

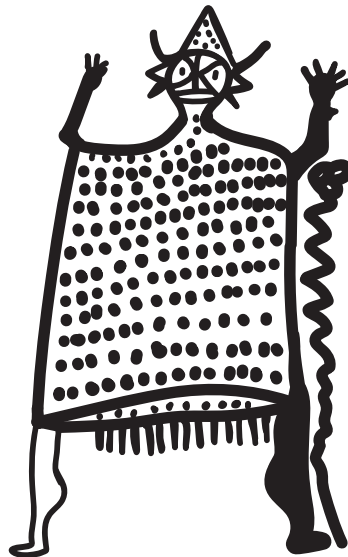
STUDIES IN MEDITERRANEAN ARCHAEOLOGY  
VOL. CLIV

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# THE DECLINE OF BRONZE AGE CIVILISATIONS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: CYPRUS AND BEYOND

*edited by*

Teresa Bürge and Peter M. Fischer



ASTROM EDITIONS  
NICOSIA 2023

Extract from T. Bürge and P.M. Fischer (eds) 2023: *The Decline of Bronze Age Civilisations in the Mediterranean: Cyprus and Beyond* (SIMA 154), Nicosia  
ISBN 978-9925-7935-3-2 © Astrom Editions and the authors 2023

STUDIES IN MEDITERRANEAN ARCHAEOLOGY

Volume CLIV

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(LC IIIA early; ca 1200 BC) (drawing by T. Bürge)

Published by Astrom Editions Ltd  
Apt 401, 7 Andrea Michalakopoulou Street, Ayioi Omologites  
1075 Nicosia, Cyprus  
www.astromeditations.com

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ISSN: 0081-8232

ISBN: 978-9925-7935-3-2

Printed by Ch. Nicolaou & Sons Ltd., Nicosia

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# Preface and acknowledgements

The papers presented in this volume are the results of the conference *The Decline of Bronze Age Civilisations in the Mediterranean: Cyprus and Beyond* organised by the editors of the volume and held on January 17 and 18, 2020 at the Department of Historical Studies, University of Gothenburg. It was supported by much appreciated funds from the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet, registration number 2019-00327) and the Riksbank's Anniverary Fund (Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, registration number F19-1036:1). In addition, it was the final conference of the project *The Collapse of Bronze Age Societies in the Eastern Mediterranean* (Vetenskapsrådet, registration number 2015-01192; project director Peter M. Fischer) that investigated the causes of disruption in international trade and the 'collapse' of Bronze Age civilisations in the Eastern Mediterranean in the second half of the 13th and the 12th centuries BC, focusing on the island of Cyprus which was the centre of interregional trade in this region. The project was closely connected with our ongoing excavations at the Late Bronze Age harbour city of Hala Sultan Tekke on the island's southern coast.

The newly restored and enlarged building of the Faculty of Humanities, where the conference was hosted, thanks to the support of Henrik Jansson, the Head of the Department, provided an excellent environment for the conference. The conference dinner in the refined Jugendstil milieu of 'Ågrenska Villan', built in 1916 in the centre of Gothenburg as a private residence and since 1981 owned by the University of Gothenburg, was much appreciated by the participants. To the best of our knowledge, this conference was the last at the university of

Gothenburg before the serious outbreak of COVID-19 ended physical meetings for almost two years. In retrospect, we are even more grateful that we could enjoy these very intense and stimulating two days to the full, untroubled by thoughts about physical distancing, the potential spread of infection and other issues that would start to affect our everyday life only a few weeks later.

For some of us the pandemic was a very quiet and perhaps more productive period than usual, while others had to deal with parental challenges while schools and preschools were closed. In spite of these and the many other difficulties, issues and changes that we all had to face during the last more than two and a half years, we are particularly glad that all participants were able to submit a contribution to the present volume. In addition, we have included three more chapters to round off the topic.

Besides the funding bodies mentioned above, we would like to thank Jennifer Webb and David Frankel and Lennart Åström, the editors-in-chief and manager of SIMA, for including the volume in this series. Each single contribution was carefully peer-reviewed and we are grateful to all reviewers for accepting this task. Jennifer Webb has given us incredible support by finalising the layout and correcting and improving the language. We are very much obliged for all her accurate work! We also want to thank Elena Peri, who has assisted with copy editing, and Jennie Fälth of the administration of our department for practical help.

Gothenburg and Bern, June 2023  
Teresa Bürge and Peter M. Fischer



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# Toppling the domino: the destruction of the palace at Knossos and the Aegean Bronze Age collapse

Jan Driessen and Florence Gaignerot-Driessen

## Abstract

This paper reconsiders the chronology and sequence of events in the Aegean during the advanced Late Bronze Age. It argues that the major destruction of the palace at Knossos during the late 14th century BC set in motion a process of uncertainty and turmoil in the Aegean, eventually leading to a wholesale societal collapse. It discusses the different hypotheses that have been presented to explain the main destruction of the palace at Knossos and asks whether an unknown third party like the *She/ardana*, one of the groups later counted amongst the Sea Peoples, who make their first appearance in the Amarna letters (ca 1350–1330 BC), could not also have been a possible candidate as the bringer of destruction. Some level of administration continues at Knossos afterwards. Internationally, however, Knossos no longer plays a role. Within the island, regional centres such as Chania and Ayia Triada clearly become important and other regions henceforth go their own way. Taking as an example the recently excavated site of Sissi, we note changes in material culture in the Cretan countryside, following the destruction of Knossos. Two of these changes are discussed in more detail. The first is the presence of clay spools for which a connection with the central Mediterranean is argued, the second is the more intense use of caves during the later 13th century BC, indicative of a few decades of uncertainty. We note that the earliest clay spools on Crete appear immediately after the main destruction of Knossos and that this is also the moment at which the Mycenaean Mainland starts major fortification works but also progressively passes a period of turmoil, leading to the final destruction of palatial civilisations in the Aegean.

Despite the famous quote ‘Nations do not die from invasions; they die from internal rottenness’, which has erroneously been attributed to Abraham Lincoln (by Jones 1916: 115), the hypothesis that the collapse of Bronze Age Mediterranean societies was solely caused by system collapse is not one that is preferred by most scholars (Jung & Mehofer 2013; Dabney 2016;

Middleton 2017; Wiener 2017; Jung 2018). But even if the great American statesman would have said these words, he probably would have meant that an invasion could only be successful and bring a nation to its knees if there was already internal rottenness and decay before.

## Setting the scene

During the 13th century BC the Aegean was, literally speaking, on fire (Cline 2014; Knapp & Manning 2016) (**Table 1**). On present evidence, century-old palaces burned down, one by one, the series inaugurated by the destruction of the palace of Knossos on the island of Crete, in the late 14th century BC or Late Minoan (henceforth LM) IIIA2. This was followed almost at the same time by a destruction of the palace at Pylos (Vitale *et al.* in press) and a generation later by the setting on fire of the palace of Ayios Vasileios in Laconia (Kardamaki 2017: 114; Vasilogamvrou *et al.* in press). From then onwards, major centres on Crete, the Cyclades and the Greek Mainland were eliminated and fire was often the main agent of destruction. It is unlikely that devastating earthquakes were involved in this process (cf. the recent evidence at Midea and Tiryns, for which see Hinzen *et al.* 2018). In addition to these destructions, there are many settlements that are simply abandoned (Murray 2017: 140–141). By the time everything more or less quiets down again—at least for a while—, early in the 12th century BC, the Aegean had drastically and permanently changed appearance: no more monumental art, no more literacy, no more public architecture, just to mention some of the major changes. Some old centres, like Tiryns and Chania, continued, while new settlements were founded. In the 100 or so years between the destruction of the palace at Knossos and the brief renaissance of the Late Minoan/Late Helladic IIIC period, there was hence a prolonged period of troubles and uncertainty (Middleton 2020). It was a process, not an event. This is sometimes neglected and discussions, as far as the Aegean is concerned, often conflate two things: on the one hand, an increased attention to the military investment in Mainland

| Site                | Event                              |                                        |                                  |                                             | References                                                 |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
|                     | ca 1350/25<br>(LM IIIA2)           | ca 1300<br>(LM IIIA2/B)                | ca 1250<br>(end of LM IIIB1)     | ca 1200<br>(end of LM IIIB2/<br>early IIIC) |                                                            |
| <b>Knossos</b>      | Major LM IIIA2<br>fire destruction | –                                      | Fire damage?                     | Brief abandonment,<br>then resettlement     | Hatzaki 2007;<br>Macdonald 2010                            |
| <b>Pylos</b>        | Fire destruction                   | –                                      | –                                | Fire destruction                            | Davis 2010;<br>Vitale <i>et al.</i> in press               |
| <b>Thebes</b>       | –                                  | Fire destruction<br>House of<br>Kadmos | Fire damage                      | Fire destruction                            | Dakouri 2010                                               |
| <b>A. Vasileios</b> | –                                  | –                                      | Fire destruction                 | Abandonment                                 | Kardamaki 2017;<br>Vasilogamvrou <i>et al.</i> in<br>press |
| <b>Gla</b>          | –                                  | –                                      | –                                | Fire destruction                            | Iakovidis 2001                                             |
| <b>Dimini Area</b>  | –                                  | Fire destruction                       | –                                | Fire destruction                            | Adrymi-Sismani 2016                                        |
| <b>Tiryns</b>       | –                                  | –                                      | Damage                           | Fire destruction                            | Maran 2010;<br>Hinzen <i>et al.</i> 2018                   |
| <b>Mycenae</b>      | –                                  | Earthquake &<br>fire                   | Earthquake<br>destruction        | Fire destruction                            | French 2010; Shelton 2016                                  |
| <b>Midea</b>        | –                                  | –                                      | –                                | Fire destruction                            | Walberg 1998;<br>Hinzen <i>et al.</i> 2018                 |
| <b>T. Dymaion</b>   | –                                  | –                                      | –                                | Fire destruction                            | Vikatou & Moschos 2018                                     |
| <b>Chania</b>       | –                                  | –                                      | Earthquake &<br>Fire destruction | Fire destruction                            | Hallager & Hallager 2003;<br>Andreadaki-Vlazaki 2015       |
| <b>Sissi</b>        | Fire?                              | Earthquake &<br>Fire destruction       | Abandonment                      | –                                           | Langohr 2017a                                              |

Table 1. Events taking place in the main Aegean centres (ca 1350–1150 BC)

Mycenaean fortified citadels and their subsequent destructions at the end of the 13th century BC or Late Helladic (henceforth LH) IIIB; on the other hand, the settlement shift with the founding of highland sites in the early 12th century BC or LM IIIC on Crete (for an update see Nowicki 2018) and the islands (such as on Aegina, at Megali Koryphi, for which see Vokotopoulos & Michalopoulou 2018, and at Ayios Andreas on Siphnos, for which see Televantou 2017). Both are historical facts in the sense that they form a consistent pattern in the archaeological evidence, which does not mean that there is a causality between them, however.

One major player that consistently stands out from the commonly presented historical scenarios for the Late Bronze Age collapse is the palace of Knossos, which, with a size of ca 13,000m<sup>2</sup>, was the largest palatial complex ever built in the Aegean. Scholars agree that the palace had been a ‘cosmological’ centre during the Minoan periods (Soles 1995) and remained the source of symbolic and political inspiration for all Mainland centres during the early Mycenaean period (Maran & Stavropoulou 2007; Wiener 2016; Wright 2020; Driessen & Mouthuy 2022). Moreover, an increasing number of studies has shown how the first Mycenaean palaces, built in LH IIIA, and many aspects of their construction, decoration and administration, were directly borrowed from the

Knossian prototype (Kilian 1988; Nelson 2001, 2017, 2022; Wiener 2016; Blakolmer 2019; Wright 2020). With a history going back to the early Neolithic period, the site of Knossos received its first monumentalisation in the 3rd millennium BC and repetitive rebuildings around 2000 BC, 1650 BC and 1400 BC (Macdonald 2005). Despite several earlier destructions that always were followed by reconstruction, this time the millennium-long history of the palace came to an end for reasons that have not yet been explained. As noted (Gaignerot-Driessen 2016: 21), it is not the destruction that is awkward but the absence of reconstruction of this palace. The destruction of the Palace of Knossos and the date of the Linear B tablets that were stratified during this destruction are evidently something which cannot be resolved easily (most recently, see Driessen & Mouthuy 2022). While the excavator, Arthur Evans, proposed a date around 1400 BC, downdated to 1375 BC by Mervyn R. Popham (1970), the major destruction is now likely to have happened even later, around the mid to late 14th century BC, sometime between 1350 and 1320 BC. Granted, this is our personal opinion that is shared by some of our colleagues (Hatzaki 2007; Macdonald 2010; Wiener in press), and partly rests on the presence of similar ceramic evidence at Malia and Sissi (Driessen 2021a). Defenders of a very late date of 1250 or even 1200 BC evidently also exist (Hallager 1977; Niemeier 1982) but for various reasons,

including the absence of a palatial culture at Knossos itself during this late period, this is unlikely (and see below). While perhaps being circumstantial evidence, it is also clear that, after LM IIIA2, the Mainland steers its own path, as does the Cretan countryside. It appears hence that the disappearance of the palatial source of inspiration seems to have had considerable repercussions on the island and beyond (e.g. Langohr 2019). The creativity is largely gone and henceforth the pottery decoration is monotonous and bland, and palatial workshops no longer produce pieces of art, weaponry and jewellery, at least on Crete (Poursat 1997; Krzyszkowska 2005: 230). Before the LM IIIA2 destruction of Knossos, however, its influence was persuasive (see e.g. Banou 2004 for the Knossian pottery from the Viannos area). Together with this disappearance of local influence, there is also a serious drop in international trade after LM IIIA2 (Cline 2007: 192). While much Mycenaean pottery on Crete comes from Knossos before LM IIIA2, it is Chania that clearly takes the lead afterwards (Bernhardt 2021).

This said, the early 13th century BC and post-Knossos destruction period was still a time of contrasts on Crete with a series of active settlements. From Palaikastro and Zakros in the very east of the island, to Mochlos, Gournia, Malia and Sissi in the Mirabello area, Kommos and Ayia Triada in the Mesara, to Armenoi and Chania in the west, settlements and cemeteries abound, often illustrating dynamic interactions between the sites and occasionally with regions abroad (Kanta 1980; Gaignerot-Driessen 2016: 51–56; Langohr 2017a, 2019). This is also the period of the largest number of Cretan stirrup jars inscribed with short Linear B texts found on the Mycenaean Mainland, especially at Boeotian Thebes (most recently Judson 2013, with references). Clear evidence exists that Chania during the first half of the 13th century BC had a major political centre, perhaps even a palace, using Linear B, as shown by excavations by Maria Andreadaki-Vlazaki, Yannis Tzedakis and Erik and Birgitta Hallager (Tzedakis 1969; Hallager *et al.* 1990; Hallager & Hallager 2003; Andreadaki-

Vlazaki 2009, 2015; Hallager 2017). The products of the Kydonian workshop have been found in more than 40 sites on the island itself and beyond (Hallager & Hallager 2011: 431). Chania and, for a while, Ayia Triada in the Mesara, monumentalised just before the time the Knossos palace was destroyed (La Rosa 1997; D'Agata 2017), may by then have been the only major centres remaining on the island. Southern Crete still continued exporting stirrup jars, some inscribed, and their contents (e.g. to Tiryns). This goes on into LM IIIB2 but it cannot be shown that there was palatial involvement (Kardamaki *et al.* 2016). While Ayia Triada seems to have been largely abandoned around 1250 BC, Chania suffered a serious fire destruction from which it recovered, however, immediately and occupation continued until another fire destruction happened at the end of LM IIIB2 (Hallager & Hallager 2003: 22). But even afterwards, the settlement seems to continue without too much adversity. In this regard, it seems to be quite unique, at least where Crete is concerned. The LM IIIB1 destruction of Chania (Andreadaki-Vlazaki 2015), during which the last Linear B tablets were stratified, can probably be regarded as the final blow to the Cretan Bronze Age settlement system since more or less contemporary destructions or abandonments in the middle of the 13th century BC are attested all over the island (papers in Langohr 2017a).

### The Kephali at Sissi

A site which can be regarded as a good illustration of the various events that we can identify throughout the late 14th and 13th century BC on Crete, is the Kephali at Sissi, excavated since 2007 by a team of the UCLouvain for the Belgian School at Athens (see especially Driessen *et al.* 2009, 2011, 2012, 2018; Driessen 2021a, 2021b) (**Fig. 1**). Located only 4km from the Minoan palace site at Malia, the Sissi site is a coastal hill, about 3ha in extent, strategically placed opposite the Selinari Gorge, the only land route between central and east Crete (**Fig. 2**). Although

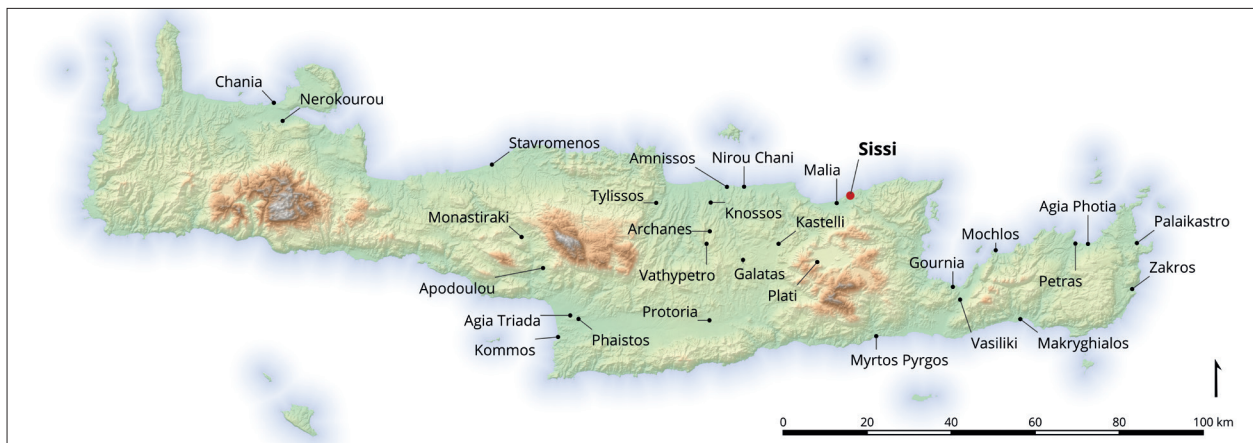


Figure 1. Map of Crete with important sites (courtesy N. Kress, © TALOS)



Figure 2. Outline plan of the settlement remains at Sissi (E. Zografou, © EBSA)

occupied since the middle of the 3rd millennium BC and once also home to a thriving settlement and a court-centred building (a 'palace') in the 16th century BC (Driessen 2021b), Sissi suffered at various moments during the Neopalatial period, probably first at the time of the Santorini eruption and then again during the wave of fire destructions in LM IB (Driessen 2018). The site was quickly resettled, however, but during the late 15th and 14th centuries BC, only the summit of the hill, probably because it was easily defensible, was chosen by the Knossos Linear B administration for the establishment of a small fortified structure with a potential tower (Driessen 2017; Driessen *et al.* 2022). The fragment of a Linear B inscription found elsewhere on the site (Driessen *et al.* 2012: 24)

and the burial of a lady in typical Mycenaean style emphasise this Knossian link (Driessen & Mouthuy 2022; Driessen *et al.* 2022). The pottery of these first post-LM IB phases is also entirely Knossian (Langohr in Driessen *et al.* 2011: 194; Liard 2019) and the hill seems to have suffered some kind of calamity at the same time as the Knossos palace did (Driessen *et al.* 2022). Immediately afterwards, probably still in the 14th or early 13th century BC, a single architectural complex CDE, north and south of an open space, was constructed (Gaignerot-Driessen & Letesson 2012; Driessen 2017) (Fig. 3). During its initial construction, the main building, CD, was an integrated building in which three sectors can be distinguished (Fig. 4): the north wing (in orange) with the main hall 3.1 and



Figure 3. Aerial view of the top of the hill at Sissi, north at the top (N. Kress, © EBSA)



its annexes (4.7, 4.8, 4.9, 4.10 and 4.14), as well as an entrance porch formed by 4.4. A south wing (in blue) centred on pillar hall 4.11 with its annexes (3.2, 3.7, 3.8, 4.12, 4.13, 4.17) and an entrance formed by a possible porch in 4.18. A wing (in green) without a central space and with a more functional nature, also provided a spatial link between the other wings. The north part (orange) has in its centre a large hall with two column bases and an axial entrance, something which is new for the period. Experiments have shown that this hall could easily hold 40 seated people. The north and south wing are architecturally and syntactically very similar and may also have been functionally similar: providing space for food processing (4.8 and 4.13) and for the gathering of people. The accessibility for both areas is identical, which also means that they provide equal access to the rest of the building. At the same time, it is clear that no efforts were made to provide easy access between the two wings, but that communication had to pass through the southwest wing (green). Each wing is hence organised around a node of convergence formed by a hall with double internal support. Within hall 3.1, there was evidence of what may have been wine or perfume production (Peter Warren, *pers. comm.* 12/02/2014 for the latter interpretation). The presence of a hearth and three tripod cooking pots in hall 4.11 and loom weights in the room next to it (3.6) may be noted (Gaignerot-Driessen 2012: 72–74).

The spaces south of the court, Building E (Fig. 3), were destroyed by fire already in early LM IIIB1, perhaps caused by earthquake, something which is also evidenced at nearby Malia, where it caused the death of at least one person (Driessen & Farnoux 1994; Jusseret & Sintubin 2012; Jusseret *et al.* 2013). At Sissi, this destruction left many floor deposits in place, including quite a few bronze objects and a large lead cauldron (Devolder 2009: 152). The same event seems also to have affected the main building CD to the north since several rooms were abandoned, again with their objects left in position and their doors blocked (Fig. 5), while others were cleared and reused (Gaignerot-Driessen & Letesson 2012: 67). During the following mature LM IIIB period, only the central part of complex CD continued to be occupied and at least one room, 3.8, in the centre of the building was a shrine used for ritual practices (Gaignerot-Driessen 2014). The pottery from this phase is obviously a far memory of the palatial-type vases from the 14th century (Langohr 2017b). In one of the rooms, 3.6, two piles comprising 58 spool-shaped loom weights were found (Fig. 6). Similar spool-shaped loom weights occasionally also turn up in other areas of the site (especially zones 6, 8, 10 and 15) and in the survey around where limited LM IIIB occupation is attested, showing that it was a widespread feature (Gaignerot-Driessen 2012: 73; Jusseret 2018: 236).



Figure 6. Nests of spool-shaped loom weights in Room 3.6 of Building CD at Sissi (F. Gaignerot, © EBSA)

### Spools

Where Sissi is concerned, we may note that, at the time of the Knossos palace destruction in LM IIIA2, the site was also affected, as were some other settlements, like Chondros Kephali (Platon 1997: 373), while others, like Chania, were not (Hallager & Hallager 2011: 269). And while the nature of the occupation at Sissi afterwards changes—no palatial pottery, no Linear B—considerable new building activity did take place. Second, a considerable destruction took place early during the 13th century BC—probably by earthquake accompanied by fire. Settlement was much reduced afterwards and much simpler. Eventually the remaining buildings were simply abandoned well before the end of the same century. Thirdly, during its later phases of occupation, the inhabitants of the site very likely included people who were trained in a different tradition of textile production than had been the case in Minoan times when disc-, melon- or pyramidal-shaped weights were used.

The spool-shaped loom weights encountered in large numbers at Sissi are indeed a novelty on Crete (Cutler 2016: 178–179; Gaignerot-Driessen 2016: 53–54, 191, no. 24). Lorenz Rahmstorf (2005, 2011) has discussed such spools in detail and their present distribution shows that they are primarily attested in mature LM IIIB–C coastal settlements (Fig. 7). Because of the early date, LM IIIB, and number, the spools of Sissi represent the most surprising case. The two piles, each of ca 28 fired spools from the same room (Gaignerot-Driessen 2012: 73) may be suggestive of

the original presence of one or two looms. On average they are about 4cm high and weigh about 70 grams. At nearby Malia, at least three spool-shaped loom weights were found in Quartier Nu, and in surface layers of nearby Quartier Mu, at least four (Gaignerot-Driessen 2012: 73; Poursat *et al.* 2015: 229) and all seem to date to the late habitation in the area, which is also LM IIIB and probably well before its end. At Chania too, an isolated example of such a spool already occurs in a 14th century BC context, but they become more common in LM IIIB2 while most are 12th century or LM IIIC (Bruun-Lundgren *et al.* 2015: 199). At Ayia Triada, there is one example dated to LM I, another to LM IIIA (Militello *et al.* 2015: 209) and on the Mainland, at Thebes, there is also one spool already dated to LH IIIA2 while most are later (Alberti *et al.* 2015: 281). Recently, several spools have also been identified in a LM IIIB context at Samonas Apokoronou (Kanta 2020). Phaistos too has several spools but they only appear in LM IIIB2 (Militello 2014: 324, pls 22, 23, 31, 37), while on Cyprus, as e.g. at Kition (Smith *et al.* 2015: 340), their chronology should be equivalent to LM IIIC. On the basis of this evidence, however, it is difficult to reject the hypothesis that the tradition already started in LM IIIA2 and not only in LM IIIB2 (Ramstorf 2005: 146; Yasur-Landau 2010: 132).

As noted by Marie-Louise Nosch (2020: 593), these spools were ‘excellent weights for the warp-weighted loom’ and Ramstorf’s (2011) study already counted 57 Mediterranean sites in which they appear. It is worth repeating Nosch’s comments:

The appearance of spools may suggest the arrival of new people, with their own tool kits, coming from another region, where the warp-

weighted loom was also in use. This explanation should be considered in a gendered framework since women appear to be the chief producers of textiles, and the presence of spools suggests the presence of women among the newcomers. Mounting a loom, warping, and weaving take time, and the spools suggest these women are not simply passing by, but settled (Nosch 2020: 593–594).

It is also important to add that the tradition these women inaugurated continued afterwards, since spool-shaped weights on Crete are much more common in LM IIIC as, for example, at Smari (Despina Chatzi-Vallianou *pers. comm.*), Karphi, Phaistos, Chalasmenos, Petras (Metaxia Tsipopoulou *pers. comm.*), Thronos, Chamalevri and Palaikastro-Kastri (Ramstorf 2005: 149; Gaignerot-Driessen 2012: 73). Moreover, it cannot be excluded that more spools remain as yet unidentified since they are relatively uninspiring objects. We suspect a closer look at other Cretan sites occupied around the middle of the 13th century BC may reveal more of these simple objects (incidentally, they are absent from LM IIIB Gouves, Despina Chatzi-Vallianou *pers. comm.*). In addition, as observed at LM IIIB Phylakopi, recycled kylix feet could have been modified so as to serve as spools (Cherry & Davis 2007: 403). Finally, at Zambrone in southern Italy (Jung & Pacciarelli 2021), at LM IIIC Knossos (Warren 1983: 71, 73, fig. 58) and in the Near East (e.g. at Tweini, see Sauvage & Jans 2019: 40–41; also Yasur-Landau 2010: 132–134) unbaked spools have been preserved, which may imply that we have missed many of those originally in use.

Their early presence in three sites along the north coast—Chania, Malia, Sissi—may suggest that these

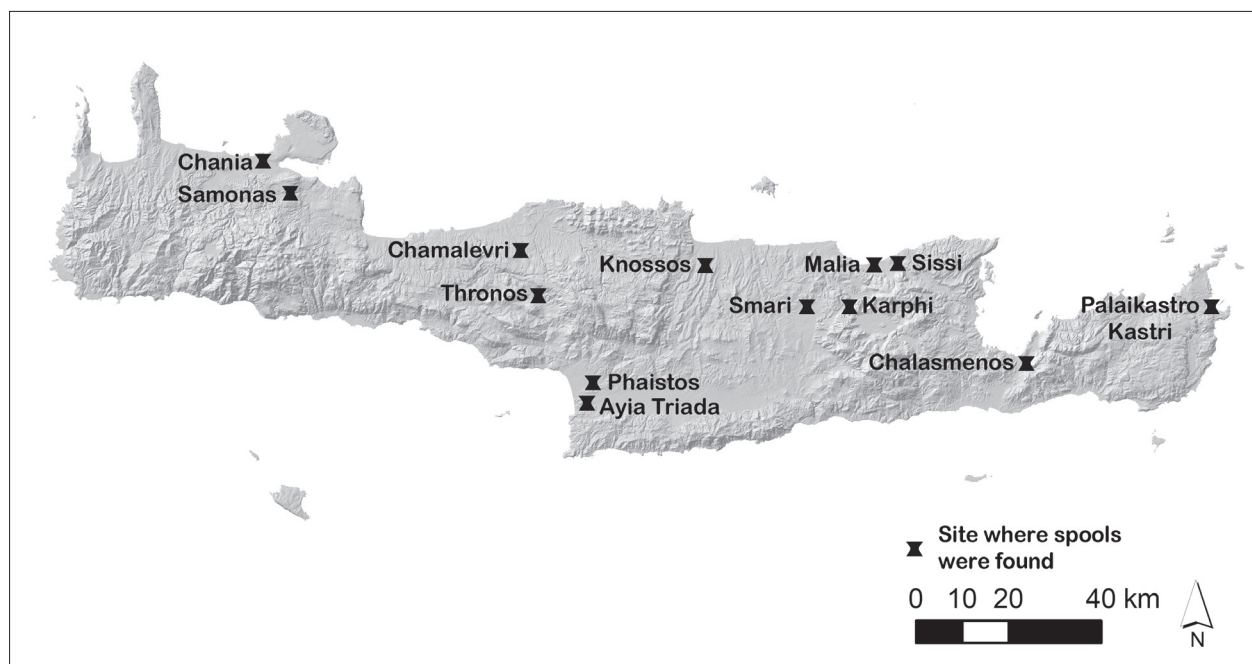


Figure 7. Map of Crete with LM III sites where spool-shaped loom weights have thus far been identified (by authors)

new populations (1) came from a single cultural tradition, (2) arrived at more or less the same time on the island, (3) most likely arrived from the north via the sea and (4) started a new tradition on arrival that was long-lasting. As such it recalls the 'Deep Change' identified in migratory movements by Assaf Yasur-Landau (2010: 14, 132, 267–270; 2011: 248–253; Gaignerot-Driessen 2016: 54). Although the origin of the spool-related weaving technique still remains problematic, it may be mentioned that clay spools, the so-called *rocchetti* or *bobines*, are attested in Italy during the Chalcolithic (sites of Maccarese, Colle Longo) and Early Bronze Age (Molina di Ledro). They become more common during the Late and Final Bronze Age (e.g. sites of Frattesina, Fossa 5, Stagno, Poggio del Molino, Scarceta, Sorgenti della Nova, Madonna degli Angeli in Tocca Causauria and Martinsicuro, Fonte Tasca di Archi) (Mistretta 2004; Di Fraia 2013).

Some of these Italian sites date to the late 13th century BC (already Rahmstorf 2005, 2011), others are 12th century BC or later. The fact is, however, that spools are not attested in Sardinia (see Melis 2014) or Sicily (Pietro Militello *pers. comm.*) and are still rare in southern Italy (Lo Porto 1963: 357, fig. 68.14–15; Rahmstorf 2011: 320), while they seem quite common in northern Italy (Po valley) as shown, for example, by the numerous examples found in phase 1 at the site of Villamarzana (Salzani & Consonni 2005). These probably date to the 12th or even 11th century BC but attest to a local tradition which may be much older. Indeed, two examples come from a Middle Bronze Age site near Maguzzano near the Garda Lake (Biagi & Fasani 1971: 44, pl. III.9–10). Even if, in a recent study by Tomaso Di Fraia (2013), spools in general are considered as indigenous developments in different areas, this seems difficult to accept and we think that they formed part of a larger movement of people and goods, which also included Naue II swords, such as the one found on Kastrokefala on Crete (Kanta & Kontopodi 2011), and razors, Peschiera daggers, fibulae and Italian spearpoints, as illustrated by examples from Knossos, the Dictaeon Cave, Mouliaia and elsewhere (Warren 1983: 71, figs 50–51; Hallager 1985; Jung & Mehofer 2013; Molloy 2016). These seem to us to suggest a north Italian influx during the second half of the 13th century BC. This was certainly not the only movement of people that occurred, since a case can also be made for a Sardinian connection with Cyprus (e.g. Bürge & Fischer 2020) and perhaps with Crete, at Sybrita (D'Agata *et al.* 2018), Kommos (Rutter 2017: 245, 270–271) and Chania (Hallager & Hallager 2011: 431; Jung 2018).

### The use of caves in LM IIIB2

But let us return to the second half of the 13th century BC and see what was happening on Crete. In fact, not much. The limited occupation as illustrated by the latest phases at Sissi and Malia is also what we

see at Chania, Phaistos, Ayia Triada, Kommos and Knossos, once major centres, and in a few other sites. Near the Stratigraphical Museum at Knossos, a gap in habitation occurs after LM IIIA2 (Warren 1983: 69) and the LM IIIC occupation is of an entirely different character (Warren 1983: 69–75), possibly including an apsidal building. Some sites will stop being occupied before the century is over, others continue somewhat into early LM IIIC but are then abandoned. The recently published volume *How Long is a Century? Late Minoan IIIB Pottery. Relative Chronology and Regional Differences* (Langohr 2017a) is clear about the development. One of the sites that seems to be typical for the late 13th century BC is the cave of Kalamafka in the Aposelemos valley (*nomos* of Heraklion). Difficult of access and well-hidden, the cave was definitely in use during the later half of the 13th century BC (Kanta & Kontopodi 2017). The Kalamafka cave may serve as a type fossil for many other ones that were at least visited during this particular period (e.g. Faure 1964; Platon 2013). Crete indeed has more than 3000 inventoried caves and many of these show evidence for human use even if there has been no recent exhaustive study. While such caves had been used for funerary and ritual practices in earlier times, their use during this particular period, roughly between 1250 and 1200 BC, can perhaps be explained as retreats or refuges during troubled times. This was already stressed by Paul Faure (1964: 59–65), who noticed how in Early Minoan I, LM IIIB and in Late Antique times—all troubled periods—caves throughout the island show such an increased use. We can easily add the Ottoman and Nazi occupation as two later periods of increased use (Faure 1964; Hutton & Horan 2017; Monteath 2018). Of the 39 caves to which Faure (1964: 59–64) assigned a function of shelter, 19 in particular were used during the advanced LM III period. Likewise, of the 13 west Cretan caves inventoried by Louis Godart and Yannis Tzedakis (1992), seven were used in LM IIIB2 (Platyvola, Perivola/Mamelouko, Lera, Koumarospilio, Arkouda, Melidoni, Sendoni). Moreover, Ilias Liakopoulos' (in press) recent exploration of the caves of Dafnes and Xanthos in the *nomos* of Chania also stressed that they were visited especially during this phase. People in LM IIIB2 were hence incrementally forced to look for hiding places that were difficult of access but still provided shelter and water. Here we solely refer to caves and not to hilltop settlements that in our opinion were not only founded in response to a danger. This, together with the absence of mature LM IIIB material from most except for a few of the largest settlements, is surprising.

The period 1250–1200 BC therefore constituted half a century during which the island seems to have been in turmoil. On the basis of the surviving settlement evidence (cf. Gaignerot-Driessen 2016: 141–144, 170–171), the coastal zones of the island to a large extent seem to have been abandoned and a clear settlement shift takes place. This can, we believe, only mean that,

apart from a potential partial depopulation, people had left the coast to establish new highland settlements such as Karfi, Vronda, Anavlochos, etc. at a moment in time that is considerably earlier than hitherto assumed, which is the end of LM IIIB or in the transitional period to LM IIIC (Nowicki 2018: 125). Future work, notably at Anavlochos (Gaignerot-Driessen *et al.* 2016), may succeed in identifying clearer traces of LM IIIB2 occupation in the mountains. Why people left the coasts and went to live in the mountains is another story but the traditional hypothesis—sea raids and pirate attacks (cf. Hitchcock & Maier 2016)—definitely is not the full answer (Gaignerot-Driessen 2016: 170–171). Among other reasons, climatic changes with an increased occurrence of malaria in coastal areas may, for instance, have played a considerable part in the processes (see e.g. Sallares *et al.* 2004; Langgut *et al.* 2013; Winegard 2019). Was it from this moment onward that malaria became endemic in coastal zones, as it still was when Evans started to excavate at Knossos?

Herodotos (7.169–171) tells us that when Daidalos escaped to Sikania (Sicily), the great king Minos, grandfather of Idomeneus, hunted him down with a large fleet but got himself murdered at the court of King Kokalos at Kamikos. The Cretans set out to revenge their king with only the Kydonians and Praisians staying behind. The siege failed and, on their return, the entire fleet was shipwrecked off the coast of southern Italy. As a result, Herodotus tells us, Crete was depopulated and men of various stock, but especially Hellenes, settled here. Three generations later, when the Cretans returned victorious from the Trojan War, they found the island afflicted by famine and plague. Again, it was depopulated and again new settlers, mainly Dorians, arrived. While archaeology, history, myths and legends are dangerous bed fellows, the tradition that major depopulations and in-migrations took place on the island seems to have a solid background and it is perhaps wise to take these into account.

But let us return to Knossos. The military power of the palace before its LM IIIA2 destruction was considerable, with many operational war chariots while others were in production (Driessen & Mouthuy 2022). The priority stationing of these chariots in the major satellite towns at Chania, Amnisos, *Setoija* and Phaistos (already Bennet 1990) suggests that they foremost served local authorities for peace keeping purposes and power display and were primarily meant to keep local populations under control. Many hypotheses have been proposed as to who was to blame for the destruction of the palace of Knossos. Some prefer a local uprising with regional centres striving for independence (e.g. Kanta 1980: 320; La Rosa 1997). Others recognise a punitive expedition by one or more mainland palace centres, trying to get rid of their major commercial competitor (Doxey 1987; Wiener 2016, in press). A third hypothesis, that another party

was involved, cannot be excluded. Since Knossos is only 5km from the coast and the harbour installations at Poros and Katsambas were also destroyed in LM IIIA2 (Rethemiotakis & Christakis 2022), an external raiding party remains a possibility (e.g. Hitchcock & Maier 2016, with references). But if not Mainlanders, who were they? We can only guess. The Aegean has a reputation of having been infested with buccaneers in Roman and more recent times and many of the Cycladic islands provided sufficient hidden ports to serve as bases of operations (Kanta 1980: 325; White 2017; for the ‘proletarians’ of the sea see Braudel 1996: 296–298; Broodbank 2013: 466). Moreover, from the time of Akhenaten onwards, around the middle of the 14th century BC, the *She/al/rdana* are mentioned as forming a threat and being incorporated as mercenaries in Egyptian armies (Weippert 2011: 210, n. 10). We do not know where these *She/al/rdana* came from but if they did have a link with the western Mediterranean, they must have passed Crete. With the island being at the centre of all Mediterranean maritime routes, any passing marauding force—*She/al/rdana* or other—would surely have been tempted to pay a short-lived visit with a long-lasting impression. Could it be that, of all Mediterranean centres, Knossos was the first to be attacked by a seaborne force of what are later known as the Sea Peoples? This evidently remains a mere hypothesis, but the presence of spoils in sites along the north coast, their chronology and the moment Knossos was destroyed gives perhaps some support to a hypothesis, which suggests that foreign population groups already started to move in the late 14th century BC. Whether this was a real migratory movement that accelerated during the 13th century BC remains to be seen.

### Toppling the domino

After the major LM IIIA2 destruction, the ruins of the palace at Knossos were patched up, simple earth floors were installed and there is evidence for continuing production and bulk storage, with many stirrup jars and double amphorae in specific areas of the palace (Popham 1964; Hallager 1977; Niemeier 1982; Paterson 2002). There was also at least one cult room, in the Shrine of the Double Axes (Gaignerot-Driessen 2014). Some Linear B administration continued but more than a limited intra-regional interest seems not to be evident (Driessen & Mouthuy 2022). Whether one should describe this use of the palace as a squatter occupation is a matter of opinion. There does not seem to be anything that suggests that the building in quality or attraction could still compete with the Mainland palace *megara*. Knossos pottery workshops no longer influence the rest of the island, this role being taken over by the Kydonia workshop (Hallager & Hallager 2011: 431). But the elimination of Knossos may well have been more serious than it has been regarded in the past. We would claim that the destruction of

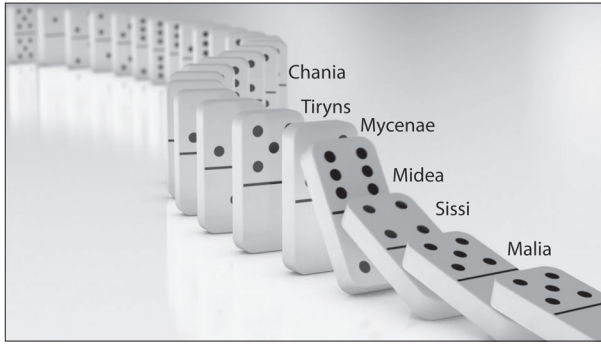


Figure 8. Conjectural sequence of events—dominoes falling one by one (by authors)

the palace should be regarded as a world-shocking event, comparable to the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution or 9/11. The disappearance, while opening the way for Chania to flourish and to establish its own independent ‘kingdom’ (Hallager & Hallager 2011: 269), was a serious blow to the palatial system in the Aegean and may have destabilised an order that had kept the Aegean relatively calm since the 16th century BC. Can we even argue that the massive military investment in fortification systems on the Mycenaean Mainland, which is basically a 13th century BC phenomenon, was first of all a reaction to the destruction of Knossos and a preparation for even more troubled times to come? At Mycenae, a start may have been made precisely at the moment of the destruction of the palace at Knossos when a first fortification wall (the west wall) was constructed in LH IIIA2. The gates and main walls date to LH IIIB, however (French 2010: 674–675; Wright 2020). At Tiryns, the non-Cyclopean walls date to the early LM IIIB period while those of the Middle Citadel and the proper Cyclopean walls were only constructed in the advanced LH IIIB period (Kilian 1988; Maran 2010). Gla and Thebes may have been fortified in early LH IIIB1 (Iakovidis 2001: 144; Dakouri-Hild 2010). Midea, too, was not fortified before the middle of the 13th century BC (LH IIIB1/2) and Athens even later (LH IIIB2/IIIC). Teichos Dymaion also dates to the 13th century BC (Kolonas 2009: 9). Moreover, as mentioned, and on present evidence, the earlier Minoanising palaces at Pylos and H. Vasileios, the first to be destroyed, were not fortified and this may reflect the rule, rather than the exception. It is remarkable that, with Knossos toppled and reduced to a minor player, a domino effect was set off, with a progressive and incremental collapse of the Bronze Age system as a consequence (Fig. 8).

## Acknowledgements

The authors want to thank the organisers, Peter M. Fischer and Teresa Bürge, for inviting one of us to the Göteborg workshop and Joachim Bretschneider, Reinhard Jung, Athanasia Kanta, Elina Kardamaki,

Pietro Militello, Dimitri Nakassis and Todd Whitelaw, as well as the anonymous reviewers, for valuable comments and references. We especially want to thank Elisa Dalla Longa for the reference to the Middle Bronze Age spools of Maguzzano, Jonas Danckers for help on Italian chronology and Jack Davis for sending a forthcoming paper on Pylian destructions.

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