

# The Production and Consumption of Elite Culture at Malia in the Early Minoan and Middle Minoan Periods

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**Abstract** The analysis of the archaeological data from Early Bronze and MM IB/II Malia shows a sort of an evolution in the Palace's significance for Malian society, when the main arenas of consumption of elite culture shifted – as far as we can see – from the cemeteries and the court building to elite residences. The Palace continues to be used as does the cemetery, but the architectural elaboration of the elite residences suggests that the role of the latter as arenas becomes more pronounced. Nonetheless, the ceremonies held in the elite residences were more likely exclusive rather than inclusive. Inclusion or exclusion can be seen as a confirmation of the social order in MM II; the fact that innovations find their way into multiple co-existing elite residences in MM II points towards a climate of emulation and competition.

**Keywords** Minoan Palace. Malia. Elite culture. Production and consumption.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Elite High Culture. – 3 The Production and Consumption of Elite Culture at Malia. – 3.1 Early Minoan. – 3.2 Middle Minoan I/II. – 4 Conclusion.

## 1 Introduction

Traditionally the Minoan palace is considered to be the main agent behind cultural, technological and ideological innovations in Minoan society. Thus, there is a long tradition in Minoan archaeology to consider high-quality objects as palatial and objects of lesser quality as provincial or not produced by the Palaces (e.g. Walberg 1976) to the degree that workshops producing

high-quality objects are automatically considered as palatial even when located outside the Palaces and/or in non-palatial settlements. This way the idea of the Palace as the main agent of technological and ideological innovations role is confirmed and maintained. However, recent research has pointed out that, besides the Palaces, others agents such as the elite played an important role in the reproduction and transformation of society. Recent research has also altered our views on the role the Palaces played in society. It has become clear that the former have a much longer biography than assumed previously and go back in time to the Final Neolithic and the Early Minoan II period (Tomkins 2012). Rather than having been imported or adapted from the East as suggested earlier on (Watrous 1987), the architectural core of the Minoan Palace, which consists of a central court with auxiliary buildings around it, can be seen to be present at Knossos in FN and EM I, thus suggesting a local development (Schoep 2007). In addition, the function of the Palaces as residences of kings has been called into question and it has been suggested they were instead ceremonial centres that were important arenas for the reproduction and transformation of Minoan society (Schoep 2011). However, the Palaces were not the only arenas and research has pointed out that in the Early Bronze Age the funerary arena also played an important role (Schoep 2011).

By assessing social practice and especially the creation, communication and dissemination of what Baines and Yoffee (Baines, Yoffee 2000) have termed 'high culture', we can get an idea of the power dynamics in Minoan society. Traditionally, 'high culture' is associated with the Minoan Palaces, but a reassessment of administration and writing, the production of luxury goods and technological innovations in the Early and Middle Minoan period shows that these practices do not appear to have been monopolised in the buildings that we conventionally call Palaces but seem to have been distributed in palatial and non-palatial settlements (Schoep 2002, 2006). High culture in the Early and Middle Minoan I-II period on Crete was not a unidirectional and centralised affair emanating from the Palaces, as was the case in the Mycenaean polities on the Greek Mainland, but elites who were based outside the Palaces can be identified as a driving force behind certain technological and ideological innovations. From this it follows that they played an important role in the production and transformation of Minoan society.

## **2 Elite High Culture**

Elite high culture can be defined as the material expression of a strategy aimed to maintain and legitimise social order and hierarchy. The development and maintenance of high culture is pervaded by ideolo-

gies of order and hierarchy and, within that order, by legitimacy that underpins order in social and political terms and by wealth, which sustains both order and legitimacy (Van Buren, Richards 2000, 4). Elites can be characterised by their differential access to material, social and symbolic resources. Wealth in itself is not sufficient and elites need to portray themselves and manifest themselves as qualitatively different people in order to legitimate and maintain their position. This will be done by the construction and materialization of an elite ideology that emphasises the rightful place of elites within world order and maintains and legitimises the social order (DeMarrais et al. 1996; Helms 1998). In addition, elite culture forms a powerful tool for the creation or maintenance of coalitions or factions. Since elite high culture is closely connected with power dynamics, the contexts in which it was consumed will provide information about the scale and dynamics of power relations and the different arenas in which they were played out. The spatial distribution of certain elements of elite high culture can provide an alternative way to viewing the intra-site dynamics and power relations (Schoep 2002).

Whereas in the Early Bronze Age elite high culture seems to have in the first place focused on funerary architecture and mobile objects, in the Middle Bronze the construction of large elite domestic architectural structures, such as evidenced at Malia at the end of MM I or the beginning of MM II, testifies to the deployment of a new architectural vocabulary that is the materialisation of an elite ideology in the domestic realm. This new architectural vocabulary thoroughly transformed the urban landscape (Schoep 2002, 2004). This process of constructing large elite structures in palatial as well as non-palatial settlements will intensify further in the MM III and LM I periods, which witnesses an explosion of elite architecture and iconography emphasising the role and place of elites in the cosmic order.

### **3 The Production and Consumption of Elite Culture at Malia**

High culture affirms the necessity of a ruling group to the maintenance of the cosmos (Helms 1998). The communication of elite ideologies relies on the ability of elites to translate these ideas and values into the material realm through the production and consumption of aesthetic items under the control, and for the benefit of the inner elite (Baines, Yoffee 2000). We will examine how elite groups at Malia materialised and maintained an elite ideology by looking at production, exchange and consumption from a diachronic perspective. As Barratt has argued, society is made up of different fields of discourse, which can be defined as an “arena in time-space occupied by virtue of the practice of a particular discourse/communication that reproduces relations of dominance between individuals and groups”

(Barrett 2000, 28-9). We will here consider the funerary, domestic and the Palace as arenas that bear witness to elite practices.

### 3.1 Early Minoan

Our knowledge of Early Minoan Malia is restricted at the moment but it is clear that on the one hand the cemetery was used from EM I onwards (*charniers*). The evidence from the settlement dates to EM II and beneath the later Palaces traces of a large EM IIB building with a central court that displays the same orientation as the latter have been found (Pelon 1999, 2005). The field of discourse that is not well known in this period is the domestic one since the remains of Early Minoan houses are restricted to the area of the Crypte hypostyle (Van Effenterre 1980) and the edge of the West Court.

The material culture from the Palace includes pottery, a sealing, gold ornaments and numerous Anatolian obsidians from Nenezi Dağ and Göllü Dağ (Bellot-Gurlet, Pelon, Séfériadès 2010). The monumental scale of the EM IIB building supersedes a functional purpose and can be seen as the materialization of the ideology in vogue at the time that the building was first constructed in EM IIB on top of earlier EM IIA building remains. There can be no doubt that the ability to allocate and control resources to construct this monumental building should be seen as a display of power and a vehicle to gain legitimacy by a certain group of people. It is important to note that the presence of at least two courts (west and central court) points towards the participation of large groups of people. In addition, the central court seems to have permitted access to the west wing of the EM IIB building via a portico with pillars (Pelon 1999). The EM IIB Palace was destroyed by human agency in EM IIB (Pelon 2005).

The evidence from the cemetery at Malia is restricted and although EM I and EM II pottery has been found in the *charniers* there is no evidence of a preserved tomb context dating to the Early Minoan period, with the possible exception of the ‘ossuaire Renaudin’ (Soles 1992). This contrasts with sites such as Archanes, Mochlos, Sissi and Palaikastro where several tombs structures existed as early as EM II (Soles 1992). There is convincing evidence for elite culture in EM II and EM III and there is a tendency to choose for an elite culture that has links with the Cyclades (figurines, obsidians) or the East (diadems from Mochlos, etc.) and Egypt (stone vases) (Schoep 2006; Colburn 2008).

### 3.2 Middle Minoan I/II

There is a period of intensive construction at Malia at the end of MM IB or the beginning of MM II. Most of the funerary structures in the cemetery of Malia date to MM I/II (“La Maison des Morts”). The date of Chrysolakkos remains disputed and recent soundings seem to suggest that the construction of the enceinte may be post-MM II (Pomadère 2009). Below the east portico of the latest building were found remains of an earlier yet not precisely dated building phase.

The Palace that was destroyed in EM IIB was rebuilt in EM III/MM IA to be destroyed again in MM IIB (Pelon 2005). Since the stratigraphic evidence for the different phases of EM III, MM IA, MM IB, MM IIA is not yet published, our evidence pertains in the first place to the MM IIB phase. The plan of the MM IIB building is well known (Schoep 2002, 2006) and appears to have been permeable and accessible from the south, west, north and east. The presence of large courts (west and central) forms an element of continuity with the EM IIB building.

The settlement of Malia forms a good case-study for the study of elite culture and its emulation at different levels because besides the Palace there are clearly several elite complexes: Quartier Mu, Crypte Hypostyle, Magasins Dessenne, the building incorporating Sanctuaire aux Cornes (Bradfer-Burdet, Schmid 2005), the building discovered by the Malia survey with ashlar limestone blocks (Müller, Olivier 1991) to the south-west of Quartier Mu (Schoep 2002). The elite complexes distinguish themselves from the medium-sized and small houses by their size, activities (production, administration, storage of agricultural and finished luxury goods) and their architectural elaboration, which manifests itself in the use of ashlar masonry, columns, polythira (predecessor Minoan Hall) and sunken rooms (predecessor lustral basin). These MM II complexes mark a considerable increase in scale, range of activities and architectural elaboration when compared to the MM IA/MM IB “Maisons Sud”.

Looking at the production, exchange and consumption of elite culture in the MM I/II settlement at Malia, it is clear that neither the Palace nor any of the elite residences were the main producers in the settlement. The Palace yielded only limited evidence for production (stone vases, ivory, obsidian) and the majority of the objects consumed on the premises were obtained from other workshops in Malia. This is the case for polychrome pottery but perhaps also the sealstones and gold swords. Just like other households in MM I/II Malia the Palace appears to be a consumer rather than being a main producer (Schoep 2010). Neither was the largest of the elite residences, Quartier Mu, the main producer in Malia, although there is clear evidence for the production of a variety of goods (Poursat 1996).

### 3.2.1 Production

Despite the presence of seven specialised workshops around Building A and B of Quartier Mu, not all objects consumed and stored in Quartier Mu were produced in these workshops (Poursat 1996). Thus, Knappett has identified three pottery production modes amongst the pottery consumed in Mu, which probably reflect different Malioté workshops (Poursat, Knappett 2005) that were also providing other complexes in town: the style *écossais* for example occurs besides Mu also in Delta Beta and Zeta gamma and the building under Nu (Schoep, Knappett 2003). In addition, not all sealstones consumed in Mu were also produced in the “Atelier de Sceaux”; this is especially the case for the sealstones in hard stones (agate, rock crystal) and faience (Poursat 1981, 162-3) as well as the gold Cretan Hieroglyphic ring, which impressed a sealing, and the Cretan Hieroglyphic prismatic (Schoep 2010). Some of the obsidian consumed in Quartier Mu was imported as preformed blade-cores and/or finished products from Dhemenegaki (Carter, Kilikoglou 2007).

Although there is a metalworking workshop in Mu (“Atelier de metallurgist”), it is not clear whether the dagger from Mu was also produced here since the latter seems to have specialised in the production of utilitarian metal objects such as axes and chisels (Poursat 1996). Just like the acrobat’s sword from the Palace and the gold bees from Chrysolakkos, the inlaid dagger from Quartier Mu is Egyptianising (Poursat 2000) and the question arises whether all these Egyptianising metal objects were produced in the same workshop and, if so, where the latter was located. Other metal objects from Quartier Mu are small fragments of vessels, a gold prismatic sealstone and a metal ring with Cretan Hieroglyphic inscription (see *supra*).

### 3.2.2 Consumption

Corroboration for this picture of multiple levels and agencies of production in Malia is provided by the items consumed in Quartier Mu. Although some objects were obviously produced in the workshops (three-sided prismatic sealstones, bronze tools, stone vases, applique vases), the majority however was not. With the possible exception of the egyptianising applique pottery (e.g. cat in nilotic landscape, sphinx and lid with falcons), there is no evidence to suggest that the pottery (tableware and other) consumed in Quartier Mu was actually produced in the “Atelier de Potier” (Poursat, Knappett 2005). There is no evidence to suggest that the trichrome pottery (*inter alia* the style *écossais*) was produced in the Quartier Mu workshop and although the Quartier Mu elite had access to it, so did other people in the settlement. Houses Delta beta and Zita gamma were probably

moderate houses but it is interesting to note that they were consuming similar pottery as Quartier Mu (*style écosais*, straight-sided cups with festoons). The MM II building below Quartier Nu also yielded fragments of trichrome pottery (Schoep, Knappett 2003). Interaction with regions beyond Malia is shown by the importation of Mirabello and Mesara storage vases and their contents (Schoep, Knappett 2003; Poursat, Knappett 2005) and was not exclusive to Quartier Mu either (Schoep, Knappett 2003).

An assessment of the finished goods produced in the Mu workshops and the goods consumed in Buildings A and B leads to some important conclusions. The attached workshops were in the first place aimed at the production of utilitarian objects, stone vases and sealstones of average quality rather than the more obvious elite culture objects consumed in the main buildings A and B. With the possible exception of the applique vases (see *supra*), the fine labour-intensive and highly standardised table-ware consumed in Mu was acquired from a local workshop(s) that also provided other households. It is assumed that several local workshops existed (see discussion in Poursat, Knappett 2005, 140-52), which were organised according to different modes of production (centralised and administered) and were supplying the whole settlement. The involvement of the Quartier Mu elite in the production of the sealstones of higher quality (hard stones and inscribed) and of metal objects (Mu dagger, Chrysolakkos bee pendant, swords from the palace) remains unclear as there is no compelling evidence to suggest that these were produced in the Mu workshops. It is obvious that the Mu elite was not the only consumer of these items in Malia and there is little reason to assume direct control on their part. This leaves unanswered the question whether the production of elite culture items was administered, partly-administered or independent. How did the system work? Was it based on supply and demand? Were pieces commissioned? What mechanisms lie behind the distribution or restriction of specific items?

In addition, the attention lavished on elite buildings in the settlements from MM IB/II onwards suggests that the latter became more important arenas for the consumption of wealth and competition for power (Schoep 2004). At Malia there is an interesting difference between the Palace and the elite residences in that architectural innovations such as orthostats, ashlar masonry, sunken rooms and the Minoan Hall were apparently only applied in the latter (Crypte Hypostyle, Magasins Dessenne, Quartier Mu, etc.). The MM II Palace does not provide any evidence for the deployment of this new architectural vocabulary. Besides illustrating the role of elites in the introduction of innovations in society, this also suggests that architectural innovations can be seen as the materialisation of an elite ideology in which the creation of ritual venues inside these elite residences played a major role. The role of ritual thus becomes very pronounced

in the latter but the scale of the venues is clearly different from the scale of the Palace. Whereas the MM I-II Palace at Malia was being used for large-scale ceremonies presumably involving the community at large, the venues inside elite residences were aimed at smaller groups. The smaller scale is likely to have included an element of exclusion, with certain groups being favoured above others.

## 4 Conclusion

Power and its agency, expressed in terms of control over the production, ownership and deployment of material, social and symbolic resources at Malia do not appear to have been concentrated in the Minoan Palace but to have been more widespread in the settlement. Material culture, especially high culture and the practices associated with its consumption, seems to have been an important way of marking status and affiliation. Inside the settlements the main venues where elite high culture is consumed are the cemetery, the Palace and elite residences. In Malia, the main arenas of consumption of elite culture seem to have shifted from the cemeteries and the court building in the Early Bronze Age to elite residences in the MM IB/II period. The Palace continues to be used as does the cemetery but the architectural elaboration of the elite residences suggests that the role of latter as arenas becomes more pronounced. However, the smaller scale of the ceremonies in the elite residences suggests that the former were exclusive rather than inclusive. Inclusion or exclusion can be seen as a confirmation of the social order in MM II. The fact that innovations find their way into multiple co-existing elite residences in MM II points towards a climate of emulation and competition.

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