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Review of:

**Hamilakis, Y. (ed.) 2002. *Labyrinth Revisited: Rethinking "Minoan" Archaeology*. Oxford: Oxbow Books. 237 pages, 36 figs., 3 tables, 4 maps. ISBN 1-84217-061-9. Paperback. £ 28.00.**

On 23 March 1900, Sir Arthur Evans began excavating the site of Knossos. This date marks such an important event that 102 years later it is still the object of discussion, as the publication of this book demonstrates. The particularities of the newly discovered (or created) 'Minoan' culture provoked an early interest in its study. This interest was materialised by Evans' excavations at Knossos, which created a corpus of theoretical assumptions that have become embedded in the material recovered from that site. These assumptions are still present in archaeological studies of the Cretan material, recognisable in the basic terminologies of those studies, such as the periodisation of the island during the Bronze Age into Early/Middle/Late 'Minoan'. These are not mere intellectual relics, but current terms that still hide the theoretical paradigms of the time in which they were created. As a consequence, 'Minoan' archaeology has always been slow to adopt new archaeological approaches (although there are some remarkable exceptions such as Renfrew's *The Emergence of Civilisation*, a groundbreaking approach at the time of its publication in 1972).

The aim of the book reviewed here is not only to develop a reflexive critique of what 'Minoan' archaeology has been, and make explicit its biases and assumptions, but also to update the study of Bronze Age Crete by introducing new archaeological approaches. In this, the book has two foci: it targets scholars specialising in Cretan archaeology, but it also happens to be interesting for scholars from other disciplines, since some of the articles included are valuable attempts to bring recent archaeological theories to a specific material record. The book does not pretend to create a new archaeological theory, but belongs to that kind of *second wave* of books that tries to ground theoretical approaches with material analyses. The quality of the Cretan record, along with the quantity of data, makes Crete a perfect case study for such new material analyses.

As is normal in edited volumes, there are irregularities in the achievement of these aims throughout the book's various papers. Hamilakis' introduction presents probably the most profound critique and is therefore the most controversial paper of the book. Not only does he criticise some of the most important figures and theories in 'Minoan' archaeology on a theoretical basis, but as a Greek scholar (although he is currently a senior lecturer at the University of Southampton), he also specifically criticises views from Western scholars who use imperialist assumptions. This suggests that Evans' views are still alive and well in assumptions such as the characterisation of 'Minoans' as the perfect, peaceful culture, an ideological ancestor of modern Western European culture. This view survived in processualist ideas of the 'Minoans' as a perfectly balanced system, i.e. culture (Renfrew 1972). Hamilakis proposes a series of important changes such as the suppression of 'Minoan' as a term

or the conceptualisation of prehistoric Crete as a dynamic group of cultures with their own contradictions. This would allow our studies to improve through new views and archaeological approaches to the data. However, such revolutionary changes cannot be undertaken without the confusion of standardised terms such as 'Minoan' or 'palace', which allow communication between scholars, and it seems difficult to replace them without doing more harm than good. Hamilakis' critique needs to be included in future analyses, but with reshaping the meanings of current terminology rather than creating a brand new set of terms that would never be free of biases either.

The second part of the book "Constructing the 'Minoan' Past" is a collection of three articles that explore the critique of Evans' theoretical baggage. Preziosi's paper tries to find the implications of the role of Victorian museums in creating the dominant vision of the 'Minoans', and how they tried to relate themselves to 'Minoan' culture. Although she analyses Evans' work in the Ashmolean museum (predating his work in Crete), her paper is quite theoretical, which leaves the reader with the impression that she is pointing to things that have been said before, and she does not manage to present a good case study of how the 'Minoans' were created and represented in the museums.

In their paper, Hitchcock and Koudounais analyse the most important 'Minoan' museum, the reconstruction of the palace of Knossos, and Evans' assumptions on which this work was based. Their analysis is fluid enough to include in the discussion not only how biased the reconstruction is, using modern materials based on very little material evidence, but also the restrictions under which that reconstruction was created. As Evans' preconceptions biased the reconstruction of the palace, our personal point of view about it will contain these preconceptions of how the palace should look. The strongest point of the article is not the critique of Evans, but the fact that it makes us aware of the subjectivity of any point of view about the palace.

MacEnroe's paper analyses the turbulent political moment in which the studies of Crete started and how this affected the discipline. He focuses on the political agenda behind both the archaeological excavations and the theory that tried to relate Crete to Western Europe. Probably the most interesting feature of the article is how it discovers the way ideas stimulated by this agenda can still be found in archaeological interpretation, such as the idyllic picture of 'Minoan' culture, or the supposed thalassocracy that they exercised.

The third and fourth parts of the book change the focus of the analysis to the application of new archaeological approaches that supersede the old assumptions discussed in the previous parts of the book. The first two papers are under the general title: "Engendering the 'Minoan' Past" and are concerned with gender and agency. Alberti reviews the evidence of gender attributions in the Late Bronze Age figurative art of the island, in a successful attempt to break old female versus male schemes which he demonstrates not to be useful categories for the analyses of the representation of the human figure. This is a refreshing view of a category of studies (figurative art) that seems to have a very limited categorisation of gender, supported by good material evidence. However, the lack of colour pictures impoverishes the

comprehension of the discussion regarding the stylistic traits. The second paper is an attempt by Nikoulaidou to apply agency studies to 'Minoan' societies, in order to discover a more active society, which includes children and women as social agents. However, this theoretical assumption, which has been posed elsewhere (Dobres and Robb 2000), is not supported by a convincing analysis of the data. Nikoulaidou sets an agenda for future studies, but she is not able to find evidence to support that agenda in the material record. Although her suggestions are an important reminder for Cretan archaeologists, they do not show any way of achieving the task that she sets out.

In the fourth part, under the name "Charting the Landscapes of Power in 'Minoan' Crete", we find four papers that can be divided in two groups. The first of these groups explores new insights in the understanding of 'Minoan' society. Day and Wilson's article suggests that Knossos was a place marked by an important symbolic role, related to its longevity in a key position in the landscape. Although this paper is the theoretical culmination of a series of articles by these authors in the analysis of the Knossian pottery (Day and Wilson 1998; Wilson and Day 1994, 1999), it makes too many assumptions that are derived from a data analysis that is still a topic for debate (Faber *et al.* 2002; Tsolakidou *et al.* 2002). Although symbolism is deeply connected with social and economic issues, their interpretation does not succeed as it is not supported by strong enough evidence. However, their innovative suggestions are worth consideration in future data analyses. The second article is probably the most balanced article of the book, with a good theoretical introduction that is well supported by the evidence. Haggis suggests what Hamilakis proposed in his introduction, that the processualist assumption of the palaces as a natural culmination of social and economic improvements is simply wrong (see also Dabney 1995; Lewthwaite 1983). Haggis suggests that palaces brought no improvements. On the contrary, they substituted existing economic and social structures for ones which were beneficial only for a top level social stratum. This approach seems to be a valuable insight not only in looking at the emergence of palatial societies in Crete, but also in looking at any other social change in the Mediterranean, as it provides arguments for other suggested social interactions in the Mediterranean (Gilman 1981).

The next two articles in this part of the book are concerned with the theoretical aspects of ceramic studies, probably one of the most developed fields in the investigation of Cretan archaeology. However, this development has been through a narrow scientific approach to ceramic study, and there seems to be no connection between scientific analysis and theoretical interpretation. Day and Wilson's paper may be considered to belong to this kind of study, but Knappett's and Van der Moortel's papers are directly involved in the attempt to move beyond this approach. Knappett (1997, 1999) recently presented very innovative analyses on 'Minoan' pottery, where through a detailed analysis of the data he reached conclusions about political and economic relations between sites. However, these articles were based on some theoretical assumptions that were not completely developed and discussed, which is exactly what Knappett attempts again in this paper. Once more, the discussion of theoretical issues provides interesting results for scholars focused in the Cretan scenario, but does not appear so original for outside scholars since these theoretical discussions have taken place before in other publications. Knappett's paper does not make

up for this by offering a good application of the theoretical discussion to a case study. However, if we place this paper within the context of his previous writing as a whole, it represents an interesting case study in which the theoretical assumption that ceramics can provide information on political and symbolic features is taken successfully into data analysis. This is also the case for Van der Moortel's paper, where she attempts a similar analysis of Late Bronze Age pottery although her factual evidence does not seem to be solid enough to support her suggested conclusions about political organisation on the island.

To conclude: the book presents a good attempt to put forward new ideas in a field of study that is in need of renovation. However not all the papers achieve this aim successfully, particularly because many of them focus on theory and interpretation, but are poorly supported by evidence. Bennet's commentary at the end of the book points out this weakness from a more traditional point of view. Nevertheless, these approaches provide good inspiration for new analyses. Those that achieve a better balance between theory and data are interesting not only for Aegeanists, but also for anyone interested in how new theoretical approaches can be applied to data analysis. The book is well published, without appreciable mistakes, although it seems to be bound too fragilely for continuous handling, and the pictures, which are black and white, do not have the quality necessary to support some of the articles, which should not be the case if one is paying £28.

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