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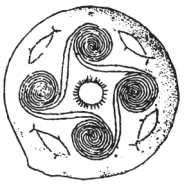

Of Odysseys and Oddities

Scales and modes of interaction between prehistoric Aegean societies and their neighbours

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Front cover: The MBA village of Punta Milazzese on Panarea. Photograph by Helen Dawson.

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Acknowledgements

The 2013 Sheffield Aegean Round Table took place during a rather frigid January with snowfalls threatening to cut our plans short. Thankfully, we had a very fruitful meeting and a lively discussion over the course of three days. Most of those who engaged in the Round Table have been able to publish their papers in the volume, though the event was much enhanced by the oral contributions of John Bennet, Sue Sherratt, Sara Strack and Roger Doonan. We were also fortunate to have Kristian Kristiansen deliver a thought (and discussion) provoking keynote address and our meeting concluded with an eloquent final discussion by John Barrett.

The event took place during a Marie Curie Fellowship that the editor held at the University of Sheffield 2011–2013. I was very fortunate to work with and learn from Roger Doonan during this period. Along with acting as mentor for the fellowship, he co-organised the Round Table event with me and played a key role in designing the research agenda for the event and this publication. Thank you also to all of the student helpers who made the event run so smoothly. The Round Table is generously supported by the Institute for Aegean Prehistory, to whom we are most grateful.

The Sheffield Aegean Round Table is a type of event that is relatively rare these days, as it takes place in a relaxed atmosphere where people freely speak their minds. This is really made possible through the welcoming environment that is created by Debi Harlan, Valasia Isaakidou and John Bennet. The home baked fare that they so kindly made on the opening night (thanks also to Vuka Milić) set the guests up for a very comfortable and enjoyable event. Debi and John also hosted all of the guests at their home the next evening, making a very memorable climax to the convivial environment that makes the Round Tables such unique events.

The panel of reviewers, including many of the contributors, provided invaluable advice that was vital in bringing this volume to publication, for which we are grateful. I would finally wish to express my gratitude to the participants at the event and contributors to this volume who made the entire process so stimulating. It was indeed testimony to our aspiration to work across political and traditional boundaries that have influenced Aegean archaeology that we had participants representing eleven nationalities from institutions on three continents. A final note on behalf of the authors is that papers in this volume were submitted in 2013 and 2014, and as a consequence many will be missing citations to some important more recent publications.

Chapter 2

An Elite-Infested Sea: Interaction and Change in Mediterranean Paradigms

Borja Legarra Herrero

A distinct Mediterranean

For archaeologists and historians, the Mediterranean world has been always inherently linked with ideas of human interaction (Braudel 1949; Horden and Purcell 2000; Abulafia, 2011; Broodbank 2013). The region presents a unique configuration in which the relatively calm waters of a closed sea connect the diverse histories of three continents. The stark differences of the lands around this sea, taken together with a very special kind of maritime 'glue' that allows for relatively easier connections than are possible by land travel alone, present a rare laboratory in human history to analyse how people, material and ideas move, meet and mix.

While ideas of *ex Oriente lux* among early 20th century scholars have already indicated the importance of the Mediterranean as a corridor for ideas and people to move, it was of course Braudel who presented a compelling case for approaching the Mediterranean as a context defined by its high connectivity (Braudel 1949). Braudel conveys the idea that interaction is a primary characteristic of the Mediterranean, as it transcends every single level of human experience in the region. The Mediterranean is not just about long journeys by the Phoenicians, or the Roman grain trade, but about the every-day experience of connectivity on every scale: the peddlers that move around using cabotage techniques, the products that reach local markets, the ideas that travel along with such mechanisms. The Mediterranean is a meshwork of movement at every social and geographical scale, and with an intensity difficult to match anywhere else.

Horden and Purcell's *The Corrupting Sea* (Horden and Purcell 2000) has inspired a new generation of archaeologists and ancient historians to re-examine the Braudelian paradigm. For example, the mosaic of Mediterranean landscapes, the uncertainties of the climate and the relatively easy connectivity made possible by the sea has taken a central place in the study of the Mediterranean (Blake and Knapp 2005;

Knapp and van Dommelen 2010; Demand 2011; Stockhammer 2012) and these approaches have led to new explicit attempts to develop an archaeology of the Mediterranean (Broodbank 2010, 2013).

This burst of academic interest cannot be explained solely by the inspirational academic work of Braudel, and Horden and Purcell. The interactivity that so starkly features in approaches to Mediterranean history seems to have come into focus as issues such as intercultural contact, fusion and mobility have become major concerns in our globalised modern world. We have started to look back to the ancient and prehistoric Mediterranean as a scenario that perhaps mimics both the potential and the problems unleashed by the mixture of cultures and ideas that define our modern-day reality (Rowlands 2010), as an interestingly distorted mirror in which to look at ourselves. A clear example of this phenomenon is the application of terms and approaches coined to explain the modern world, such as globalisation, to the past (Sherratt 2003; Hodos 2010; Maran 2011).

As interest in the connected Mediterranean grows, the models being developed to explain the way in which interaction moulded Mediterranean history are becoming increasingly complex. In particular, post-colonial theory has brought much more attention to ideas of local agency (Dietler 1998), and concepts such as hybridity (van Dommelen 1997), resistance (Dougherty 2003) and entanglement (Trochetti and van Dommelen 2005; Stockhammer 2013) are creating richer understandings of cultural contact and interaction in the Mediterranean. The spread of the Roman Empire is no longer a one-way process but a complex mosaic of cultural interactions (Mattingly 2011), Greek colonisation also opened up Greek populations to other culture influences (Antonaccio 2003), the east Mediterranean in the Late Bronze Age has been understood as an elaborated system of economic and cultural contacts under the approach of World System Theory (Sherratt and Sherratt 1998; Kohl 2011; Galaty *et al.* 2010), and there is much emphasis lately in approaching the flexible interaction of the Mediterranean using Network analyses (Knappett 2011).

So far, so good, it would seem. New perspectives introduced more complex ways of understanding the past and we have uncovered the rich ways in which people interacted. But, have we achieved this really? I would argue that the enriching approaches have not been able to identify and challenge some of the problems that are skewing our views of the Mediterranean past. Modern social and cultural paradigms concerning progress, trade, entrepreneurship, consumption and emulation have become deeply embedded in our visions of the Mediterranean, eroding the powerful social history that is at the core of the Mediterranean paradigm (Braudel 1949; Horden and Purcell 2000: 44). Too much of a characterisation of the Mediterranean based on modern values and conceptions of interaction presents problems in the ways mobility is understood. In particular, following recent archaeological literature (Kienlin 2012; Carballo *et al.* 2014) it seems opportune to revise the concept of 'elite', not only because it is a notion that is charged with

modern meanings, but also because it plays a central role in explaining the major socio-political and economic changes that drive the history of the Mediterranean during the Bronze and Early Iron Ages.

Elite, social change and the Mediterranean: a flawed paradigm

Scholars who have cast their gaze over various areas of the Mediterranean would be only too familiar with the term 'elite' (Malkin 2002; Barceló 2005; Chapman 2005; Tronchetti and van Dommelen 2005; Russell 2010; Schoep 2010; Slootjes 2011). It would be inaccurate to characterise the rich and diverse literature as being solely elite driven, but it is also difficult to ignore the continual appeal of the notion in Mediterranean studies. While the term tends not to be defined (see discussion in next section), it is normally used to refer to the powerful in any society, the 'controlling few' (Marcus 1983: 7). In the particular case of the Mediterranean, elites repeatedly appear as crucial social agents in a wide range of studies: from the Neolithic (Tomkins 2011) to the Greek Colonisation (Riva 2010), from the Levantine coast (Ahrens 2011) to the waters of the west Mediterranean (López Padilla 2009). This constant referencing in such a variety of contexts, periods and approaches tends to be a good indicator of a term being overstretched. The significance of kings and Pharaohs in Mediterranean history cannot be denied and therefore elite is still a valuable term to approach the study of social organisation and change but studies have shown that there are many more social agents in the Mediterranean (Sherratt 1998; 2003; Jung 2012; Iacono 2013) that have been barely acknowledged.

There are several ways in which elites have been included in the explanation of the dynamic Mediterranean. For those authors who highlight the insecurities and dangers of living in such an arid landscape with an unreliable climate (Halstead 2004; Risch 2002), elites appear as figures who have exploited their managerial positions in the distribution of resources to acquire a privileged position. Hoarding and sharing are key strategies used to buffer against the inconstancies of Mediterranean weather conditions and to make the most of the different landscapes accessible to a given social group (Horden and Purcell 2000). These systems possibilitate the appearance of certain people at the centres of socio-economic networks to supervise the running of the organisation. These central figures, or elites, are normally understood to have naturally striven to entrench their position and it is this natural tendency for strengthening the system that brings social-change (Halstead 1989, 2004).

This vision has become less popular as the focus on Mediterranean studies has shifted over the last 20 years from the challenges of food production and survival towards connectivity. Still, the elites have kept their role as catalysts of change, now as key figures who channelled and fuelled interaction across the Mediterranean.

As mentioned above there are several reasons for this interest in interaction and cultural contact that have led to a wide variety of approaches. Our current view of

the past Mediterranean is a rich combination of large scale economic movements with local responses that are defined in the archaeological record by a wide range of practices. This has encouraged many more types of studies. Interaction does not focus mainly on exchange anymore, and new studies have highlighted technological transfer (Brysbaert 2008), ethnogenesis processes (Blake 2013) and even large scale population movements (Voskos and Knapp 2008). It is rare, however, to find studies that examine the basic social mechanisms that make such processes possible. The application of network approaches illustrates well the problem. Network analyses are perhaps one of the methodologies that have shown more potential for the analysis of diverse types of interactions in the Mediterranean (Broodbank 2000; Knappett 2012; Isaksen 2013). It brings flexibility to our understanding of connectivity and allows us to approach broader patterns without losing the focus on local scales. However, when networks analyses are brought down to the realities of regional studies and there is a more pressing necessity to characterise the agents that represent the nodes in the network, the tendency to rely on notions of 'elite' to fuel the networks becomes apparent (*e.g.* Van Bremen 2007; Feldman 2008; Alberti 2013).

The role of elites becoming the kernels of change is based on an understanding that local privileged groups are the agents recognising the potential of new types of interaction for strengthening their social positions (Malkin 2002; Schoep 2006; Tronchetti and van Dommelen 2005; Slootjes 2011). This is understandable, as early documents such as the Amarna Letters or the archives from Ugarit point towards the significant role of oligarchies the east Mediterranean in establishing interactions across the Mediterranean (Bell 2012). At the other end of such interactions normally we encounter local elites creating a positive feedback loop between tighter control over resources that new colonist/traders may be interested in (both raw materials and the worforce needed to gather these materials; Dietler and Herbich 2001), and more exclusive control over the exchange links. Local elites seem easily capable of turning these new opportunities to their socio-economic advantage by a series of different mechanisms. They may use exotic materials and finished items to demonstrate their special status by means of the conspicuous consumption of such objects within meaningful social arenas (Cherry 2010). Such objects provide new material means to promote an ideology of distinction. Even the mere opportunity to travel to other places or connect with distant and mysterious peoples may add to their new ideological mystique (Helms 1994); they may claim links with other high-status groups as members of a similar koiné by adopting new customs (Dietler 1990), items (González Wagner 2013) or by claiming shared mythical links (Riva 2010: 58). In other cases, elites may lead the adoption of technical innovation (Brysbaert 2008) providing them with particular items to mark their differential status and giving them the opportunity to re-organise labour production. These mechanisms, isolated or in conjunction, provide the main explanations for how Mediterranean connectivity promoted socio-political change (*e.g.* Chapman 2005; Vianello 2011).

There are several cases in which specific versions of this approach, backed by detailed material analyses, have produced models of strong explanatory power. For example, in Iron Age Etruria, the case for local elites consolidating their position through economic and ideological links with Phoenician and Greek cultures is well documented (Malkin 2002; Izzet 2007). The clear case for elite emulation as evidenced by the Veii and Tarquinia tombs, has been backed by nuanced models that include a variety of responses to external influence that match the richness of the archaeological record (Riva 2010).

While such a model then is useful in particular cases, the repetition of such a picture in so many Mediterranean studies independently of the geographical area or the period studied indicates two major problems. First, as next section tries to show, that mechanisms of changes are not universal and the general idea of how elites work do not seem to fit current visions of power relationships in the anthropological cases that our models are based on. Specifically, they ignore the significance of taking into consideration the role of broader populations in processes of change. Secondly, as scholars are producing more nuanced theoretical points of view that build a much richer picture of the past, a comparable careful interpretation of the archaeological record is sometimes lacking. The relationship between items and social ideas of value is far from straight-forward. For example, while foreign materials and objects are relatively easy to identify in the archaeological record, detailed case-studies focused on deposition contexts have shown that they were not always significant to explain socio-political change (Legarra Herrero 2011a) and they did not always represent value-laden exotica (Tykot 2011).

How do elites work?

Despite its wide-spread use, the term 'elite' is ill-defined and escapes easy characterisation (Marcus 1983; Shore 2002). It is generally used to refer to a loose group of people with the power to make or influence decisions. It could be argued that the term is merely a word used to avoid unfashionable and meaning-laden labels such as 'chief' or 'big-man' (Kienlin 2012), and to keep our frame of reference consciously open. But such an assumption is dangerous as 'elite' carries with it a series of conventions and meanings of its own (Marcus 1983) that in most cases remain unchallenged under a guise of innocuousness.

At the heart of the term lies the concept of active agency (Marcus 1983; Shore 2002). The elite are the actual people who held and exercised power as opposed to more abstract and passive terms such as class. Elites do not simply exist, they act. So a working-definition of elite would be: a reduced group that wields much of the power to influence people and make decisions. While such definition includes highly formalised positions such as 'pharaoh', the focus here is in the use of the term in relation to formative periods of socio-political change that define much of Mediterranean history during the Bronze Age and Early Iron Age.

This very broad definition of the term elite may include several different groups in any given society (Scott 2008). Depending on their type of power, elites take on several personalities (military elite, political elite, religious elite, economic elite, and so on) that are differingly combined depending on the particular cultural environment. Therefore, elites may consist of several sub-groups sometimes of a very different nature, and that on many occasions oppose each other, although the case of certain individuals consolidating different kinds of power and deploying them accordingly in different circumstances is also well attested (Roscoe 2000). Such an articulated group of powerful people is in constant rebalancing depending on the shifting relationships between the different types of elite and the elites with the broader populations (Shore 2002). While the complex constitution of such elites has been acknowledged in several archaeological works (Bell 2012; Kienlin 2012; Schoep 2006) it is still rare to find definitions of elite within a specific cultural context.

More importantly, a workable definition of the notion must be aware that the changeable nature of the elite does not play out in a context isolated from the rest of the population, and much of its fluidity comes from the porous relationship between elites and the broader group, with a constant transfer of people amongst social positions. The fact is that our elites tend to be theorised as static and long-lived social groups in spite of the fact that the best studied cases, such as the strongly regulated Roman Empire (Hopkins 1983), have made clear that the nature of the ruling elite to be in constant flux due to their own internal battles, their permeable nature, and their changeable relationships with the rest of the population.

A possible reason for this simplification of the elite concept may have to do with the implicit assumption that past elites were governed by similar motivations as modern elites. In contrast to ideas of a 'Chief' or 'Big-man' the notion of elites is widely used in the modern world by the general population and by several academic disciplines (Savage and Williams 2008; Scott 2008; Daloz 2010). This makes it very easy for meanings and values related to its modern use to affect the study of elites in the past. Under modern socio-economic paradigms, elites are considered agents of change by deploying mechanisms such as conspicuous consumption, emulation and trickle-down effects. This agency tends to be seen as a positive force that brings social and economic benefits to the rest of the society (see for example the critique in Hamilakis 2002b and Legarra Herrero 2013). Elites are seen as the drivers of change and innovation, two notions charged with positive meanings in the modern world. Elites bring new prospects, opportunities, and technical developments to their societies as a by-product of the pursuit of their own interests (Savage and Williams 2008; Daloz 2010). Such a view seems to underpin the use of the concept of elites in the past. The connected Mediterranean is seen as a positive human context that encourages what in the modern world would be seen as beneficial dynamics of cultural contact and fusion, trade and exchange, economic development and technical innovation. Elites have become in many cases the personification of such processes in the Bronze and Iron Ages by being the main agents pushing the boundaries of trade, bringing

innovations to local communities, and taking advantage of the cultural exchange that the connected Mediterranean made possible. Following such a paradigm and beyond studies on violence and warfare (Eckstein 2009; Jung 2009), it is difficult to encounter in Mediterranean studies an acknowledgement of the possible negative implications of cultural contact (disease, economic disparity, widening socio-political differentiation, xenophobia).

A final key trait of the concept of an elite is its relational nature (Marcus 1983). Elites can only exist in relation to the broader group they are trying to control. This relation again brings cultural particularities to the forefront, as the interaction between elites and the associated group is entirely dependent on shared social and ideological structures and on specific cultural mechanisms of social negotiation (Roscoe 2000). To add complexity, the interaction of elites with the related group relies on their multifaceted nature; the head of a kinship group would activate different aims, goals and means of interaction than a military leader would such variability is not played out in separate arenas by clearly differentiated groups but more often involves the same people reacting to a complex contextual awareness of the cultural relationships activated at each particular moment.

The complex nature of the relationship between elites and other parts of society has recently been subjected to the scrutiny of a range of anthropological and archaeological works (Roscoe 2000; Wiessner 2002; Roscoe 2009; Wiessner 2009; Blanton 2010; Hayden and Villeneuve 2010; Blanton and Fargher 2011; Carballo, Roscoe, and Feinman 2012; Kienlin 2012; Roscoe 2012). These works have shown that elites are not omnipotent individuals that can manipulate social relationships at will, but rather groups that need to engage in social conversation with the broader population in order to achieve their goals (Marcus 1983; Kienlin 2012). Such communication is limited by ideological and material restrictions imposed by cultural worldviews.

Anthropologists such as Polly Wiessner (Wiessner 2002, 2009) and Paul Roscoe (Roscoe 2000, 2009; Roscoe 2012) have revisited classic cases of Big-man societies in Papua New Guinea to offer a more modern understanding of power negotiations and socio-political change. It is beyond the scope of this article to dwell on the Big-man concept, and Papua New Guinea may seem a world away from the ancient Mediterranean, but the well documented ethnographic work in this part of the world has informed much of our models of formative periods of social stratification in the Mediterranean (Patton 1996; Broodbank 2000) so new research in this area makes a pertinent critique of Mediterranean studies.

Big-man figures (but also 'chiefs' or individuals with ascribed power) appear as restricted agents, people who must negotiate their power rather than simply impose it. In the cases presented, leaders form part of a complex web of social groups and relationships that contextualise their position, and in many cases limit it. For example, Polly Wiessner argues that long-established social arenas are particularly limited by tradition and that Big-men must create new areas of social activity in order to be able to negotiate new social relationships (Wiessner 2002). Even so, such new social arenas

require the tacit approval of the rest of the population to be successful, approval which is dependent on whether they are perceived as beneficial. This particular point is especially interesting for our studies of the Mediterranean, as new connections would provide just such novel social arenas and social relationships in the form of new materials and customs for local cultures to contend with. The fact that elites are in many instances 'subjugated' to the group they command has two important implications for the Mediterranean: one refers to the aims and goals of the elite, the other to mechanisms of social interaction.

Elites are the visible heads of larger groups, such as extended families (Kienlin 2012; Roscoe 2012) or political organisations, and they act for their own benefit as much as for the benefit of the groups they represent (Scott 2008; Hayden and Villeneuve 2010). For most elites, securing a more powerful personal position in society is intrinsically related to the strengthening of the position of the specific group they lead. Decisions made by elites are driven by a combination of different types of reasons, ranging from seeking the benefit of the group they represent and widening their social appeal to more mundane motives, such as personal revenge or immediate physical satisfaction of the individual making the decision (Roscoe 2000). In addition, the goals of elites in the past do not necessarily follow modern paradigms of economic wealth and power. Much of their behaviour focuses on gaining social capital, symbolic capital and knowledge (Roscoe 2009; Hayden and Villeneuve 2010). Power depends not on material gains but on the ability to influence as many people as possible. Mechanisms such as conspicuous consumption, emulation, feasting and hoarding are part of wider social strategies for enlarging social influence (Roscoe 2009). Such mechanisms take different forms, with a shifting emphasis on ritual, economic and coercive activities dependent on the particular nature of each culture (Kienlin 2012). Most importantly, such mechanisms cannot be considered simple top-down strategies, as supporters represent active agents who will accept or reject these mechanisms based on the perceived benefits they provide them. The broader population is empowered by the cultural norms that frame their social relationships; in other words, the elite find themselves constrained by tradition and other social rules. At the same time ideological and material tools can help to manipulate messages that strengthen the position of an elite which is particularly patent in large socio-political systems (Smith 2003). However, this is never an automatic process, nor a perfect one and elites may always be involved in the constant maintenance of their social position (Roscoe 2000) against other elite groups, the groups they represent or even other socio-political entitites. Elites never can control social negotiation mechanisms at will.

This also brings us to the crucial point of how the interaction between elites, between elites and associated groups, and between these larger groups is managed. The nature of these relationships is entirely contingent upon its actual implementation, upon its practice (Shore 2002). The power relationships within a society may be shaped by ideological and social structures, but it is played out and constantly re-defined through repetitive practices ('habitus' in accordance

to Bourdieu's terms; Bourdieu 1977). Such practices do not need to be heavily ritualised performances or highly visible events, but they are formed mainly through constant every-day customs and behaviours, and through a wide range of mundane material culture and activities that are open to the whole population, not only elites. It also depends on many more interactions than those related to social vertical differentiation, and the concept of 'heterarchy' has demonstrated (Crumley 2003) that many other social relationships are crucial to the structure of a culture.

In this light, some of the traditional models of elite behaviour seem to be crude caricatures. Let us focus, for example, on the concept of conspicuous consumption. This has been supported on many occasions by the idea that dangling an exotic object in front of people would attract attention and provoke admiration, thereby marking social differences. Modern views on conspicuous consumption have demonstrated that this is a complex mode of communication that allows for many responses (Patsiaouras and Fitchett 2012). Recent ethnographic studies have demonstrated that outside the modern world conspicuous consumption is a mechanism that can refer to integration rather than differentiation. Conspicuous consumption can be seen as the epitome of the material identity of a group and not necessarily of the elite individual who possess it, and as such may be used to send out social messages to other groups (Roscoe 2009). For example, conspicuous architecture is a mechanism for integrating a social group into building a message through collective practice and material means (Roscoe 2012). Archaeologically, detailed work in consumption patterns has also shown that an exotic origin does not warrant the use of the item for conspicuous consumption strategies (Legarra Herrero 2011a; Tykot 2011).

The implications for the study of interaction and social change in the Mediterranean are far reaching. Stress becomes laid on cultural context and this opens our understanding of agents of change to a broader social spectrum. Post-colonial theory has shown that long-distance connections would be differently adopted and adapted by local populations depending on their existing social structures and on the nature of these connections (van Dommelen 1997). Responses are not just limited to acceptance or resistance; there are far more complex ways of linking new external influences to internal social trends. Such rich interpretation of the past can only benefit by adding more non-elite voices to the picture. A corollary to this is that changes at such a broad social scale are better understood as medium and long-term socio-political dynamics with very different histories in each Mediterranean region.

A case study: Crete and the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age (2000–1700 BCE)

Middle Bronze Age Crete represents a well-known and long-discussed case of socio-political change in the Mediterranean. At the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age, we encounter a series of major changes in the archaeological record that indicate profound socio-political transformations: rapid growth at the most important

settlements, in the case of Knossos from 3,000–4,000 people to 18,000–20,000 people (Whitelaw 2011); large central buildings appear at major settlements, normally referred to as palaces (Macdonald 2011); and the new administrative use of seals and the script known as Linear A are first documented in this period (Watrous 1994). It is also in this period that we can securely identify a number of Egyptian items and local imitations in the record for first time (Legarra Herrero 2011a), as well as a few technical innovations with an east Mediterranean origin, such as the fast potter's wheel (Knappett 1999).

At this point of the discussion one should not be surprised that the major focus of study has been on the role of elites in bringing about new changes, by exploiting the newly-developed exchange networks with Egypt and the east Mediterranean. Currently, the main explanation of the rapid changes seen at the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age argues that material and ideological links with the east Mediterranean are immediately seized upon by local elites to start a process of differentiation that allows them to lead Cretan society along the path of state formation (Parkinson and Galaty 2007; Manning 2008; Cherry 2010; Schoep 2010; Watrous 2012). In a classic deployment of the model explained above, exotica are thought to have been used by existing privileged individuals to mark out further ideological differences and to gain control over resources that can be used to participate in the new exchange links with the east Mediterranean. Competition between different regional elites to control resources and imported materials may have also accelerated changes all through the Middle Bronze Age on Crete (Schoep and Knappett 2004; Schoep 2006; Sbonias 2011). The use of this notion of elites is normally based on the study of the mechanisms that they used to gain power (Adams 2006; Schoep 2006) but the elites are never embodied in specific social agents, and it is therefore still unclear who these elites were, and how they related to the broader population. Only recently has a 'house society' been suggested for the island by Jan Driessen, where elites are placed at the head of corporate social groups organised around residential units (Driessen 2011; see also Hamilakis 2002a; Knappett 2009). However, a clearer definition of the elite has not made an impact on explanations of social change, and the causality of social change has not been expanded to incorporate a broader demographic spectrum (Wright 2004).

Individuals or small group of elites are not easily spotted in the archaeological record. Recent studies of mortuary data (Legarra Herrero 2011b) have challenged the traditional interpretation of socio-economic differences being clearly marked in Middle Bronze Age cemeteries on Crete (Manning 2008). Quite the contrary, communal use of the cemeteries and a collective ethos in mortuary ritual seems to dominate mortuary behaviour at the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age (Legarra Herrero 2011b). In this period, cemeteries underwent major transformations but these stressed collective interment and group ritual within centuries-old burial grounds. For example, large tombs in the cemeteries of presumed early palatial sites such as Archanes or Mallia are surrounded by paved areas associated with large deposits of cups and jugs that speak of group ritual, and seem to constitute new focal points for a growing community (Figure 2.1). These tombs share their collective interment

practice with every other tomb on Crete, where bones and material were randomly scattered in the tombs in mixed deposits. This communal interment type had almost exclusively been the burial tradition on Crete for a thousand years and supports the idea that individual identities were diluted in the group ethos of the tomb, even during periods of profound change (Legarra Herrero 2011b). These powerful mortuary arenas speak of change, but they remain curiously silent about the elite.

The role of exotica in Middle Bronze Age Cretan society also needs revision. While authors have interpreted this material as evidence of new influences from Egypt (Watrous 1998; Aruz 2008; Wiener 2013), careful investigation of the material reveals strong local patterns of consumption that do not necessarily fit well with ideas of either conspicuous consumption or emulation (Legarra Herrero 2011a). Newly-imported items, or objects made in imported materials are few in number and represent a narrow and strange selection of items, mainly scarabs (actual imports and local imitations) and a limited range of Egyptian stone vessel types. Local imitations of these two types of items are a little more common, but do not register a significantly different pattern of deposition. Neither scarabs nor the type of stone vessels found on Crete are popular in Egypt during this period, but they are linked to two types of items that become

Figure 2.1: Chrysolakkos I (EM III/MM IA) cemetery at Mallia and Archanes cemetery (MM IA) with areas used for group ritual highlighted (redrawn by author).

prevalent in the Cretan archaeological record at the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age: seals and stone vessels. The increased appearance of seals in the record has been interpreted as relating to the growing importance of group identity in the regional administration of goods (Relaki 2011; Sbonias 2011), and the fact that scarabs are found mainly around certain geographical areas (Pini 2000) may indicate that a particular choice of seal was preferred by certain communities to express their identities. Scarabs continue a long history of zoomorphic sealstones on Crete (Karytinos 2000), and in some cases imported scarabs are found engraved with local Cretan motifs, which further supports the idea that scarabs were being used as seals. Similarly, stone vessels became much more popular in the archaeological record during this period, and the few imitations found usually uncovered in conjunction with significant depositions of local types of stone vessels (Figure 2.2; Legarra Herrero 2011a). Only at Hagia Triada was an imported stone vessel found in a peculiar depositional context although even here it appeared inside a communal tomb (Bevan 2004).

These trends in the deposition of items with off-island links do not support traditional views of such items being used to mark the differential status of certain

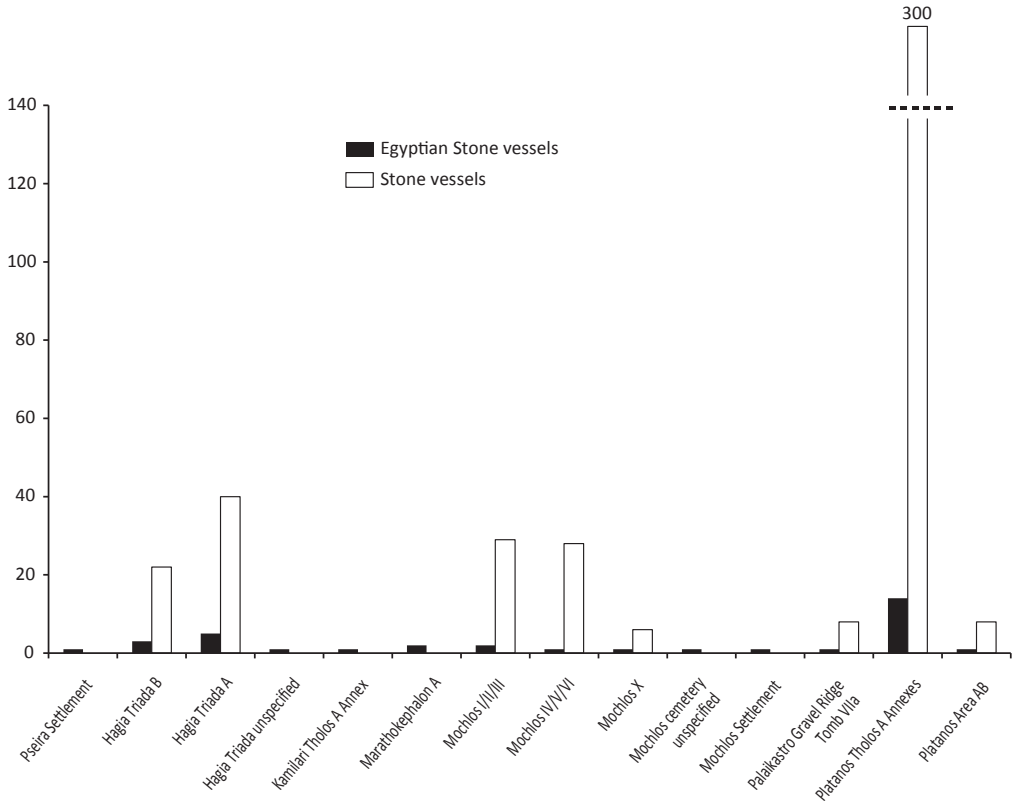

Figure 2.2: Number of stone vessels found in MM I tombs. Only tombs with Egyptian imitations included.

individuals; rather they seem to have been incorporated into existing local patterns of production and consumption. This may be explained in part by most of these items reaching the island after a long trip around the east Mediterranean and do not necessarily indicate direct links with Egypt. Available sailing techniques in MM I coupled with prevailing winds and currents make a direct trip from Egypt to Crete extremely difficult (Agouridis 1997). It is possible that Cretan populations chose to use certain items that were being traded across the Mediterranean because they fit in with existing consumption patterns, materials and ideological structures on the island (Legarra Herrero 2011a). These items may have lost many of their original meanings along the long chain of trade from their places of origin to Crete (Stein 1998), and were open to being imbued with new meanings by Cretan populations. While Crete may have opened up to new trade routes, it seems the Cretans were the ones choosing what kind of items to trade and that these were adapted to the local culture.

Without easily-recognisable elites, valuable exotica and clear emulation processes, change on Middle Bronze Age Crete is in need of new explanations. I have already mentioned that cemeteries underwent major transformations that encouraged social practices and group activities, and that new sealing systems seem to indicate regional community identities. Similar social trends can be traced in other newly-created social arenas, such as peak sanctuaries (Figure 2.3); open areas located on certain

Figure 2.3: Yuktas peak sanctuary (photograph by author).

mountain tops where ritual seems to have been open to large groups of people the large number of simple clay figurines that characterise their deposits (Nowicki 2008). This open social practice at peak sanctuaries would reinforce their role as geographical beacons for the establishment of group identity in the landscape (Peatfield 1987; Haggis 1999). The appearance of palatial buildings in central Crete, with their open courts, may well present similar new arenas for group ritual (Figure 2.4; Manning 2008).

Social dynamism on Middle Bronze Age Crete cannot be explained solely through the agency of a few, or the influence of external interactions. Changes seem to have been driven by large social groups that are emphasising new collective identities, such as co-residential communities in a new regional competitive framework. The main changes in the record do not refer to the appearance of distinctions but to the redefinition of significant social groups and identities, and the appearance of new regional arenas of interaction. While privileged individuals would have gained new social positions in this process, and it is most likely that in some large cemeteries certain small groups may have acquired greater importance (Legarra Herrero 2011b), there is no indication in the record that they were able to construct a new language

Figure 2.4: West court and west façade at Knossos palace (photograph by author).

of differentiation that set them apart from the rest of society, nor that they were the principal agents of change. Privileged individuals or successful groups would still find themselves torn between new opportunities and the continuing limitations set by the collective-oriented cultural context. The adherence to old traditions such as collective burials, may have been a key mechanism for wrapping change in a socially-acceptable language that may at the same time have set clear boundaries to intra-society differentiation dynamics.

And so the emphasis of study may be better focused on new group identities that brought advantages to large parts of the population, rather than on the rise of aggrandizers or leaders. This basic characterisation of Middle Bronze Age Crete leaves many questions unanswered. How did new social identities differ from older ones? What does this mean for the fluid relationship between influential individuals and the rest of the society? Why was there such an acute change at this point in Cretan history? Changing our approaches may not bring immediate answers, but it presents more pertinent questions to match the archaeological record.

A social history of the Mediterranean: Bringing in new paradigms

The collective nature of social change on Crete seems not have been a unique phenomenon. Authors have started to recognise such dynamics in other parts of the world (Blanton and Fargher 2008; Blanton 2010; Bernbeck 2012; Carballo, Roscoe, and Feinman 2012) as well as in the Mediterranean (Kolb 2005, 2012), and this implies that Crete could provide an extensively-investigated archaeological scenario that can facilitate our understanding of several other Mediterranean cultures in the Bronze Age.

On a purely archaeological level, monumental architecture attached to collective mortuary rituals on Crete has strong correlations in the central and west Mediterranean such as the temples of Malta (Malone and Stoddart 2009) and the communal Chalcolithic tombs in southeast Iberia (Lomba Maraundi, López Martínez, and Ramos Martínez 2009). The materialisation of group identity in the landscape through highly visible structures such as palaces finds parallels in Pre- and Nuraghic Sardinia (Blake 2002; Dyson and Rowland 2007; Russell 2010), Argaric Spain (Arribas Palau *et al.* 1974), and Talayotic Balearic Islands (Gili *et al.* 2006). Even in the more 'advanced' case of the southern Levant, central 'palaces' in early urban centres may not be the seat for powerful individuals but the focal point of a community (Greenberg 2011: 239), and these communities are increasingly being investigated from a collective point of view (Chesson 2003). Such large architectural programmes may indicate cases of conspicuous construction in which local group identities are reinforced at larger social scales as connectivity and interaction become more developed.

The dynamism that linked connectivity with constant social change was not necessarily solely the work of privileged individuals, aggrandizers or very clever individual agents; there were many other complex interactions between the different components of each culture, the outside influences, and the old histories and traditions that marked each Mediterranean population. The connected nature of the Mediterranean added to the range of strategies that social groups had at their disposal in the negotiation of social, economic and ideological identities. Connectivity does not reflect a meaningful activity *per se* but a constant reference point in the Mediterranean social landscape that is entangled in each cultural framework in a different manner. The development of connectivity by sea and land challenged social groups to enter new social scales of interaction. The development of the sail is not only important because it allows new products to travel, but also because it creates significant new links between social groups on a scale unknown before (Broodbank 2010). In the Bronze Age and Early Iron age, people were increasingly concerned not only with their immediate neighbours, but also with groups hundreds or even thousands of miles away. In these new circumstances, it is only natural that local groups needed to re-organise themselves to face these new challenges.

The way in which connectivity affected the basic cultural structure of populations and made it change can only be understood through a myriad of social identities, from gender to community, from individual practices to cultural identities, all overlapping in constant flow. In the particular case of the overuse of the notion of elites, an extreme focus on this type of social position means that the agency of the multiple social groups that form a culture, the practices by which they asserted and negotiated their agency, and the ways in which they shaped the development of social and ideological transformations are poorly understood. There are many cultural mechanisms in which the relational nature of power is negotiated. Heterarchy was one of the first approaches that highlighted alternative avenues of social interaction with regards to social change, and recent approaches to local agency and social networking are discovering new aspects of the complex relationship between interaction and change in the Mediterranean. Only when elites lose some of their privileged theoretical position and they are better located in relation to other social agents, the intricate connection in the Mediterranean between the materialisation of social identities, resource acquisition, travel, cultural interaction, settlement patterns, and ideological representations can be fully explored.

Conclusion

The sheer complexity of Mediterranean history will always thwart scholars' attempts at analysis. In our quest to draw even a simple sketch that alludes to that complexity, we find ourselves forced to resort to generalisations and theoretical shortcuts. The elite is a good example of the problems that arise when a useful term is applied without

a clear theoretical framework. The indiscriminate use of the term can lead it to lose much of its explanatory power and to misunderstandings of the inner workings of social organisation and change in the Mediterranean. To study the dynamism of the Bronze and Iron Age Mediterranean, a more encompassing social approach is needed, one that studies the complex relationship between elites, group agency, ideology and connectivity in a clearly defined cultural context and through precise definitions of the terms based on archaeological evidence.

The problem is not that by focusing on elites we are losing the crucial perspective of a social history; but that it is precisely the social depth of connectivity that makes the Mediterranean unique. Connectivity is so significant for Mediterranean studies because it permeates every stratum of society. The narrower the social focus of our approaches, the less exceptional the Mediterranean appears.

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