

## Alternative Pathways to Complexity in the Southern Aegean

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### Introduction

The most radical argument of *The Emergence of Civilisation* was that the development of the state was an endogenous process within the Aegean, and owed little or nothing to antecedents in the Eastern Mediterranean. By providing an alternative to the diffusionist assumptions of previous research, Aegean archaeologists, for the first time, had to engage explicitly with theories of early state formation. Regardless of how one debates the details, this is a fundamental and lasting legacy of the *Emergence*.

In this paper, I want to look critically at a group of assumptions which have generally not received explicit attention, but underlie the approach to the origin of the state as developed in the *Emergence*, and which I believe still dictate the agenda most Aegean archaeologists are working to (implicitly or explicitly), involving on the one hand pattern and on the other process.

In the Aegean in the Early Bronze Age (and indeed throughout the Bronze Age), the archaeological evidence is usually partitioned into a series of regional sub-divisions, specialized to the degree that researchers only rarely cross these intellectual boundaries or, when they do, have equal familiarity with the data from more than one region. However, to put together a multi-dimensional picture of Aegean societies in the third millennium BC, Colin Renfrew drew upon evidence from all over the region: settlement evidence from some areas (e.g., the mainland, northwest Anatolia), burial evidence from other areas (e.g., the Cyclades, Crete), evidence for fine craft-working (e.g., northwest Anatolia, Crete), etc.. This transcended the traditionally recognized specializations, and enabled him to assemble a picture of a pan-Aegean Early Bronze Age, so-called 'proto-urban' stage of development (Renfrew 1972: 49–53).

This process, and the approach to explaining Aegean cultural development which depended on this pan-Aegean reconstruction, embodied four assumptions:

- 1) that complexity emerged gradually;
- 2) that broadly comparable developments took place in different sub-regions of the Aegean;
- 3) that there was a uni-linear trajectory of development, representing one underlying set of processes; and
- 4) these processes were essentially presented as natural, which implied that areas which failed to follow this trajectory – to develop greater social complexity – were the exceptions.

Considering problems of pattern, at the time Renfrew was writing, one could not rule out that the differences perceived between regions were largely the result of investigation biases, given that most research in the Aegean had focused on the later palatial phases of the Bronze Age. However, 30 years of further intensive research, largely focused by the challenge of the *Emergence*, have only served to document these differences in ever greater detail. While there are areas of close cultural contact, such as Attica, Euboea, Kythera, and north Crete, the various sub-regions can still be studied as distinct entities, as embodied, for example, in the recent series of geographically-defined 'Reviews of Aegean Prehistory' (Cullen 2001).

These differences in pattern have serious implications for our understanding of process, since they make it difficult to maintain that similar processes of cultural development were at work in the different areas. However, the partitioning of the region still tends to inhibit comparative research, such that it is rarely asked how societies or communities in adjacent regions differed from each other, what this tells us about them, and what it tells us about the processes whereby the earliest states in the Aegean emerged at the end of the Early Bronze Age, and only in Crete.

In arguing for similar processes of developing complexity throughout the region, the fact that states developed early in the second millennium only on Crete, was an anomaly which had to be explained by Renfrew by disruptions of or constraints on the similar trajectories anticipated for the other sub-regions (1972: 116, 255–64, 477). In this view, it was the relative isolation of Crete (and its extensive inland areas) which allowed it to develop, while regions such as the mainland and the Cyclades suffered disruptions of various kinds (Caskey 1960; 1964; Warren 1975; Cadogan 1986; Wiencke 1989; Forsén 1992; Doumas 1988; Manning 1994; 1997).

John Cherry initiated a challenge to one of these assumptions, with his advocacy of a revolutionary, rather than gradualist evolutionary model (1983; 1984; 1986), but at the end of the day, the EB III lacunae throughout the Aegean were a stumbling block – the available data were not sufficient to distinguish between the evolutionist or revolutionist alternatives. This challenge, therefore, was reduced to empirical problems of chronology and timescale (e.g., Cherry 1986: 44–45; Manning 1995: 33–34) – we had too few closed stratified contexts, and so had difficulty ascertaining the nature and pace of change.

What was not challenged was the assumed uni-lineal framework of expectations. This is the model which I think most Aegeanists are still struggling to force the data to fit, as embodied in models which have been developed in criticism or modification of the *Emergence*, and are themselves presented as of Aegean-wide relevance (e.g., Gilman 1981; 1991; Halstead 1981; 1988 (though see 1994); van Andel and Runnels 1988; Sherratt 1993; Sherratt and Sherratt 1991).

Comparisons between the patterns of development in the different areas, which would be instrumental in identifying different patterns of change and highlight the need for different models for the processes of change, are difficult to make. This is, first, because of the degree of regional specialization in Aegean studies, already noted. But this is exacerbated where, because of the character of different regional archaeological records, one is trying to compare inferred characteristics of societies based on different types of material behaviours – for instance, inferences about social organization principally based on a burial record from one area (e.g., the Cyclades) and a settlement record from a neighbouring area (e.g., the southern mainland).

Further complications, however, are both theoretical and methodological, and are caused by the abstractness of the theories we attempt to apply to the data, and significant problems of the middle range – how we interpret specific characteristics of the archaeological record. Here, I want to try to side-step these last difficulties, not to imply that they are not important, but, through a largely empirical exploration, to explore directly the issues of pattern and process. I want to make the basic point that it is time we recognize explicitly the homogenizing assumptions of the *Emergence* model, and begin to explore alternative perspectives which are more oriented to recognizing difference, contingency and agent-centred dynamics in the emergence of complex societies in the Aegean.

Recognizing the problems of comparison noted above, I will focus particularly on evidence from Crete – where we can, by and large, compare similar sorts of evidence from different sites – and see whether it conforms to the uni-lineal model that was implicit in Renfrew's work, and in most of what has been written about Minoan state formation in the succeeding three decades.

### **Investigating Social Development in Prepalatial Crete**

Crete was relatively isolated from the rest of the Aegean during the third millennium, though this picture changed in the second millennium, when Minoan cultural influence spread throughout the southern Aegean. While a certain degree of regionalism has increasingly been recognized in Cretan material culture and patterns of behaviour in the Prepalatial period (Branigan 1974: 127–30; Andreou 1978; Betancourt *et al.* 1979; Walberg 1983; Betancourt 1984; Cadogan 1994; 1995; Wilson and Day 1994; Whitelaw *et al.* 1997; Day *et al.* 1998; Kiriati *et al.* 2000; Sbonias 1999; 2000; Schoep 1999b; Bevan 2001), we can legitimately speak of a

common culture area, and the evidence for extensive exchange indicates a relatively high degree of communication and shared ideas throughout the island.

Unfortunately, the *Emergence* was slightly premature for assessing the nature of Early Minoan society: Keith Branigan's synthesis of the evidence from the Mesara tombs had just been published (Branigan 1970a; also 1970b), while Peter Warren's publication of his excavations at Myrtos Fournou Korifi (Warren 1972), as well as John Evans' summary of his excavation of the West Court House at Knossos (Evans 1972), came out in the same year as the *Emergence*. The discussion of the Early Minoan evidence in the *Emergence* was also complicated by what has proven to be a non-issue (Renfrew 1972: 84–98): EMIII is a significant period of time, and witnessed important developments on the island (Cadogan 1986; Momigliano 1991; 2000; Haggis 1999; Watrous 2001).

Two decades ago, I tried to pull some of this post-*Emergence* information together, highlighting significant differences among the better understood Prepalatial communities on the island, and suggesting that an understanding of the nature of these differences would be essential to understanding the processes involved in the development of social complexity and the emergence of the state on the island, soon after 2000 BC (Whitelaw 1983). I was, in fact, trying to argue against an even more basic model which saw sites such as Vasiliki and Fournou Korifi as precursors of the later palaces (Hutchinson 1962: 145; Branigan 1970b: 44–49; 1975). Given that small rural communities usually co-exist alongside the most complex urban centres, there was no reason why one should expect a site such as Fournou Korifi to represent a microcosm of the later palaces (e.g., Warren 1972: 260–61; 1983: 266; 1987: 49–50).

To a significant degree, such special pleading was a consequence of advocating an endogenous origin for the Aegean states. Given the relatively poor documentation of the EB III period throughout the Aegean, to see a local origin for the Middle Bronze Age palace-centred societies of Crete, one had to get a running start in the EB II period – so EB II evidence tended to be interpreted with a great deal of hindsight, which itself often encourages teleological assumptions.

But, despite focusing on differences, in 1983 I was still working to a uni-linear model: my community size estimates situated the farmsteads represented by some of the Mesara tombs, the egalitarian hamlet of Fournou Korifi, the stratified village of Mochlos, and the nascent state of Knossos, along a continuum of social complexity as well as size. While I was documenting diversity among contemporary sites, which might also represent different components of a settlement hierarchy, these could also be imagined to represent a developmental trajectory, in a time-honoured tradition of anthropological and archaeological theorizing.

### **Inter-site Comparisons in Prepalatial Crete**

Another couple of decades on, recent publications of both old and new

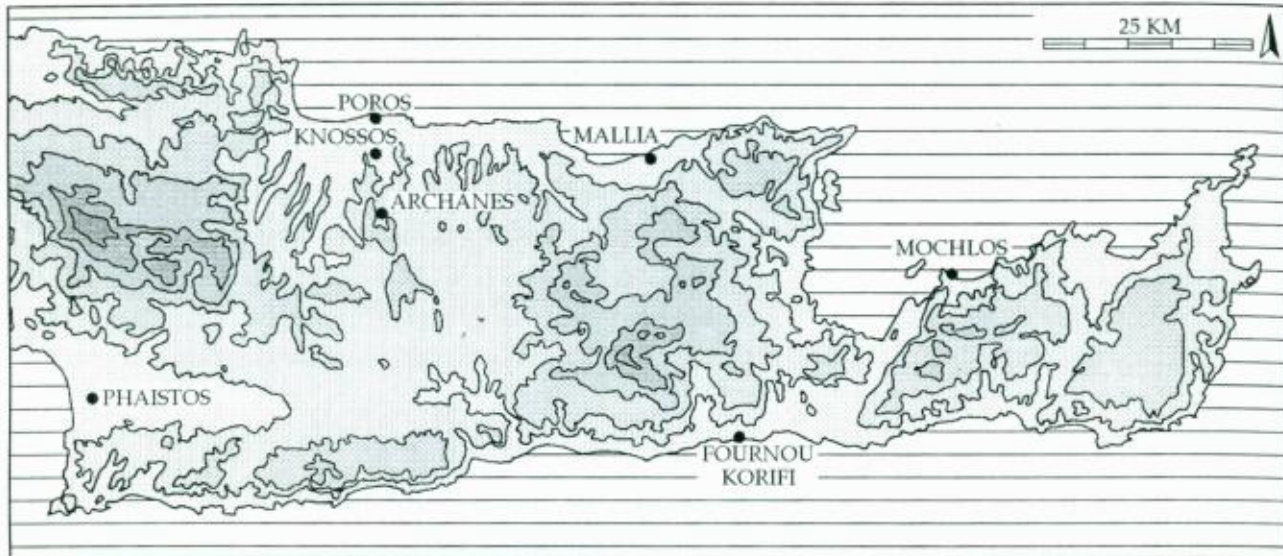


Figure 13.1. Crete with principal sites discussed

investigations at a number of Cretan sites now provide an opportunity to wrestle more effectively with some of this diversity in pattern, in a way which I think allows us both to reflect on and to build on the understanding of processes outlined in the *Emergence* (Figure 13.1).

Turning first to Fournou Korifi, the work I have been doing with various colleagues on the ceramics (e.g., Whitelaw *et al.* 1997) has demonstrated that, while ceramic production at even such small hamlets was specialized, and exchange relations were extensive, there is no evidence that either production or distribution was centrally organized, and there is no evidence for redistribution at that local scale.

Turning next to Mochlos, the study and republication of the tombs excavated early this century (Soles 1992), and renewed excavations both in the cemetery and the town (Soles and Davaras 1992), are providing significant new evidence about the Prepalatial community. Within the cemetery, the largest and most elaborate tombs occupy key locations, defined by the routes of access across the slope, determined by rock outcrops. Tombs IV–VI, at the upper end of the cemetery, are particularly elaborately constructed, and have a unique paved area and system of platforms, which would appear to have been the focal point for the entire cemetery. Differences in tomb size, elaboration and offerings suggest systematic and sustained differences in wealth between burying groups – the earliest evidence for social stratification in Crete (Whitelaw 1983; Soles 1988; 1992). The phases of use of the different tombs indicate a boom in wealth consumption at the site in the later Prepalatial period, with a sharp decline afterwards (Soles 1978; 1992; Soles and Davaras 1992: 417, 420–28), at about the time that the first major palaces were being constructed elsewhere in Crete (Figure 13.2).

Mallia, also situated on the north coast, has recently been receiving over-due attention, because of the wealth of contexts preserved from the Protopalatial

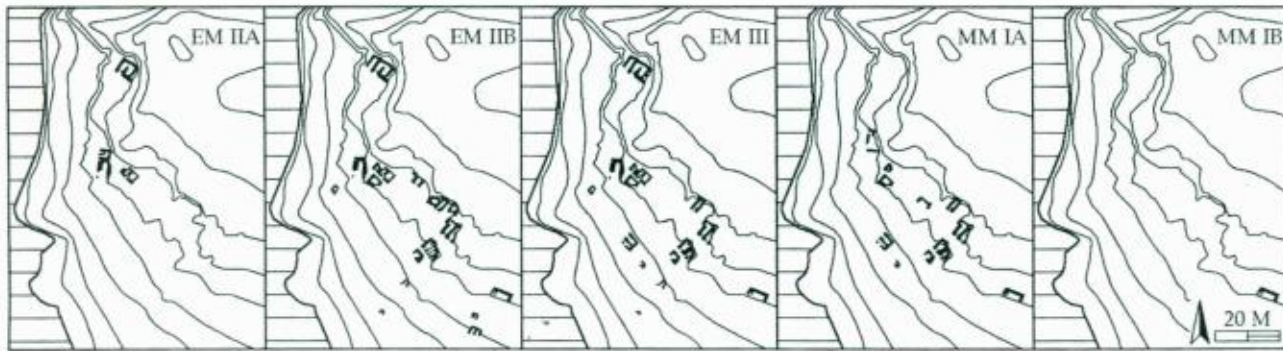


Figure 13.2. Evidence for the use of tombs within the cemetery at Mochlos

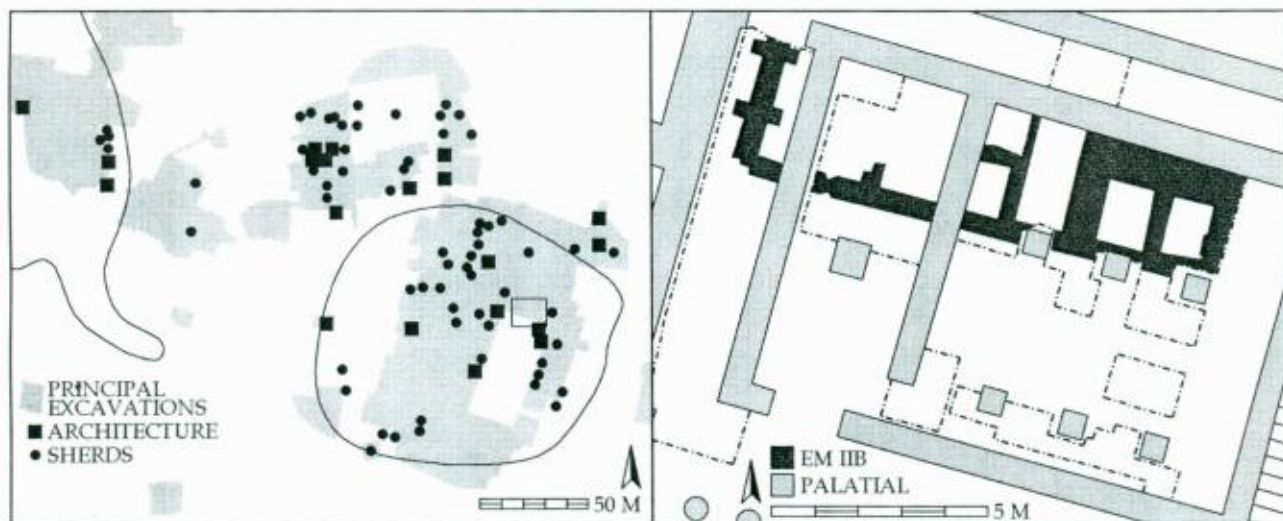


Figure 13.3. Early Minoan Mallia: deposits and detail of structure at core of site

period (van Effenterre 1980a; 1980b; Poursat 1983; 1988; Knappett 1999; Schoep 2002a), though the Prepalatial evidence from that site, one of those which emerged as a major palatial centre early in the second millennium, also has begun to be reassessed (van Effenterre 1980a; Pelon 1987). Soundings beneath the later town indicate the existence of a sizeable community by the middle of the Prepalatial period (Figure 13.3; van Effenterre 1980a: 83–94; Whitelaw 1983: 338–39; Pelon 1989; 1991; 1993; Poursat and Darque 1990; Farnoux 1989; 1990; Baurain and Darque 1993). Directly under the later palace structure, a carefully laid-out building has been partially revealed, leading to suggestions that it might represent an EM IIB fore-runner of the later palace (Pelon 1993; Schoep 1999a).

In the cemetery, the use of individual tombs again allows us to recognize distinctions between social groups, with a restricted number of burials in elaborate built ossuaries, while many others were simply placed in crevices in the rock (Demargne 1945; van Effenterre and van Effenterre 1963; Olivier and McGeorge 1977; van Effenterre 1980a: 229–52; Baurain 1987; de Pierpont 1987; Soles 1988; 1992). In contrast to the situation at Mochlos, burial facilities at Mallia continue to become more elaborate throughout the later Prepalatial period, culminating in

the construction of a monumental tomb, the Chrysolakkos, at about the same time as the first monumental palace structure (Figure 13.4). The architecture and the finds that survived earlier looting justify viewing this as the tomb of the palatial elite of the early Mallia state (Demargne 1945; Shaw 1973; van Effenterre 1980a: 241–47; de Pierpont 1987).

The Prepalatial community at Mallia was much more extensive than that at Mochlos, and the community continued to expand through the early second millennium (van Effenterre 1980a: 155–228; Müller 1990; 1991; 1992; 1997; Schoep 2002a). The development of Mallia into a palatial centre, the focal community of a regional state (Cadogan 1995; Knappett 1999; Schoep 2002a), is in direct contrast with the decline of the community at Mochlos, despite the parallels in development at these two north coast communities earlier in the Prepalatial period.

The most apparent difference between the two sites lies in their immediate hinterlands (Figure 13.5). Mallia is situated on a broad coastal plain, one of the finest agricultural areas of northern Crete, where intensive survey has identified numerous sites of the late Prepalatial and Protopalatial periods (Müller 1996; 1998; Müller Celka 2002). Mochlos, on the other hand, appears to have been oriented toward the sea, with much more limited agricultural potential in its immediate hinterland. These two sites reveal dramatic differences in their patterns of development – but what does this empirical difference in patterns suggest about the processes involved?

### Trading Sites and the ‘International Spirit’

Following relative isolation in the Neolithic period, evidence from several north coast communities documents the development of extensive exchange relations with communities in the Cyclades and the mainland, during the first half of the Prepalatial period (Renfrew 1964; Stucynski 1982; Rutter and Zerner 1983; Warren 1984; Branigan 1991; Karantzali 1996; Dimopoulou 1997; Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997; Day *et al.* 1998; Carter 1998; Papadatos 1999; Wilson *et al.* in press). Extensive contacts are represented by distinctive Cycladic imports, and particularly Cycladic raw materials (Figure 13.6), such as obsidian (Torrence 1986; Carter 1998), copper (Stos-Gale 1993; 1998; 2001; Betancourt *et al.* 1999), and lead and silver (Stos-Gale 1985).

By the middle of the Prepalatial period, when Mochlos really takes off, Cycladic finished artefacts appear to be declining in popularity (Stucynski 1982; Wilson 1994: 39–41; Karantzali 1996; Papadatos 1999), but raw materials such as obsidian and copper continued to be imported. While such materials did find their way to even quite small hamlets, such as Fournou Korifi, there is a significant decline in quantity with distance from the north coast, and coastal sites such as Mochlos are likely to have been acting as points of access for raw materials, and also as local centres for specialized craft production – such as bronze-working,

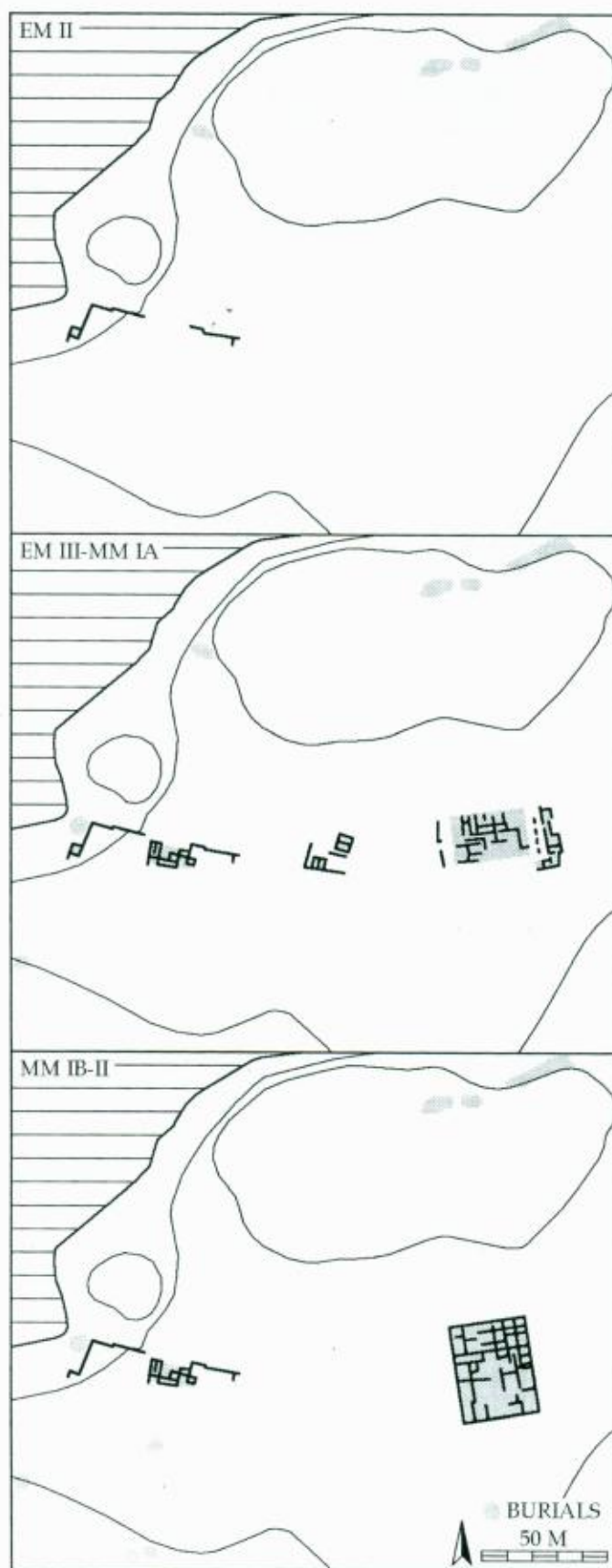


Figure 13.4. Evidence for the use of tombs within the cemetery at Mallia



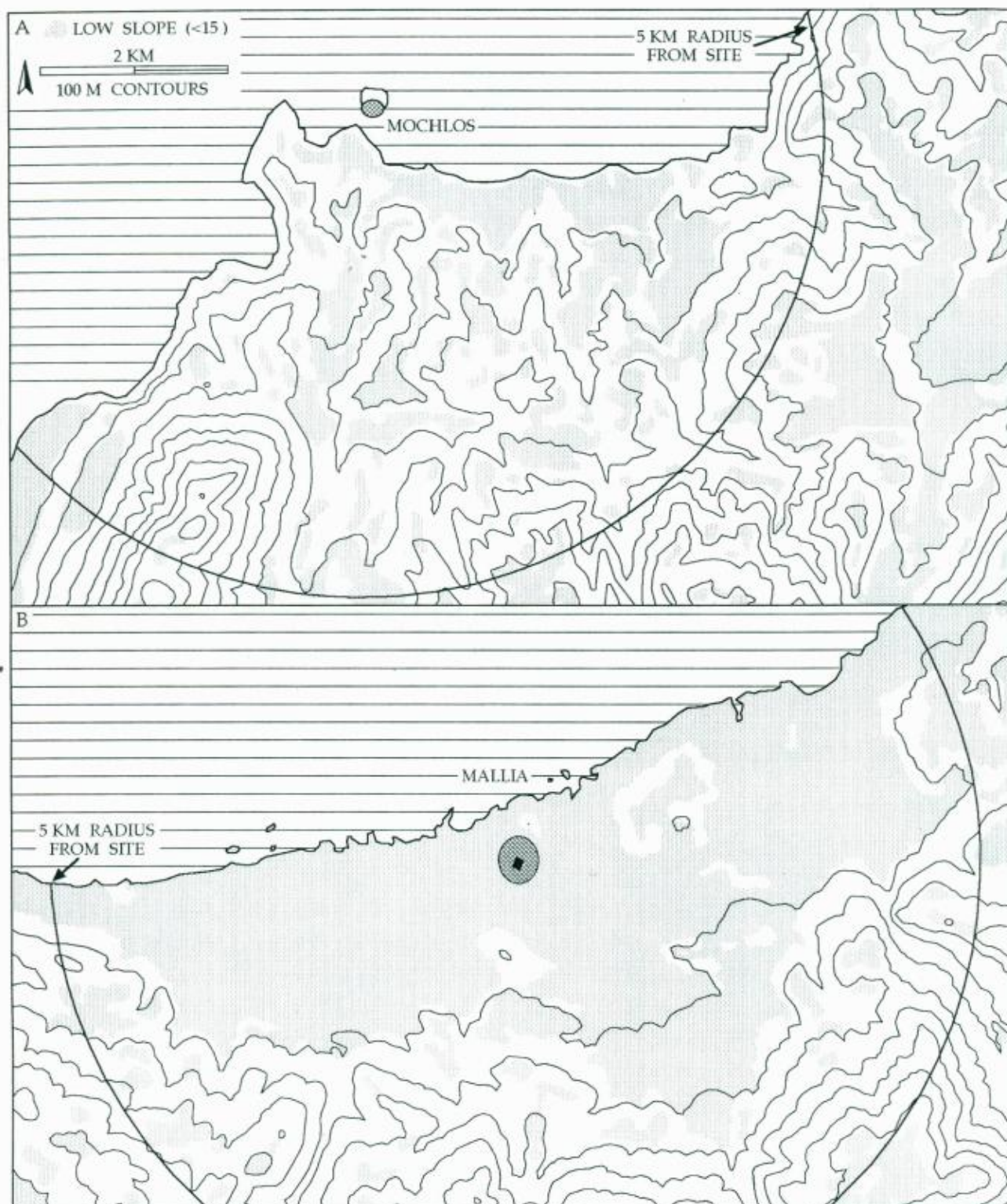


Figure 13.5. Agricultural suitability of the coastal plains at Mallia and Mochlos

gold-working and stone vase production (Warren 1965: 28–36; Branigan 1991; Betancourt *et al.* 1999; Bevan 2001).

This pattern is paralleled, in the middle of the third millennium, by the emergence of a small number of relatively large sites in the Cyclades, at



Figure 13.6. Sources of imports into Prepalatial Crete

demographic and communication nodes. It has been argued plausibly by Cyprian Broodbank that the wealth and exotica documented at such sites provide evidence for the operation of a prestige goods system, structured around trading networks (Broodbank 1989; 1993; 2000a; 2000b). The evidence from Mochlos suggests that it, and perhaps other Cretan north coast communities (such as Poros: Dimopoulou 1997; Wilson *et al.* in press), may have developed in a similar way, acting as channels for the movement of raw materials and finished prestige goods south into Crete, initially from the Cyclades (Broodbank 2000a: 306–09), but by the later Prepalatial period (MMIA), also including rare imports from the East Mediterranean such as Egyptian stone vessels (Warren 1969: 105–15; 1995; Bevan 2001), scarabs (Yule 1983; 1988; Pini 1989; 2000; Phillips 1996), Near Eastern cylinder seals (Strom 1980; Møller 1980; Davaras and Soles 1995; Aruz 1995), and ivory (Krzyszkowska 1989).

While quantified evidence is not yet available for Cretan sites, an idea of the potential of such exchange systems to establish and maintain differentials between

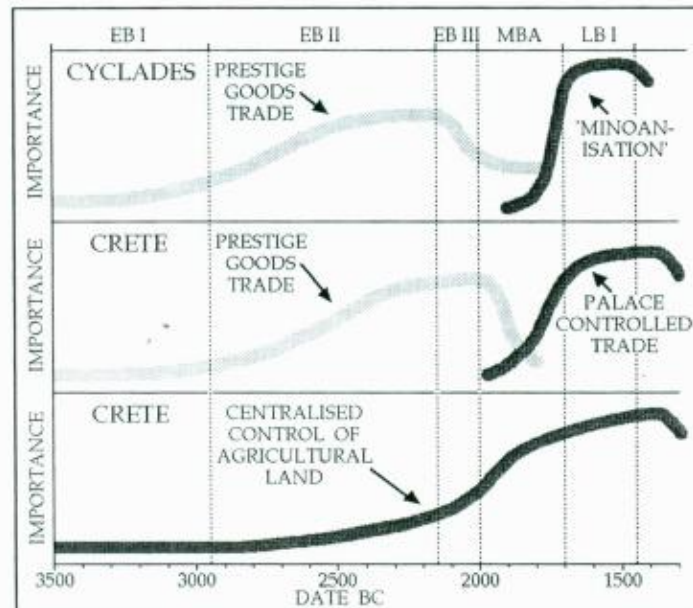


Figure 13.7. *Alternative bases for power in Crete and the Cyclades*

communities can be seen from Mochlos and Fournou Korifi, only some 30 km apart on the north and south coasts, respectively. Only 181 pieces of obsidian were recovered from the near complete excavation of the settlement at Fournou Korifi (Jarman 1972), while deposits of hundreds of blades and cores have been noted within the cemetery at Mochlos (Soles and Davaras 1992). Similarly, fragments of only three stone vessels were recovered at Fournou Korifi (Warren 1972: 236–37), as against hundreds recovered from the Mochlos tombs (Seager 1912). While the depositional contexts at each site are different (settlement versus tomb), the contrasts are so gross as to merit attention.

While these networks collapsed (or were transformed: Broodbank 2000a: 320–61) in the Cyclades, Mochlos seems to have continued to maintain its position to the end of the millennium, probably sustained by the local Cretan demand for off-island raw materials, particularly metals (Figure 13.7). Remarkably, though perhaps an index of our uni-linear expectations, the subsequent decline of this site has received little comment (Seager 1909; Soles 1978: 11; Branigan 1991; though see now Soles and Davaras 1992: 417, 426–28).

### **An Agriculturally-Based Alternative?**

An alternative pattern of development, already noted at Mallia, can be more clearly documented at the site of Knossos. While also near the north coast, the site is several kilometres inland, relatively distant from the sea, but central to one of the richest agricultural regions of the island. It was to develop into the largest prehistoric site in the Aegean, reaching nearly three quarters of a square kilometre in the middle of the second millennium BC (Whitelaw 2000; in press). As the

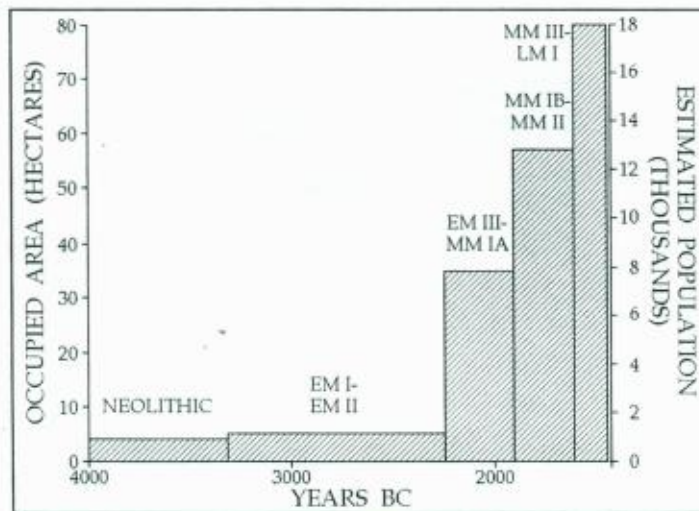


Figure 13.8. Estimated population growth at prehistoric Knossos



Figure 13.9. Early Minoan Knossos: deposits and detail of structure at core of site

result of a century of intensive investigation, we can chart its growth more precisely than we can for Mallia, and it is now clear that it grew phenomenally in the late Prepalatial period, just prior to the construction of the first palace in MM IB (Figure 13.8).

As with Mallia, at the core of the site, adjacent to and under the later palace, there were significant structures dating to the middle (Evans 1972; Wilson 1985) and late Prepalatial (Peatfield 1988; Wilson 1994: 38; MacGillivray 1994: 49) periods, which were erected and rebuilt in the context of major terracing operations, themselves denoting considerable power by an organizing authority (Figure 13.9). These constructions represent the first manifestation of the elites who, soon after 2000 BC, began construction of a palace which was to be adapted and expanded throughout the next six centuries.

At Mallia and Knossos, in contrast to Mochlos (and the Cycladic sites), we can see a process of accelerating growth and increasing complexity beyond the end of the third millennium, culminating in the formation of palace-centred regional polities. However, to date, these different patterns in settlement development in the middle and late Prepalatial periods have been linked together into a single trajectory, with the prestige goods elite model being seen as ancestral to the emergence of the Minoan state (e.g., Van Andel and Runnels 1988; Branigan 1988; 1995; Manning 1994; 1997; Haggis 1999), as anticipated by the *Emergence*.

Yet, as the written documents from the Later Bronze Age from both Crete and mainland Greece indicate, the large-scale palace systems of the Middle and Late Bronze Age were based on the centralized control of agricultural production and agricultural land. According to the uni-lineal model, a trade-based system such as can be argued for some sites in the Cyclades, and for sites such as Mochlos on Crete, somehow developed (or in the case of the Cyclades, would have developed) into the agriculturally-based palace states centred at sites like Mallia and Knossos. However, when one looks at specific sites, such as Mochlos, it is clear that they did not. The relatively small scale and inherent instability of the prestige-goods, trade-based, coastal communities of the mid-third millennium do not appear to provide adequate antecedents for the later urban-centred palace states. Indeed, the parallel development during the middle Prepalatial of another large centre at the later palatial site of Phaistos (Whitelaw 1983; Watrous *et al.* 1993; Carinci 2000), in an inland location in the southern Mesara plain, seems to separate the two patterns of development entirely. The growth of these agriculturally-based sites is contemporary with, but independent of, the development of the trade-based communities – they appear to be parallel rather than sequential processes. This distinction may be most clearly embodied in the contrasts in the mid-Prepalatial evidence from Knossos and neighbouring Poros (Dimopoulou 1997; Wilson *et al.* in press).

I would suggest that what we are seeing is the eclipse of the early trading communities, in the face of a new, much larger-scale and much more effectively expansionist type of polity, with power rooted firmly in control over agricultural production and surpluses. At the moment, we cannot actually chart the development of the regional systems associated with the expanding, eventually palatial, centres, though the surveys in the Mallia coastal plain and the West Mesara promise to give us just such information (Müller 1996; 1998; Müller Celka 2000; Watrous *et al.* 1993). However, even existing data (Blackman and Branigan 1975; 1977; Hope Simpson *et al.* 1995; Vasilakis 1989–90) suggest the development of a small-scale regional settlement system around Phaistos in the middle Prepalatial, a picture supported by the preliminary reports on the West Mesara survey.

Consideration of one final site can perhaps nuance this picture of two parallel, or perhaps even competing, processes. Data from the remarkable cemetery complex of Phourni at Archanes indicate that, early in the Prepalatial period, the

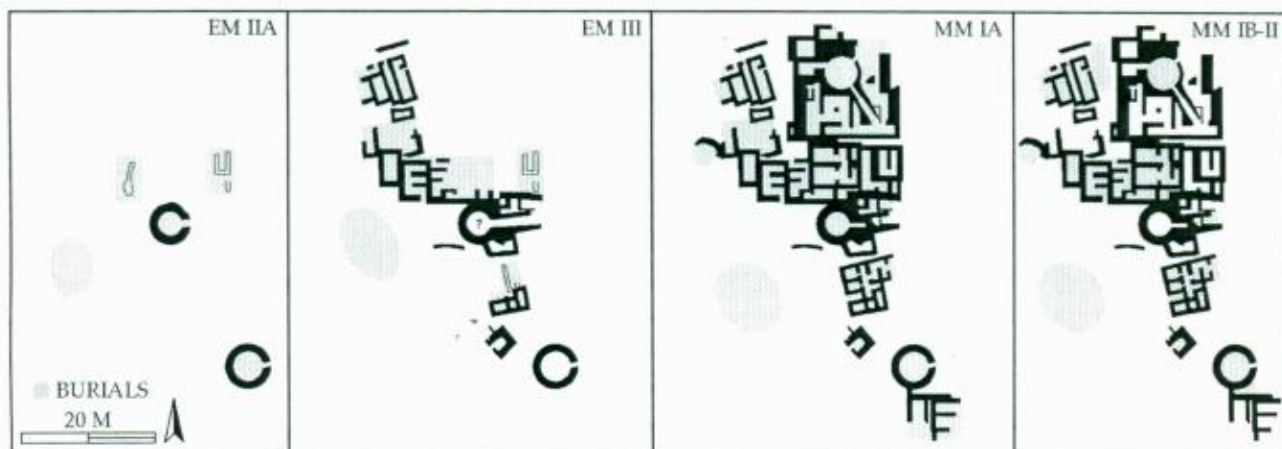


Figure 13.10. Evidence for the use of tombs within the cemetery at Archanes: Phourni

site was well provided with raw materials and material culture from the Cyclades (Sakellarakis 1977; Sakellarakis and Sapouna-Sakellarakis 1997), and may have acted as a point of distribution for such material further south, over the watershed to southern Crete (Carter 1998; Papadatos 1999).

In the middle of the Prepalatial period, strangely, there is no evidence that the cemetery was in use, and this must represent a disruption of some kind in the previous patterns of behaviour. Burials resume in the later Prepalatial period, with rapid expansion in the number of tombs constructed and in use, followed by a cessation of new construction in the Protopalatial period (Figure 13.10). The intensification of use of the cemetery in the late Prepalatial period saw multiple phases of expansion of the main tomb complexes, including the dismantling of one tomb (Building 7) and its complete replacement by another (Tholos B). This otherwise unprecedented behaviour implies intense competition between burying groups within the community, probably as the site was developing as a regional centre (see also Maggidis 1998; Sbonias 1999; Karytinis 2000).

The cessation of expansion at the Phourni cemetery coincides with the end of the Prepalatial period, when calculations of the area necessary to support the rapidly expanding population of Knossos indicate that Archanes would almost certainly have become incorporated into the sphere of influence of the emerging palatial centre to the north.

What I suggest we can see in the episodic development of the Phourni complex, is the instability of the early exchange-based power structures, and the subsequent growth of an agriculturally-based, local centre. This process involved intense competition between land-holding groups within the community, expressed through mortuary aggrandisement. This local competition was eventually curtailed when the community was incorporated within the regional network of the neighbouring site of Knossos, whose inhabitants had embarked on an agriculturally-based trajectory of growth centuries earlier, in the early Prepalatial period.

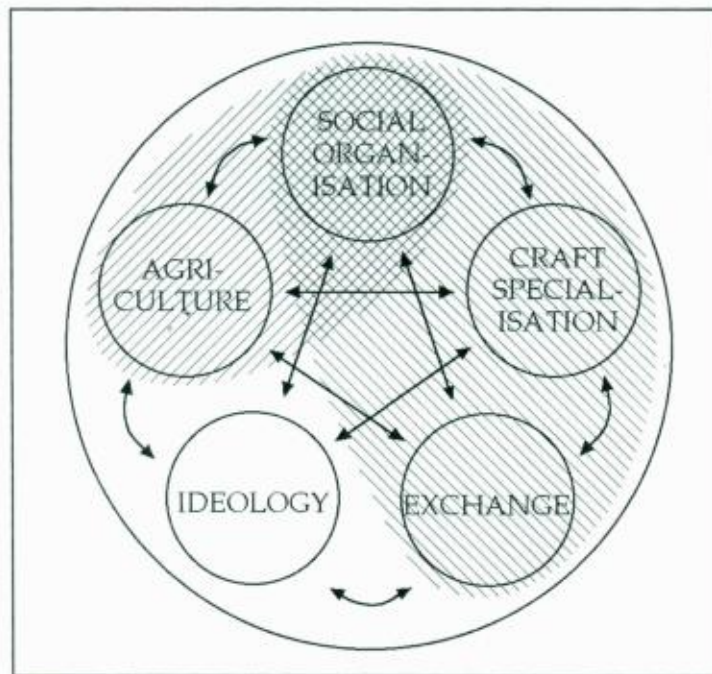


Figure 13.11. Renfrew's cultural sub-systems and principal feedback linkages during the Prepalatial Aegean

### Conclusions: Multiple Patterns, Processes, and Perspectives

In defining his systemic perspective for the emergence of the state in the Aegean, Renfrew emphasized the inter-connectedness of various processes, though in illustration he outlined two specific positive feedback loops, on which most subsequent debate has focussed (Figure 13.11; 1972: 479–504). One of these was based in the development of bronze metallurgy, craft specialization, and exchange systems, while the other was based in diversification and specialization in agriculture, linked to the domestication of the olive and the vine – an agricultural intensification model. Research since then has considerably modified our understanding of each set of processes, but what I would like to suggest is that what the data are indicating, whether we compare evidence between regions such as Crete and the Cyclades, or even, as I have done here, compare sites in detail within one of those cultural systems, is that these are, actually, two distinct social dynamics. They may often inter-link, but such articulation itself will be a variable and dynamic process.

In the three decades since the publication of the *Emergence*, various models have been proposed as challenges to, or modifications of the *Emergence* model, but in each case they have aimed to replace one general model, applicable throughout the southern Aegean, with another, equally broadly applicable. This largely empirical comparison between patterns of development at different Cretan Prepalatial sites, suggests that we need explicitly to consider multi-lineal trajectories of social development, and recognize that there were multiple

pathways to complexity in the prehistoric southern Aegean. Stepping back from this specific case and looking more widely at communities in the Early Bronze Age around the Aegean, leads me to ask whether there might not be other pathways as well. Unfortunately, in most cases, we as yet lack the detailed data necessary to conduct the sort of controlled comparison which I have pursued here for Crete.

However, we also need to analyse and interpret our data in ways which allow us to recognize differences, and challenge us to try to explain them. What I hope I have been able to do in this paper, is to suggest how such an approach, based in detailed comparison of individual site characteristics and histories, can contribute to the analysis and interpretation of cultural difference and change, and help us to appreciate and encourage us to try to understand differences in both pattern and process. While adopting this approach to advance a fairly simple argument, I would also suggest that the approach has considerable advantages over debates between theories which, on theoretical and methodological grounds, can only weakly be grounded to the existing data.

Three decades ago, in the *Emergence of Civilisation*, Colin Renfrew defined a question and a research agenda which we are still trying to address today. The integrating comparative perspective which he initiated was essential to introduce a processual perspective on the question of the emergence of complex societies in the prehistoric Aegean. Likewise, the systemic framework he espoused is as valid now as it was essential then. Three decades on, building on each of these perspectives, I think both the Aegean data, and models of social change which are being explored elsewhere in archaeology, demand that we think about this issue more pluralistically, as various recently published papers (e.g., Bevan 2001; Broodbank 2000b; Carter 1998; Dabney 1995; Dabney and Wright 1990; Day and Wilson 2002; Day and Relaki 2002; Haggis 2002; Hamilakis 1996; 2002; Karytinos 2000; Knappett 1999; 2002; Knappett and Schoep 2000; Maggidis 1998; Sbonias 1999; 2000; Schoep 1999b; 2001; 2002a; 2002b; Voutsaki 1997; Whitelaw *et al.* 1997), and others at this Round Table indeed illustrate.

One could argue that a multi-lineal perspective, as advocated here, is implicit in much recent work. However, the actual tendency has been to try to replace one monolithic theory (which a systemic approach was originally designed to try to avoid), with another. This assumes that the various complex societies we are trying to understand in the Aegean basin were at least structurally comparable to each other, and that their pattern of development was also similar. This is currently being provocatively and productively questioned for Protopalatial Crete (e.g., Knappett 1999; Schoep 2001; 2002a; Tsipopoulou 2002), though the degree to which the perceived differences between polities represent past behaviour, rather than data biases, still needs consideration.

Looking positively at this often antagonistic situation, structural similarity between contexts has been assumed rather than demonstrated, and many of the models which have been put forward as competing alternatives, may be more or



less relevant to different cases – in different times and places within the prehistoric Aegean. Recognizing diversity in the patterns we are trying to explain may help us to identify the specific models which are most relevant to particular cases, while not insisting that they must be relevant to all other cases as well. In such a manner, we can build on the insights of the *Emergence*, without either being bound to its assumptions or its conclusions.

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