of Mochlos, now called Area 4, in the wall collapse of a Late Minoan IB building; see Soles – Davaras 2010, 1.

⁵⁰ Soles – Davaras 2010, 1–3; Tully in press a.

⁵¹ CMS VS1A No.177, see: Pini 1992. Another interpretation, however, holds that the image depicts child sacrifice and that the 'sceptre' is a sword.

⁵² CMS II 8 No. 268, see: Gill et al. 2002; CMS V No. 199, see: Pini et al. 1975.

⁵³ As does a Syrian cylinder seal in Vienna; see: Aruz 1995, 15, fig.11.

⁵⁴ CMS VS. IA No.175; see: Pini 1992, 179. An Aegean-style female figure feeding rampant goats sits upon an incurved altar on top of a mountain on an ivory pyxis lid from Minet el-Beida. Gates 1992.

⁵⁵ Except for one example in which two ambiguously gendered Minoan Genii, holding libation jugs and standing upon a two-tiered platform, are depicted on a stone triton-shaped rhyton; see Phillips 2008, 347, fig. 372.

⁵⁶ Up to around 30 people in the Throne Room and anteroom; see: Evans 1936, 901–46; Marinatos 2010, 50.

sanctuary on the Zakros Rhyton, while in the sealing from Knossos the overhanging rocks suggest a rocky landscape or cave.⁵⁷ Iconographic images of cult activities in conjunction with openwork platforms may have been intended to evoke ritual performances enacted at peak sanctuaries; the actual events, however, may have occurred at urban sites.⁵⁸

Elite Performance

That a constructed openwork platform was utilised at the Middle Minoan I–II (1950–1775 BCE) palatial site of Archanes Tourkogeitonia near Knossos is suggested by the four stone incurved altars, found packed tightly together against a column, on the east side of an imposing entrance way into an antechamber to the north of Courtyard 1 (Figs. 25, 26). The altars were configured into a square, suggesting that their purpose was to form a larger altar or a platform for a seat. They may have been stored in this location and brought out when required and placed at the corners of a larger platform – perhaps the stone table with a raised rim that was found at the site.⁵⁹ Such an arrangement would have served as an important focus of public gatherings and processions.

<INSERT FIG. 25 HERE>

<INSERT FIG. 26 HERE>

Archanes is situated below and directly opposite the peak sanctuary of Mount Jouktas, the stepped altar of which directly faces Archanes. The erection of a constructed platform in an urban environment located near a mountain with a peak sanctuary may serve as a metaphorical representation of that mountain. The erection of a stepped platform at an urban site such as Archanes may symbolically bring the cultic associations of the peak sanctuary down from the mountain to the palace. When surmounted by an elite female figure, the mountain-evoking platform would signify the figure's relationship with the numinous landscape exemplified by the peak sanctuary. As an abstracted mountain, the platform at Archanes would have functioned as a theatrical device in a performance or spectacle enacted on an urban ritual 'stage'. The arrangement of the seated female figure on top of this structure evokes a correspondence with peak sanctuary ritual, as does the Knossos Throne with its 'baetylic', mountain-evoking back. As argued above, these structures function within an iconography of power that associates rulership with the sacred landscape and serves ideologically to naturalise Minoan elite authority.

The fact that the constructed openwork platform was a temporary structure erected and dismantled, rather than permanently left in place, suggests that it functioned as a theatrical prop

⁵⁷ Chapin 1995, 68, 128.

⁵⁸ Rehak 1997, 167, 174; Tully in press a.

⁵⁹ The altars measure 0.96 x 0.96m, while the stone table measures 1.73 x 1.02m. The excavator proposed, by analogy with the Lion Gate at Mycenae, which features a sculpted image of an incurved altar, that the position of these altars in the gateway indicated the presence of a 'gate shrine'. A nearby fresco depicting a female figure wearing a Minoan flounced skirt and possibly holding vegetation in her right hand on the east wall of Antechamber 2, before the east door of the polythyron leading to Area 3, enhances the cultic nature of the area; see: Sakellarakis – Sapouna-Sakalleraki 1997, 495. The fresco from Xeste 3 shows four such altars holding up the bottom tier of a constructed openwork platform, while the example on the Mochlos Pyxis contains eight. A more stylised pair of bases is painted, in conjunction with the split-rosette motif, on either side of the stone seat in the Throne Room, as noted by Krattenmaker 1991, 291.

used for particular ritual events. Ritual performance is an embodied communicative event that materialises ideology and defines political reality.⁶⁰ Ethnographic studies demonstrate the importance of elite performance as an aspect of political behaviour in which authoritative identity is actualised through ritual.⁶¹ Theatrical events involving female figures seated on symbolic mountains promoted an association between Minoan elites and the sacred landscape that was reiterated and recreated through performance.

Power in ancient states was embodied in the persona of the ruler, in monumental buildings and in collective acts.⁶² Visuality was thus important. Although rulers are not clearly identifiable in Minoan iconography – in contrast to the explicitly identified rulers of Near Eastern art – it is evident that Minoan elites *performed* authority through ritual action.⁶³ Urban palatial sites can be conceived as settings for metaphysical theatre in which elites expressed an idealised reality through physical performance. The association of mountains with palatial architecture brought the symbolic qualities of the *axis mundi* to the palace and its inhabitants.⁶⁴ The appropriation of the landscape through architectural design functioned ideologically to establish, maintain, negotiate and reinforce power and status.⁶⁵

Conclusion

Images of elite female figures performing as deities in conjunction with architectonic cult structures symbolising mountains promote the idea of a relationship between Minoan elites and the animate landscape. Through the appropriation of the mountain form, the Knossian mountain throne and constructed openwork platforms were utilised in strategic performances in which elites enacted their relatedness to the landscape within architecturally monumentalised urban locations. Sacred mountains, peak sanctuaries and palatial architecture were directly associated; the symbolic presence of the mountain within such architecture in the form of the baetylic Knossos Throne and constructed openwork platforms functioned ideologically to naturalise Minoan elite authority.

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⁶⁰ Bell 1992, 72–73, 99–100; Soar 2014, 255.

⁶¹ Soar 2009, 21–3.

⁶² Baines 2006, 261–302; Driessen 2007, 73–92; Frandsen 2008, 47–73; Panagiotopoulos – Günkel-Maschek 2012, 1–8; Soar 2014, 224–241; Murphy 2016, 50–75.

⁶³ Soar 2014, 236.

⁶⁴ Geertz 1980, 114.

⁶⁵ Crooks et al. 2016, 157–163.

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Figure Captions

- Fig. 1 Drawing of a clay sealing from Khania depicting a staff-wielding male figure standing on a mountain (Hallager 1985, fig. 11).
- Fig. 2 Drawing of a stone seal from Naxos depicting a spear-wielding male figure (Dakoronia et al. 1996, no. 608).
- Fig. 3 Drawing of seal impression of a gold ring from Knossos depicting a chariot-driving male figure (Gill et al. 2002, no. 193).
- Fig. 4 Drawing of a stone seal from Epano Vatheia depicting a male wearing a spirally-wound garment and carrying an axe (Platon – Pini 1975, no. 198).
- Fig. 5 Drawing of a clay a sealing from Khania depicting a female figure standing next to a constructed openwork platform (Pini 1992, no. 176).
- Fig. 6 Drawing of a gold ring from Tiryns depicting a female figure seated on a throne (Xenaki-Sakellariou 1964, no. 179).
- Fig. 7 Drawing of a stone seal from Crete depicting a female figure seated on a rocky outcrop (Gill et al. 2002, no. 239).
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- Fig. 15 Baetyl at Gournia, view south-east (photo by S. Crooks).
- Fig. 16 Drawing of a gold ring from Mycenae depicting a standing male figure with a spear and a female figure seated on a chair with a rocky back (Xenaki-Sakellariou 1964, no. 101).
- Fig. 17 Drawing of the Knossos Throne (by A. Crooks after M.A.S. Cameron’s reconstruction in Hägg – Marinatos 1987, 322, fig. 3).
- Fig. 18 Drawing of faience votive dresses from Knossos (by P. Rehak, after Evans 1921, 506, fig. 364a–b).
- Fig. 19 Drawing of a clay sealing from Knossos depicting a female figure seated on a constructed openwork platform (Gill et. al. 2002, no. 268).
- Fig. 20 Drawing of a gold ring from Thebes depicting a female figure seated on a constructed openwork platform (Pini et. al. 1975, no.199).
- Fig. 21 Drawing of an agate seal from Knossos depicting an incurved altar (Pini 1992, No.75).

Fig. 22a Drawing of a fresco painting from the north wall, first level, Building Xeste 3 at Thera, depicting a female figure seated upon a constructed openwork platform, (Marinatos 1984, 62).

Fig. 22b Drawing of a fresco painting from the north wall, ground level, Building Xeste 3 at Thera, depicting a female figure seated on a rocky outcrop (Marinatos 1984, 74).

Fig. 23 Drawing of a fresco painting from Ayia Triada Villa A Room 14, of (left) a female figure kneeling before two baetyls, (center) a female figure standing before a constructed openwork platform, and (right) cats and goats in a rocky landscape (Sturmer 2001, pl. XVIc).

Fig. 24 Drawing of an ivory pyxis lid from Mochlos depicting a female figure seated upon a constructed openwork platform (Soles 2016, pl. LXXXIIa).

Fig. 25 Incurved altars at Archanes Tourkogeitonia, view north (photo by O. Tausch).

Fig. 26 Plan of Archanes Tourkogeitonia (after Sakellarakis 1991, 29, fig. 14).



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