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Megistos Kouros

Studies in Honour of Hugh Sackett

Edited by Jan Driessen & Carl Knappett

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Living in a *Palace-less* Place?

Reconsidering Bronze Age Palaikastro¹

Jan Driessen

Four times already, teams of the British School at Athens have descended upon Palaikastro intent on finding a palace; each time they were unsuccessful in this objective. And whereas it is much too early to bury the idea that no canonical ‘palace’ existed at the site – there is, after all, enough unexplored room left in this 20⁺ ha settlement to hide such a building and certain areas such as Block DD have barely been explored (*PK VII*: 210-215; *PK VIII*: 180) – we may consider, hypothetically, the possibility that Palaikastro may not have had one, which is what this paper attempts.

There is little doubt that court-centred civic buildings (Shaw & Shaw 1993: 186, n. 152), commonly known as ‘palaces’, were symptomatic for the civilisation that flourished on the island of Crete during the second millennium BCE. While there is agreement on the architectural definition of a ‘palace’ as a more or less north-south oriented, court-centred building with functionally differentiated wings and a major investment in elaboration and decoration, the label ‘palace’ remains abstract and a catch-all with discussions persisting on the function(s) of the building and the nature of the power wielded by its occupants – royal abode, administrative, economic, religious and/or ceremonial centre or seat of an aggregate of different, cross-cutting socio-political structures that were heterarchical. There is little doubt, however, that the investment in their elaboration and the longevity of their lay-out make it more than likely that these formal structures were essential for the proper functioning of society in both the Protopalatial and Neopalatial periods during which they clearly formed the main social arena in many large settlements (for a discussion on the term ‘palace’, see Soles 1991: 70-75; Shaw & Shaw 1993: 186; Driessen 2002; Schoep 2002; McEnroe 2010: 54, 89-90). The recent discovery of a court-centred building at Sissi (Driessen 2021b), even if rather rustic and not entirely corresponding in its details to the known complexes elsewhere, adds to the list of known court-centred buildings (Knossos, Malia, Phaistos, Zakros, Gournia, Galatas, Petras) and potential candidates (Kommos, Chania, Archanes, Pretoria, Monastiraki, Myrtos-Pyrgos). Its location, however, less than 4 km from the main court-centred building at Malia, provides new impetus for reconsidering the apparent absence of such a complex at Palaikastro.

*The Unknown City*²

Perhaps a little bit of history first. While the site had been recognised by Captain Spratt (1865: 201-205) and visited by Raulin (1869: 170), Halbherr (1891: 201, 241; 1892: 152, 214), Evans (1896; Brown 2001: 125, 264, 350) and Xanthoudides (1900) before and although originally coveted by W. Dörpfeld (Gill 2002: 522-523), a team led by Robert C. Bosanquet of the British School at Athens started excavation at Roussolakkos in April 1902 (*PK I*; also Bosanquet 1902; Bosanquet & Tod 1901/02). The expedition was in fact instigated by the discovery the year before of the finely painted larnax with griffins by J.H. Marshall (Bosanquet 1900/01: 341; Gill 2000: 532) and Bosanquet may have been especially interested in finding the temple to which the departing warrior *sima*

1 Hugh Sackett was larger than life, an amazing and quintessential archaeologist and perhaps one of the few to have excavated Minoan, Iron Age, Classical Greek, Hellenistic and Roman antiquities and this in many parts of the Hellenic world. I am proud to have been a member of the Palaikastro team he directed for many years since May 1983. I want to thank Tim Cunningham for critically commenting upon an earlier version of this paper, as delivered at the Chicago Gold Medal Session in Hugh’s honour, as well as Ilaria Caloi, Quentin Letesson, Pietro Militello, Todd Whitelaw, Sandy MacGillivray and Carl Knappett for their input, and Amalia Kakissis of the BSA for the original colour plans. Ideally, I would have wished to consult the notebooks on the first Palaikastro excavations kept at the British School at Athens but public health conditions prevented this. Part of this research took place within the project ARC 20/25-106 Talos.

2 This is how Bosanquet called the site at Palaikastro in a letter to T. Hodgkin on May 30, 1902, after the first campaign (Bosanquet 1938: 133). It is not clear whether E. Destelle, head of the French peacekeeping forces in Siteia between 1897 and 1904, knew of the ruins at Palaikastro. He did visit Itanos, however, and entertained Arthur Evans on April 15, 1898 (see <http://site.destelle.free.fr/colonel/Crete%201898/index.html>).

fragments recovered several years earlier by Halbherr belonged (Bosanquet 1939/40: 64; *PKU II*: 40; Whitley 2006: 60; Gaignerot 2011).

In the first campaign of 1902, Bosanquet, accompanied by the BSA architect Heaton Comyn (1877-1933), excavated several tombs as well as the house on the promontory and Block β within the townsite proper (figs 1 & 2). In a brief report, Bosanquet (1902: 170) suggested that the site “was one of the principal centres, perhaps the capital, of Eastern Crete”. Nowhere is it stated, however, that the work at Palaikastro was instigated with the specific intention to find a(nother) palace³.

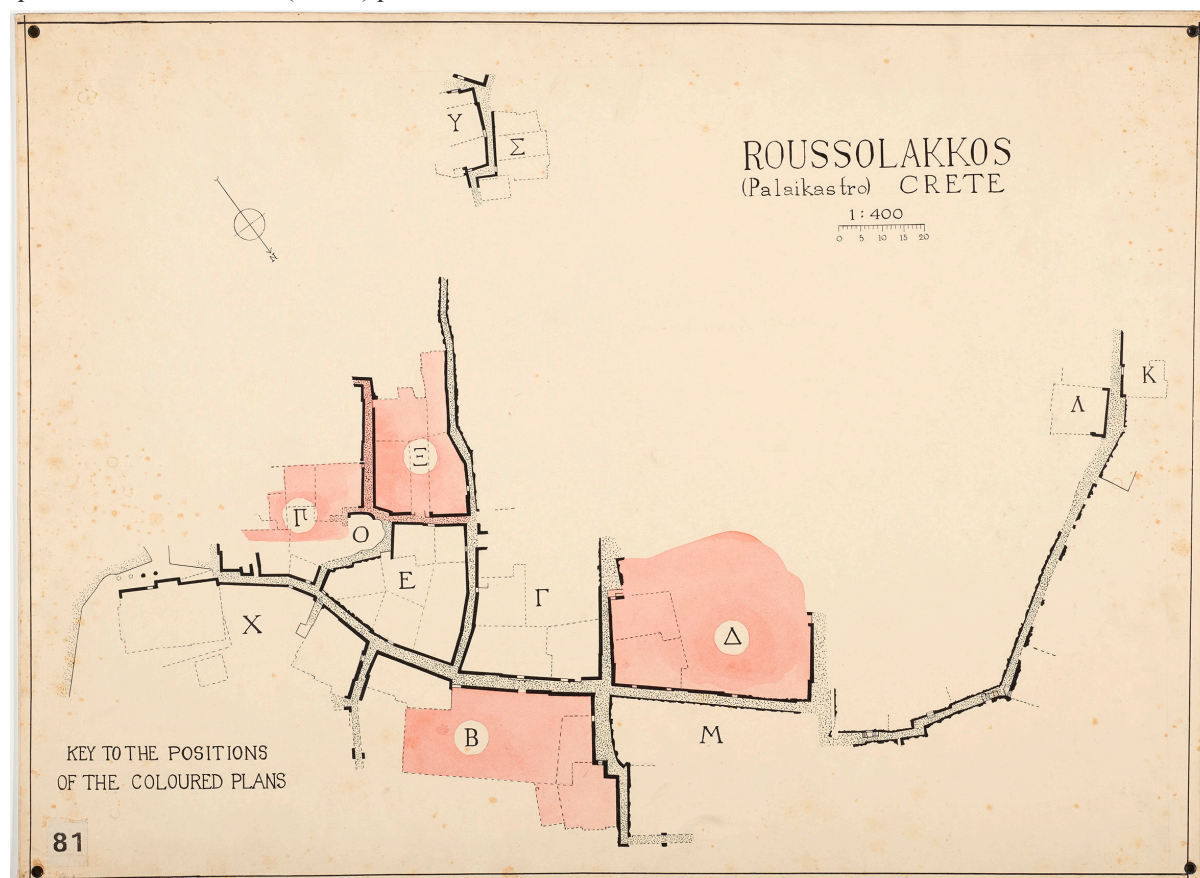


FIG. 1 ORIGINAL COLOUR OUTLINE PLAN OF REMAINS AT PALAIKASTRO, PROBABLY BY H. COMYN (©BSA, USED WITH PERMISSION)⁴

A larger team returned and resumed work on March 23, 1903 (*PK II*), first at Kouremenos and later in the townsite, the ossuaries and the peak sanctuary on Petsophas, the latter excavated by J.L. Myres⁵. It is during this season that large parts of Block δ were cleared for the first time by Richard M. Dawkins and its architecture, described as ‘the finest yet found’, commented upon (*PK II*: 292) (figs 3, 4 & 5). The first time we read about a potential palace at Palaikastro is in a brief remark made by the director of the School, R.C. Bosanquet, in the Annual Meeting of the Subscribers of the *Annual of the British School* in 1903:

³ As assumed in Boyd *et al.* 2006: 89. I could not find evidence for it in Bosanquet 1938 either.

⁴ In 1936, the School celebrated its fiftieth anniversary (1886-1936) with a large public exhibition at Burlington House at the Royal Academy of Arts in London for which a special display was prepared, including water colour plans of its excavations (some by Emile Gilliéron and Piet de Jong). Here too were shown original colour plans made by Heaton Comyn during his stay at Palaikastro in 1902 and 1906. I sincerely thank T. Whitelaw for having drawn my attention to these and to Amalia Kakissis, the BSA’s archivist, for making these available. They are here reproduced courtesy of the BSA.

⁵ A picture in the BSA archives (BSA SPHS 01/4055.8193) shows a group photograph with about 70 workmen (as mentioned in *PK IV*: 258) but in 1906, there were only about 10 (*PK V*: 1).

“In block Delta, the character and dimensions of the walls suggested that here had been a mansion if not a palace, and from this block came the most beautiful of the pottery finds, notably one which resembles the fine vase with its beautiful ‘marine’ designs found by Mr. Hogarth at Zakro” (Annual Meeting of Subscribers, BSA 9, 1902-1903, 393).

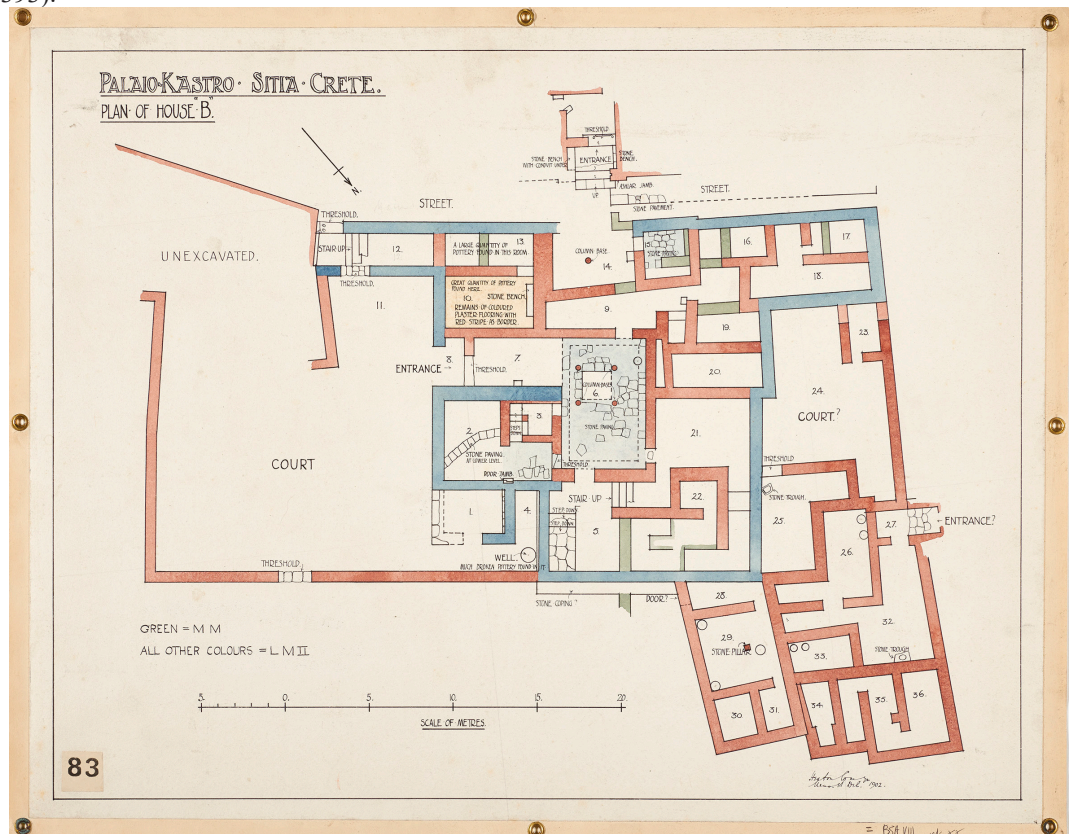


FIG. 2 ORIGINAL COLOUR STATE PLAN OF BLOCK B AT PALAIKASTRO BY H. COMYN, 1902 (©BSA, USED WITH PERMISSION)



FIG. 3 ASHLAR FAÇADE OF BLOCK Δ SEEN FROM THE NORTH. PHOTO BY J.L. MYRES IN 1903 (USED WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD)

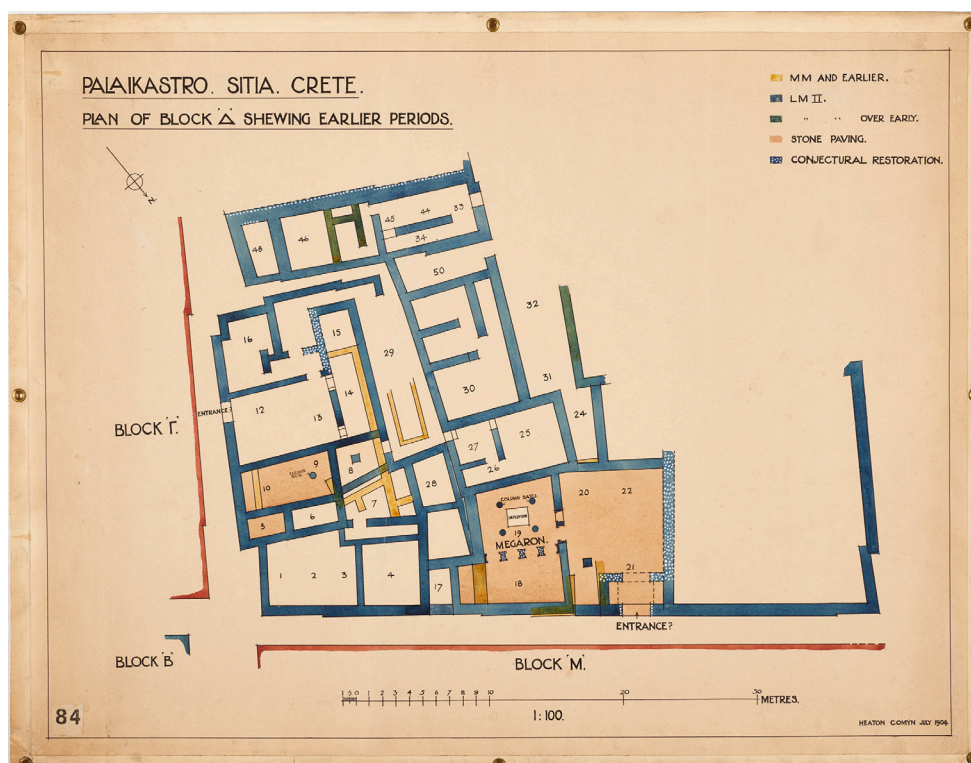


FIG. 4 ORIGINAL COLOUR STATE PLAN OF THE EARLY PERIOD IN BLOCK Δ BY H. COMYN, 1904 (©BSA, USED WITH PERMISSION)

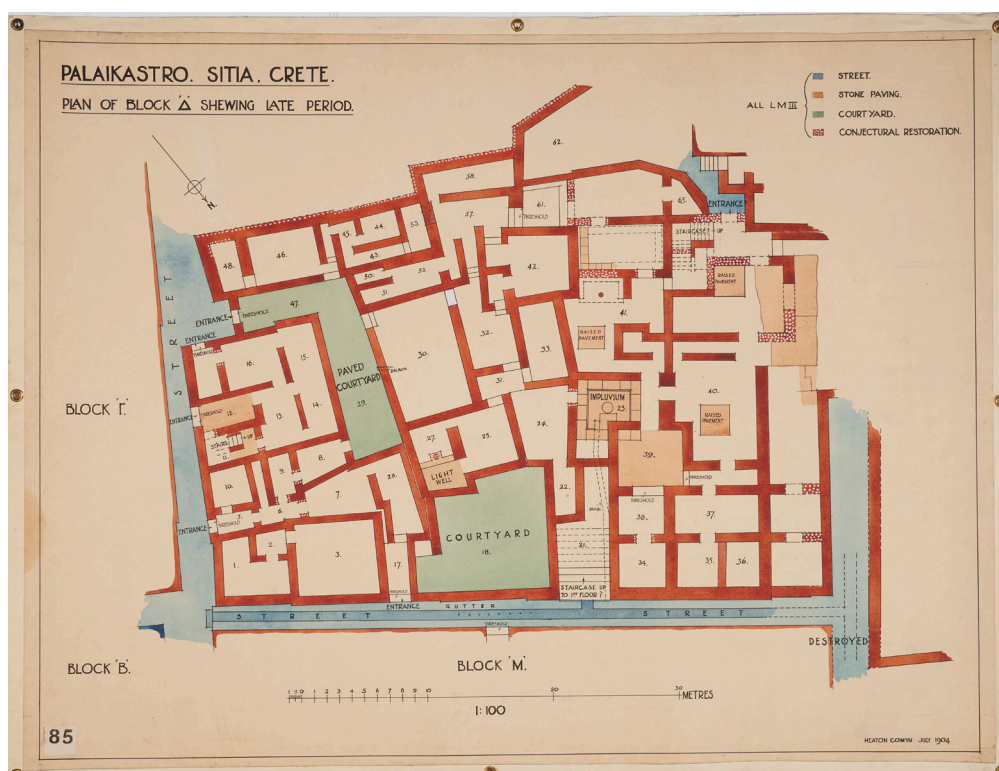


FIG. 5 ORIGINAL COLOUR STATE PLAN OF THE LATE PERIOD IN BLOCK Δ BY H. COMYN, 1904 (©BSA, USED WITH PERMISSION)

When the archaeologists returned in 1904, now under the direction of R.M. Dawkins, tombs on the slopes of Kastri and the promontory were explored, tests were made within the exposed town and new areas were excavated (*PK III*), including Blocks π and ξ (**fig. 6**)⁶. It is on occasion of the tests made in Block δ during which a Late Minoan IIIA shrine was discovered and the west wall of the block was found, that Dawkins explicitly refers to Block δ as the Palace:

“The western limit of the block [Delta] was found to be a street on which the Palace wall abutted. The southern limit is not yet cleared up. The street that runs west from Street c-d has been traced no further than square 6 F; west of this, that is in square 6 E, the Palace abuts immediately on houses of a much earlier date” (*PK III*: 216).

Further on in the report, Dawkins repeats this by calling Block δ ‘the great Palace’ (*PK III*: 216). But he also explicitly remarks on its chronology:

“Unlike Block β , however, its desertion was not final, and it was rebuilt on a magnificent scale. This later building is the Palace as we now have it” (*PK III*: 217).

Dawkins’ further description leaves no doubt that he assumed that this building dated to Late Minoan IIIA, the same date as the pottery deposit found in Block γ . Moreover, the outline plan published with the report repeats the palace label and, likewise, in the Annual Meeting of the Subscribers of the same year (1904), the identification of Block δ as the palace is repeated:

“The programme was to complete the excavation of Block Δ , to investigate the temple-area, and to search for a possible palace on the two knolls that rise above the town. Of these three the last was the first to be attempted; though no palace was found, two houses on the North-West hill were of better character than the others, which for the most part were small and much rebuilt. From this tract came two ivory figurines, a bronze ewer, and a painted bath of larnax form. Block Δ proved to contain a Late Minoan palace or Government house” (Annual Meeting of Subscribers, *BSA* 10 (1903/1904), 243-251).

Judging from the fact that the quest for finding a real palace continued and concentrated on two small hills above the town (σ & υ), it seems that the hypothesis seeing Block δ as the palace may not have carried full agreement. In a letter to his wife, dated May 25, 1904, Bosanquet states: “on the hill, where Hogarth and others thought we must find the Palace, we have dug and found, as I knew we should (having made trial pits long ago) only poor houses; H. [Hogarth] was very keen about it, but I rather grudged the time it cost” (Bosanquet 1938: 148).

Dawkins, Bosanquet and their team⁷ returned to the site on March 29th, 1905 and, besides working at Magasa, Sarandari, Kephallaki and on the slopes of Kastri, they further explored the townsite, concentrating on Block χ , the area of the later ‘temple’ (*PK IV*). Within the report, there is no further mention of Block δ nor does the plan that accompanies the report retain the palace label but we can still read that the Temple of Dictaeon Zeus was not placed on the “site of the prehistoric palace but on an artificially levelled platform” above Block χ (*PK IV*: 298).

Dawkins’ final season – it lasted only eight days – in 1906 concentrated on burial evidence in some surrounding sites (*PK V*) while Bosanquet returned for a brief period to Palaikastro in April 1908 but no official report was published on this visit. He excavated a tomb near Kastri and cleaned the megaron of House γ , which revealed that it also had four column bases, forming a Palaikastro Hall (Bosanquet 1938: 173; Driessen 1999). He was disappointed since “some of our young workmen have been helping themselves recklessly to stones from the excavations, ruining some of the characteristic features of our best Minoan houses in order to build houses cheaply for themselves” (Bosanquet 1938: 173, Letter to his wife dated 24th of April, 1908). I could not find evidence that he ever returned to the site afterwards. Although not mentioned, it is very likely that, following this visit and the legal action taken on the perpetrators, some of the remains were covered up to prevent further depredation.

In 1928, John Pendlebury made his first trip to East Crete, also visiting Palaikastro. In the account of this visit, published posthumously, he mentions: “Most of the ruins have been covered over again with earth, not so much to preserve them as not to subtract from the cultivable area. What is left consists of the main street with palace on one side and the ‘Temple Site’, Block X on the other, with a few subordinate blocks. The site is not impressive... without a plan, with which we had luckily provided ourselves, the place would have been unintelligible” (Pendlebury 1948: 36-37).

⁶ There is also a plan in the digital collection of the BSA (BSA SPHS 01/0228.1451), unfortunately in a bad state, that shows the extent of the excavations during 1903.

⁷ It also included C.H. Hawes, G. Dickins, W.A. Kirkwood as well as Vaclav Sejk, a Czech architect who also worked at Lato, Gournia, Sparta and Troy.



FIG. 6 ORIGINAL COLOUR STATE PLAN OF BLOCKS Π AND Ξ BY H. COMYN, 1904 (©BSA, USED WITH PERMISSION)

Most of the standing remains would be violently destroyed by an Italian commander, Luigi Borsari, during WW II (Driessen forthcoming). This said, it remains unclear whether the Italians destroyed more than the area that was patched up in the 1960s (see below). If their depredation was limited to the area left open seen by Pendlebury, the larger part of the site, which seems to have been buried, may have remained undamaged.

From the beginning, two main chronological phases were recognised within the architectural remains of Block δ (figs 4 & 5) and the late phase was unambiguously said to be Late Minoan IIIA, even if many Late Minoan IB objects were found. Hence, when Bosanquet published the hymn to Zeus in the *Annual* of 1908/9, he notes that:

“In the Third Late Minoan period, after the destruction of the palaces at Knossos, Phaistos, and Gournia, the town at Palaikastro became what it had not been before, the seat of a ruling prince. Here and nowhere else in Crete, so far as we know at present, a palace of the Cretan type was built anew after the general disaster” (Bosanquet 1908/09: 351)⁸.

So, if anything, the remains in Block δ were considered as a ‘Mycenaean’ and not a ‘Minoan’ central building. The same can be read in the publication of the unpublished objects in 1923:

“A new Palace (Block δ) was built on more ambitious lines than the house which preceded it, a significant fact which suggests that Palaikastro was now the capital of an independent principality” (PKU: 74, repeated at p. 75, 76, 86).

⁸ Moreover, captions of photographs kept in the BSA digital collections also read ‘Palaikastro ; entrance of later palace & later megaron into Delta’ (BSA SPSH 01/2806.7988)

If correctly understood it suggests that Bosanquet at least was of the opinion that no palace was built in Palaikastro until the period after LM IB even if the plan published in *PKU* does not repeat the identification of Block δ as ‘palace’. Although no specific claim was made that the building found was similar to the palaces then known at Knossos and Phaistos, the mention of a ‘palace of the Cretan type’ seems to suggest the opposite. It could potentially only have applied to the extent and quality of construction.

Later explorations

So, when in 1961 Nikolaos Platon resumed excavations at Zakros, also originally explored by the British School (Hogarth 1900/01), and discovered a palace here the year after, pressure to re-activate work at Palaikastro by the BSA led to a new campaign in 1962-63, under the direction of Hugh Sackett and Mervyn Popham. Both had, by then, considerable experience, as did several of their team members. While the specific aim was to conduct a series of stratigraphic tests, their report also explicitly stated:

“Lastly, there was, and there still remains, the possibility that a main building of a more convincingly palatial character than any previously found lies somewhere near the excavated town on the extensive stretch of coastal plain between Petsofas and Kastri” (PK VI: 249-250)⁹.

During these campaigns (*PK VI, VII*), important work was done on Kastri and a complete LM IB House, N, was excavated. Tests were made in several outlying areas but none yielded evidence of a ‘main building of a more convincingly palatial character’.

Twenty years later, in 1983, the British School again returned to the site and this time L.H. Sackett teamed up with J.A. MacGillivray for an archaeological and geophysical survey (*PK Survey*), in which I had the good fortune to participate. This work had promising results, in particular suggesting that the town extended considerably to the north (*PK Survey*: 157). It led, three years later, to a third intensive campaign of excavations, again with the aim clearly stated at the outset:

“The principal reasons for starting new excavations at Palaikastro are to try to locate the central or administrative centre, if such existed on the site, and while doing so to gather evidence for the diet and local environmental conditions” (PK 1986: 135; cf. PK Building I: xxv: “where was Palaikastro’s palace?”).

When we came upon Building 1 during the first excavation season, the quality of its construction and its northeast/southwest orientation immediately gave high hopes, leading to some fanciful reconstruction doodles in the architect’s notebook¹⁰, and to the concluding remarks in the BSA report:

“Building 1, to judge from its foundations, was an important structure meant to be viewed from all sides. Its foundations are the most substantial of any building at Roussolakkos. Its importance may also be reflected in the construction of a building that in many ways conforms to the definition of a cult place on top of it a few generations later. Whether or not Building 1 can be classed as ‘public’ remains to be shown by further excavations on this most promising site” (PK 1986: 154)¹¹.

These hopes were dashed early on during the second season of 1987 when the south façade, the street and differently oriented and constructed buildings were found of a similar size as Building 1 (*PK 1987*: 266, 268, now also *PK Building I*). Luckily, the discovery during this season of a chryselephantine statue somewhat mitigated the disappointment (*PK Kouros*) but the remarkable architecture of Building 1 still suggested that it was a “public building, constructed on a grander scale than any other building yet found at Palaikastro, and one which played some role in the religious life of the community” (*PK 1987*: 268; *PK Building I*: 2, 437-438).

The next decade, the hope of finding a palace of Palaikastro was only maintained in archaeologists’ songs and *mantinades* – locating it ‘somewhere over the rainbow’ or ‘in the shadows of Kastri’ (cf. Cunningham 2007: 109).

In 2001, Boyd, Whitbread and MacGillivray conducted a new geophysical survey of more than 20,000 m², concentrating in part on the southeast area – the real *Roussolakkos* – which had yielded zero sherds during the 1983 survey despite its proximity both to the town site and to Block χ. One of the zones surveyed for resistivity and with

⁹ Another reference in *PK VI* (268: note 47) to an assumed palace in Block χ seems erroneous...At least I did not find any evidence for a claim made by the original excavators.

¹⁰ See J.A. MacGillivray’s contribution to this volume.

¹¹ Incidentally, originally, we had played with the idea to call this block Ω.

GPR showed a rectangular shape (anomaly 4A) of 26 by 19 m and another larger one, devoid of constructions, in anomaly 4C (Boyd *et al.* 2006: 110, 127). Taken together, these alignments were interpreted as suggestive for the presence of a structure of which the size, orientation and location were considered as “*similar to those of the palaces at Kato Zakros, Phaistos, and Knossos*” and the hypothesis was proposed that there could have been a canonical palace here (Boyd *et al.* 2006: 133-134; also MacGillivray & Sackett 2010: 576).

Partly based on these results, a new project under direction of C. Knappett, A. Livarda and N. Momigliano was launched in 2011, again with the specific intention to find a palace as is clear from the project’s title ‘The Palace and Landscape at Palaikastro Project’ (PALAP). Focussing on the area where the 2001 survey had taken place and backed up by more geophysical exploration, excavations started in 2013 (Knappett 2013; Knappett *et al.* 2015: 549). Thus far, as reported (Knappett *et al.* 2015), these tests have been successful in revealing substantial evidence for LM I and LM III occupation in the area (and this despite the earlier noted absence of surface material) but have not found remains that could potentially be assigned to belong to what we consider a canonical palace and the aim of the project has therefore switched to a better understanding of how town and landscape related during the Bronze Age (Cañellas-Boltà *et al.* 2018; Orengo & Knappett 2018: 481; Kulick 2019).

In an online public lecture dated October 12, 2015, C. Knappett, “Urbanization in Minoan Crete: A Palace at Palaikastro?”¹² notes the variability in date and form of palatial buildings and asks whether a town as complex and large as Palaikastro must have had a palace? (@12:54). He concludes: “*either we find a palace or get it out of our system!*”. Likewise, “*it is unclear whether a palace remains to be found at Palaikastro or whether this site had a nonpalatial social organization*” (Orengo & Knappett 2018: 480).

***The Power from Below*¹³? (fig. 7)**

“One had thought that the tyrants of Knossos and Phaistos might have ruled a nation of serfs, and that there would be no transition from their sumptuous palaces to mere mud huts. But the number and refinement of these houses at P.K. shows that there must have been a considerable upper class” (Bosanquet 1938: 134 – letter of May 30, 1902, to T. Hodgkin).

Our habitual way of depersonalizing power structures – Knossos, Palaikastro *etc.* – with toponyms given agency is an easy way out, side-stepping issues of actual control and management authorities (Driessen 2021b). If interpretative progress is to be made, however, the discussion may be served by distinguishing, on the one hand, the potential presence of a (central) authority and, on the other hand, the architectural form in which this potential (central) authority may have resided. Authority here is considered as any form of permanent or non-permanent leadership, usually consisting of community leaders who are “individuals who maintain disproportionate influence over group decision-making” (Garfield *et al.* 2020: 4).

Judging on the basis of anthropological parallels (*e.g.* Moore 1996; Arkush & Ikehara 2019), some kind of authority at Palaikastro must have existed, a conclusion based on the quality, axiality and maintenance of the street system, which, as shown by the tests in the Main Street, may already have existed from the Middle Minoan IIB period onwards (PK 1994/1996: 264). Cunningham (2001: 83) too has written that there must somewhere be a central building (note his use of this term and not that of ‘palace’) at Palaikastro because of a “*lack of public open space suitable for group interaction in the present town, a lack of storage facilities beyond those necessary for individual households (e.g. for trade goods, as an economic basis for public works, as sufficient for public feasting)*” and the absence of one or more buildings, which could represent the authority or administration necessary to run such a sizeable town, as one would expect. He is certainly right if we look for example at Middle Minoan Malia (now Devolder & Caloi 2020) where public buildings of all sorts existed outside the palace and these are clearly a sign for a fully functioning state apparatus even if the palace itself may largely have had a ceremonial function (Schoep 2002: 113). Palaikastro is, evidently, not the only Minoan settlement that did not yet yield a canonical palace despite being extensively explored. Mochlos, Tyliisos and Pseira, for example, lack such a building and, as far as we can judge, on Mochlos and Pseira there are no sufficiently large flat areas available

¹² Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5nDrdCdpTc&feature=youtu.be&a>.

¹³ See Thurston & Fernandez-Götz 2021.

that could have housed a canonical palace. For both settlements, alternative structures have been suggested that would have functioned as the central building of the site: Building B.2 on Mochlos (Soles & Davaras 1996) and the Plateia Building BS/BV on Pseira (Floyd 1999). More convincing central public structures, not following the formal characteristics of a Minoan palace, do exist in several other settlements such as at Myrtos-Pyrgos, Hagia Triada and even Gournia, but in each case, spacious courtyards accompany these public structures.



FIG. 7 ANALYTICAL PLAN OF THE 1902-2003 EXCAVATIONS AT PALAIKASTRO (COURTESY Q. LETESSON)

It has been observed that the presence of large town blocks and a particular architectural code distinguishes the settlement at Roussolakkos from other Minoan settlements (also Cunningham 2007). This was the basis for a hypothesis proposed earlier (MacGillivray & Driessen 1990), which argued for the existence of what we would now call a more heterarchical societal structure. The hypothesis was built on the rather even, almost homogeneous, distribution throughout the Neopalatial town of both prestige objects – bronze vases and weapons, ivories, frescoes and administrative items – as well as the equitable diffusion of special architectural characteristics – ashlar, lustral basins, Palaikastro halls and specially cut door jamb bases. All features co-exist in the centre close to the palace in other Minoan towns while, at Palaikastro, they are spread also towards the outside, as again illustrated by the recent excavations (Knappett *et al.* 2015). The town block organization with, in several cases, one main residential

structure and a series of smaller dependent and less rich structures, in our view suggested that each of the main blocks housed something like a clan or extended family, perhaps an intergenerational group known in anthropological literature as a *House* (Driessen 2010; Relaki & Driessen 2021a). The overall distribution of wealth throughout the settlement would then also imply a community in which status differences existed within the *Houses* but in which inter-group differences were concealed and sublimated as part of an ideology that stressed the collective rather than the individual, and cohesion rather than distinctness, as noted by Cunningham (2007: 107, 109).

Certain other elements are more difficult to explain. Whatever the type of government one assumes, one would have liked to have come across a central storage facility that could be called upon to conduct public works and its absence is difficult to ignore. Likewise, not specifically linked to the type of government, is the existence of an administration to monitor the incoming and outgoing of commodities that were needed to keep the public sector running. There are signs of literacy at Palaikastro, and although widespread, they are limited and *House*-related, as are the sealstones (but these are surprisingly few). Only in the town's peak sanctuary on Petsophas is there a substantial number of figurines and Linear A inscribed libation tables but these too may represent gifts from different groups rather than collective or individual offerings.

I can think of two final arguments in favour of the heterarchical structure here advocated. One is the presence of at least two discrete habitation cores during the Early Bronze Age, one on Kastri and one, of a very monumental nature, beneath Block χ (MacGillivray & Driessen 1990; *PK VIII*: 164). These cores and the existence of *different* rather than a single Prepalatial cemetery with plots at *Patema*, Kastri, *Tou Galeti i Kephala* and elsewhere (Legarra Herrero 2014: 287-290, fig. 109) may already announce the co-habitation of different groups of which the descendants would later occupy the distinct town blocks. And finally, the fact that, after the LM IB destruction, the Late Minoan IIIA settlement would be much more robust and with a functioning street system that is absent elsewhere. Can this perhaps also be related to the fact that local groups more easily restructured and showed greater resilience than in areas where there were canonical palaces? In a sense, it would imply that even in the Neopalatial period, the inhabitants of Palaikastro found a way to deal with communal affairs without the existence of an independent, imposed central authority. Can we hypothesise the existence of an authority, made up by representatives of local groups, a body that did not meet in a central building, or the existence of a non-permanent or rotating type of leadership?

Whenever power is shared rather than hierarchically centralised, special meeting places are constructed to negotiate cooperation and the implementation of authority (most recently Stanish 2017). *Sharing power* implies a degree of equality and negotiation and spatially this should be recognisable via specific types of access systems and circulation patterns. It would also be materialised through the creation of specially equipped rooms with seats or benches that allow participants a recognised participation and even an equality or parity within group decision-making. Later Archaic Greek cities can be invoked as a parallel. Although the *polis*-system was widespread, some cities had kings or tyrants, others an oligarchic type of government and only a few could be called democratic. All, however, shared a similar architectural idiom or rather the absence of one till the Athenians decided to construct the Old Bouleuterion (Paga 2017). Likewise, while the *prytaneion* is generally considered as the main governmental structure, very few buildings exist of which such an identification is commonly agreed (Miller 1978 accepted only buildings at Lato, Delos and Olympia), even if their presence is epigraphically more widespread. Moreover, the secure examples each differ considerably in plan and the definition of a generic type seems only possible considering its functions – dining, religious (through the flame of the hearth), archives, law court, and hosting guests. These did not require many special architectural features apart from being multi-roomed, possessing a courtyard, a kitchen, benches and a hearth. It was, however, located next to the agora (Miller 1978: 36-37). Hence, despite the remarkable formal resemblances between the palaces on Crete, it would be unwise to expect governmental buildings at such an early date to adhere to a *single* generic form. This said, while seats or benches were undoubtedly mostly in wood or other perishable materials, stone benches do form an important characteristic of many Minoan public or semi-public buildings. These were treated in detail by Kopaka (1984). Occasionally these benches are decorated with triglyphs, as at Knossos, Hagia Triada, Phaistos, Nirou and Myrtos-Pyrgos, stressing their special character (Shaw 2009: 125, n. 769). Permanent stone benches, providing seating for at least three or four individuals, can be found all over the palace at Knossos and within the surrounding buildings but also within the monumental complexes or houses at Malia (Za), Phaistos, Hagia Triada, Archanes (room 10), Myrtos-Pyrgos, Nirou Chani, Galatas, Tylissos, and Zakros. In some cases, however, longer benches line two or more

walls of larger rooms, implying a considerable number of participants. Assuming about 0.60 m a person, each of these rooms could provide seating space for at least a dozen people. That these rooms fulfilled a special purpose seems evident¹⁴. The Throne Room at Knossos and its antechamber each allowed about 20 seated individuals (Galanakis *et al.* 2017: 85). The Hypostyle Crypt at Malia could seat at least 30 (*cf.* Shaw 2011: 154-158) and Building L at Phaistos, called a *club house* by Militello (2012: 246, 265; Baldacci 2017: 20, 44, 55), about 25 to 30 persons. The Neopalatial palace at Phaistos had four rooms with benches alongside two of the sides (rooms 22, 23, 50, 53), each capable of seating 15 persons, but its Protopalatial predecessor, even if only partially preserved, comprised several rooms equipped with benches (*e.g.* III, X, XII, XIII, XVIII, XXIX, L, LIII, LV, LVII, LIX, LX) (*cf.* Baldacci 2011; Caloi 2017). Room 4 of the *Villa Reale* at Hagia Triada – arguably the most important room of the complex – was also provided with benches on three of its sides. It is these multi-bench halls, which made A. Mosso (1908: 161) suggest some kind of ‘prehistoric socialism’ and Carinci (2016) has suggested similar lines of approach in interpreting the complexes at Phaistos and Hagia Triada as being used by different groups of users. At Sissi too, room 6.17, the room in the northwest corner of the Central Court and hence located in the same position as the Loggia at Malia and the Throne Room at Knossos, had, although quite small, also benches against two of its walls; moreover, a 6-m long bench lines the north side of the Central Court (Driessen 2021a). At Palaikastro, a fine bench stood beneath the portico facing the court of Block χ (fig. 8) and the large room 4 in Neopalatial Building 3 had fixed benches along two of its walls. One may assume, however, that habitually such benches would have been in wood and many a large room would have contained such furniture (*e.g.* Muhly 1996).



FIG. 8 A-B THE STEPPED PORTICO IN FRONT OF BLOCK χ . UNPUBLISHED PHOTOGRAPHS (BSA SPHS 01/4899.6018 AND BSA SPHS 01/4904.6024) IN THE BSA DIGITAL COLLECTION (©BSA, USED WITH PERMISSION)

If we assume House or Clan representatives to have formed something of a social and political elite at Palaikastro, collectively or successively representing the authority of the town, very much like the later *kosmoi* of the archaic Cretan city-states, is it perhaps not really necessary to assume that they had a central building at

¹⁴ In a paper presented at the Australasian Mediterranean Archaeology Community (MAARC) Conference, University of Melbourne, 28-30 January 2021, L. Hitchcock has been exploring the concept of ‘Deep State’, a society governed by a bureaucratic class, in the context of Minoan Crete. S. Heslop, in his 2019 MA dissertation at the University of Newcastle, also wonders whether society was organized heterarchically or hierarchically at Neopalatial Palaikastro. Both texts are available on www.academia.edu.

their disposition where authority and government resided. There are ample anthropological examples of highly stratified societies without permanent leadership (Yi 2017). Community leaders may have assembled in private or houses that were semi-public, perhaps rotating and being entertained consecutively. The Palaikastro Halls, for example, could have served as such meeting places, providing ample space for the meeting of two dozen people as delegates of the different *Houses*. Letesson (2009, also Letesson & Driessen 2008) has stressed that the Neopalatial town of Palaikastro is unusual in preserving the genotypical form of spatial configuration much more than other Neopalatial towns, with a very strong pole of convergence, a ground floor area accessible both from the inside and the outside via different trajectories, some formal and direct, some less so. Such poles are ideal for hosting guests or peers. Cunningham and Knappett seem to have been thinking along these lines in their publication of Block μ (Knappett & Cunningham 2012). The specific palatial architectural features introduced in this last building in MM III, including frescoes, a *mosaiko* paving in schist, a stone paved propylon and stoa, a *polythyron* with Γ - and T-shaped serpentinite doorjamb bases, a 7.5 by 10.5 m court with limestone column bases and perhaps even a lustral basin, as well as the likely presence of a feasting deposit, all make it a good candidate for such a semi-public or semi-official building, conveniently located in the heart of the town. Councillors, elders or *House* representatives could have met here and also performed certain ceremonial functions. The court within Block μ is certainly not large enough for gatherings of larger crowds but the nearby enclosed court (fig. 2) in Block β , for example, which could potentially have measured almost 30 by 30 m¹⁵, would have been larger than the central court of the palace at Zakros. The stepped portico in front of Block χ could also have opened up to an open area at least 20 m wide but perhaps not very deep (fig. 8). Open areas for more limited assemblies may also have existed at some stage east of Building 1, on the *plateia* between Buildings 1, 3, 4 and 5, which was originally larger, and within Block μ , after its LM IA abandonment. The fact that Block μ became a public space afterwards may perhaps imply that it was already regarded as such before or that an attempt to formalise a unique collective gathering space rather than a rotating one had failed (Driessen 1999).

The absence of a canonical palace at Palaikastro invites another observation. If this was really the case, the implication is that its presence was deemed non-essential and the functions a palace would have performed could conceivably have been executed by another type of structure, either locally or remotely, by a canonical palace building. Zakros, for example, could have been the main centre where all functions were concentrated during the mature Late Minoan I period. Such an explanation is difficult to accept (Vokotopoulos 2022) and now even more so, following the discovery of a Neopalatial court-centred building at Sissi, only 3 km away from Malia. Elsewhere I have argued that the Sissi complex did not perform the same functions as its large neighbour, lacking signs of administration, production and storage, but showing ample traces for ritual and ceremony (Driessen 2021a). If this interpretation is correct then we would expect complexes with central courts in most other settlements, even if not performing the *same* or *all* functions as the major palaces. The absence of a court-centred building from Palaikastro should then imply an absence of *all* functions performed by such complexes or, at least, of the specific type of functions such complexes performed. Was it therefore a conscious decision, some kind of boundary maintenance, a way to express cultural idiosyncrasy and difference (Driessen 2020)? Following recent work, it is clear that in some important settlements the construction of the palace was only a late addition. This is the case at Phaistos and Zakros (La Rosa 2002; Platon 2002). Other settlements, as Galatas and Sissi, saw their court building destroyed or abandoned quite some time before LM IB and their settlements had to do without a formalised meeting place for the remainder of the Neopalatial period (Rethemiotakis 2002; Driessen 2021a). This means then that even within originally ‘palatial’ towns (or towns which only had such buildings at a later stage), there were moments during which government or authority was not based at a canonical palace but presumably elsewhere, either locally within a different type of structure, or remotely, in proximate higher-order settlements.

There is another possibility we should envisage and that is that court-centred buildings are specifically Knossian creations, religious-political constructs that follow a set plan because they served the communication of a particular ideology that was closely connected to Knossian empire building (Wiener 2007). A similar interpretation has been given to the establishment of peak sanctuaries throughout the island (Nowicki 2019). Moreover, both in Central

15 This court, however, was never properly illustrated. Comyn’s plan in Fig. 2 does show its potential extent but not the pillars that existed within (and which are shown in Myres’ Oxford photograph 53432 (ASHbx16im001) or at the BSA (reference BSA SPHS 01/2281.6129, and BSA SPHS 01/2794.7078, BSA SPHS 01/2795.7079).

Crete, where Galatas is concerned, and in East Crete, for Zakros, the creation of a ‘palace’ has been interpreted as a Knossian intrusion (Rethemiotakis 2002; Platon 2002). Such a hypothesis would also find some corroboration at Sissi since the foundation of a court-centred building at the site coincides with the sudden appearance of Knossian ceramic styles, locally produced (Driessen 2021a; Mathioudaki & Girella 2022). The flipside would then be that Knossos did not manage to have an impact on settlements such as Palaikastro even if it seems to have tried during MM III when parts of Block μ at Palaikastro show more Knossian architectural influences than do other buildings at the site (Knappett & Cunningham 2012). I have argued that this building was intentionally demolished to eradicate a blatant Knossian symbol and involvement in the town (Driessen 1999). Is it possible that the absence of a canonical palace in LM IA-B from Palaikastro should be interpreted along similar lines, as a conscientious action not to include a generic type of building that was considered as Knossian? That it was a local social unit that introduced these features seems rather unlikely in view of the fact that the building was not reconstructed afterwards and seems to have become communal land.

To conclude. Whether or not Palaikastro ever had a palace, we will perhaps never know. But we owe to our predecessors and especially to Hugh Sackett that, if we want to be able to understand Minoan society in general and Palaikastro in particular, we should perhaps sidestep our obsession with palaces. Although emblematic for Minoan civilisation, court buildings remain rare and many settlements may have managed to manage without them even if the presence of such a complex at Sissi suggests otherwise. The absence of such a building from Palaikastro is frankly speaking more challenging than when such a building would have been present. The different hypotheses developed in this paper are simply that: hypotheses to challenge the status quo in our conceptions on the government of Minoan towns, and only further excavation can eventually corroborate or refute these.

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Abbreviations

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