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# INTERWEAVING WORLDS

Systemic Interactions in Eurasia, 7th to 1st Millennia BC

*Papers from a conference  
in memory of Professor Andrew Sherratt*

What *Would* a Bronze Age World System Look Like?  
World systems approaches to Europe and western Asia 4th to 1st millennia BC

*Editors*

Toby C. Wilkinson, Susan Sherratt and John Bennet

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# CONTRIBUTORS

**Nils Anfinset**

University of Bergen

**Alexander A. Bauer**

City University of New York

**Christoph Bachhuber**

British Institute at Ankara

**Philippe Beaujard**

CNRS

**John Bennet**

University of Sheffield

**Cyprian Broodbank**

University College London

**Avraham Faust**

Bar-Ilan University

**Roxanna Flammini**

Pontifical Catholic University of Argentina  
CONICET

**Dorian Q Fuller**

University College London

**Irene Good**

Harvard University

**Raphael Greenberg**

Tel Aviv University

**Paul Halstead**

University of Sheffield

**Valasia Isaakidou**

University of Sheffield

**Philip L. Kohl**

Wellesley College

**Kristian Kristiansen**

University of Gothenburg

**Borja Legarra Herrero**

University of Leicester

**Joseph Maran**

University of Heidelberg

**Christopher M. Monroe**

Cornell University

**Lorenz Rahmstorf**

University of Mainz

**Michael Rowlands**

University College London

**Jane Schneider**

City University of New York

**Susan Sherratt**

University of Sheffield

**David A. Warburton**

University of Lyon

**Ehud Weiss**

Bar-Ilan University

**David Wengrow**

University College London

**Toby C. Wilkinson**

University of Sheffield

**Norman Yoffee**

University of Nevada



Archaeologist, Teacher, Friend.  
Professor Andrew G. Sherratt, 1946–2006.

21.

## Lost in Translation: the Emergence of Mycenaean Culture as a Phenomenon of Glocalization

*Joseph Maran*

For Andrew Sherratt, a friend and outstanding scholar. It is a privilege to have known him and learned from him.

*To be of use in archaeology, World-Systems theory has to take into consideration that neither a universally applicable notion of economical interest can be presumed to exist, nor can it be taken for granted that our geographically oriented, seemingly objective perception of the 'world' had any meaning in later prehistory. Views of the world are always 'Weltbilder', that is ideologically charged constructs emerging and changing through contacts and the assignment of meaning by those participating in the exchange. The emphasis on 'exploitation' and 'dependency' in World-Systems theory neglects the agency of the members of a 'peripheral' society in influencing the mechanisms of contact with the centre, but also in shaping the way in which the latter should be conceived. In focussing on the emergence of Mycenaean culture, this paper discusses why, in spite of the strong impact of Minoan Crete on the incipient Mycenaean culture, the outcome of the intercultural contact on the Greek Mainland proved to be so different from any Cretan 'prototypes'. It argues that the essentialist position implying an inherent difference between Mainlanders and Cretans is flawed, and that instead the differences are rooted in the particular perception which the Mainland elites had of their Cretan counterparts, and in the interpretation and translation of objects deriving from Crete into a new cultural system of references.*

World-Systems Theory, as it was originally formulated, tends to focus on processes of the economic and political macro-level by putting an emphasis on factors like dependency, exploitation, economic interest and capital accumulation which are identified as the driving force behind the formation of the modern world-system. Often, the impression arises that like in a scientific law the mere existence of a centre and its demand for raw materials is sufficient to explain changes in the periphery (Kümmel 2001, 100–102, 107–116). But it seems to me that the reasons why world-systems emerge are far from self-evident and need a careful examination. Although attaching the labels 'centre' and 'periphery' at first sight seems to achieve clarity, it can actually deflect from the particular constellation of factors involved in a case of intercultural contact and disguise the importance of

the agency of the members of societies in what is called a periphery, as was emphasized in the last years by scholars critically assessing the archaeological applicability of World-Systems Theory (A. Sherratt 2004, 94). In using the 'Uruk World System' as an example, Gil Stein (1999, 55–64) has demonstrated that, as we move back into the past, the political and military infrastructure of a centre would have been less and less able to exploit and effectively control its periphery. The actually existing differences in power between centre and periphery, Stein argues, were neutralized by the factor of distance, and that is why he proposes a 'distance-parity-model' to describe the relation between Uruk and its northern trade partners. Another point of criticism was raised by Michael Dietler (1998, 299–301), who argued that applications of World Systems Theory do not usually address



the issue of what, besides economic factors, may have been the motive of peripheral societies for taking up the contact with a centre. In addition, he states, it is neither explained why this contact leads to a cultural transformation, nor specified who should be identified as the agents of such a profound change. By focussing on the centre the periphery appears like a passive object of others' interests, while in reality the agency of members of peripheral societies should be regarded as decisive for the efficacy of relations between a so-called centre and a periphery (see Thomas 1991, 35–36).

Accordingly, most pre-modern 'world-systems' must have been rooted to a significant degree in the decision of segments of peripheral societies to enter into an asymmetrical relation and to realign parts of their culture towards what we would call the centre. Perhaps the biggest challenge in dealing with early World Systems is therefore to understand the reasons leading social actors to such decisions and the mechanisms through which transcultural entanglements provoked social and cultural transformations in the participating societies.

In the last decades, the debate on the cultural implications of contemporary globalization has underlined the need to study carefully the impact of the agency of societies in so-called peripheries. Under the influence of postcolonial and cultural studies this debate has taken a remarkable turn and has thus provided some important clues for the assessment of the effects of intercultural contacts. While originally it was predicted that the global distribution of certain goods, customs and traits would inevitably lead to a homogenous world culture of western style, in recent years the emphasis has been put on the notion that globalization in certain regards indeed leads to a homogenization, but does not extinguish local identifications and, on the contrary, contributes to their increase. It is argued that the main characteristic of cultural globalization consists in a continuous process of merging the global with the local, for which the term 'glocalization' has been proposed (Robertson 1995; Bauman 1998). In processes of glocalization material and immaterial traits coming from the outside are reinterpreted and merged to form new syntheses. This shift in scholarly opinion was accompanied by a criticism of essentialist concepts of 'society' and 'culture' which had restricted research to choosing between either assuming a global homogenization or a 'clash of civilizations' as the most likely potential outcomes of globalization (Featherstone 2000, 83–89; Wagner 2001, 11–17). The main reason why phenomena of glocalization should be regarded as relevant to pre-modern contexts is connected with the impact of the agency of social actors. In combination with the structure of social space in a society this agency must have at all times ensured that impulses arriving from the outside world were transformed by merging them with existing values and world views (Thomas 1991, 27–30, 83–124).

In this regard, two closely interrelated contexts of the

operating of agency can be differentiated. The first context is the one of *translation*, through which the meaning of foreign practices, objects and ideas are made accessible in the course of the transfer from one society to another (*cf.* Greenberg, this volume). The discussion of the cultural implications of contemporary globalization underlines that in different parts of the world the same goods and ideas can be interpreted in different ways, an insight which also has a bearing on much earlier exchange systems. For this reason the expression 'prestige goods' which is so popular in archaeology, is problematic, inasmuch as it suggests that irrespective of the circumstances of usage specific objects have an inherent value. Whether, however, through such objects prestige is gained or even lost, depends on their integration into social practice and on the intra-societal power relations and discourses attached to the objects.

The second context is the *social imaginary*, that is the set of ideas which groups hold about themselves and others as well as about the world they live in and the significance of material and immaterial traits received from the outside (Anderson 1983; Taylor 2004, 23–30). Nicholas Thomas (1991, 4) has remarked that "objects are not what they were made to be but what they have become". The discourses involved in the negotiation of the meaning and value of foreign features are directly linked to the norms regarded as appropriate as well as to how the structure of the surrounding world is conceived. As the term implies, 'World-Systems Theory' takes the modern vision of geography and space for granted and transfers it together with modern economical thought to the past, thus insinuating a universally applicable significance of economy, space and distance.

But for two reasons such an attitude is misleading. First, because it confuses cause and effect, inasmuch as the knowledge about the shape and nature of the world did not exist from the beginning, but revealed itself through the accumulation of information gained through the very contacts which form the subject of archaeological research (Maran 2007a, 4–6). Second, since the allegedly objective understanding of economic interest and of geographical space is perhaps, as Mary Helms (1988, 3–65; 1993, 46–51) has reminded us, the main obstacle in comprehending one of the most important factors involved in pre-industrial intercultural contacts, namely the linkage of long-distance exchange with diverging cosmological ideas about the shape of the world and its inhabitants (Robertson 1992, 54–75). Helms has stressed that the dichotomy between 'heaven' and 'earth' – that is between horizontal distance as something ordinary and vertical distance as something supernatural, for instance – simply does not exist in all societies. Instead, irrespective of the direction in which one moves, the way that the surrounding world is conceived may often be intimately linked with religious ideas in general and cosmology in

particular. Accordingly, any change in knowledge about distant areas was bound to have repercussions on the world views of society at large. The ideological linkage with certain areas of the world gave goods coming from faraway, and especially those made by skilled-crafting, a potential meaning exceeding mere economic reasoning, a factor which, with some notable exceptions like Andrew Sherratt (*e.g.* 1993; 2004a), Susan Sherratt (*e.g.* 1994; 1999) and Jane Schneider (*e.g.* 1977; 1987), was often not sufficiently considered by proponents of World-Systems Theory. The disregard for the transformative capacities of material culture flows in world-systems research was rooted in the long-time indifference of social anthropology (and social archaeology) towards the material world. Materiality was solely identified with necessities, like bulk goods or with an antiquarian approach to artefacts, while the realms of social studies were thought to be the ‘really important’ and seemingly purely immaterial issues, such as ideology, politics and social relations. However, as Daniel Miller (1998) has succinctly remarked, “matter matters”, inasmuch as ideas and things are related dialectically. For immaterial issues find their expression through material means, and in turn the material world gains its meaning through values and ideas assigned through agency and discursive practices (Miller 2005, 20–35).

As an example of the effects of asymmetrical cultural flows transmitted in the course of expanding exchange networks I would like to use the emergence of Mycenaean culture and its relation to Minoan Crete. In the literature, phenomena of ‘Minoanization’ (Broodbank 2004) in the Aegean have been usually explained by either claiming a Minoan political control exerted through a network of colonies (*e.g.* Niemeier and Niemeier 1999), or as the result of a process of cultural emulation by local elites in different parts of the Aegean (*e.g.* Davis 1980; 1984). The emergence of Mycenaean culture is a particularly interesting case for the latter point of view, since there are no indications that the areas of origin of Mycenaean culture on the Peloponnese had ever been under Cretan rule, and accordingly the striking changes signifying the advent of the Mycenaean period must be attributed to the agency of local groups.

The origin of Mycenaean culture is a good example of how Minoanization manifests itself on different levels of material culture in a wide variety of things (Broodbank 2004, 59). Not only Mycenaean pottery, but its iconography, writing system, jewellery and weapons are all clearly linked to Cretan predecessors. In light of this, it was foreseeable that the relationship between the Minoan and Mycenaean cultures would eventually be described in terms of centre-periphery relations within an early Aegean ‘world-system’ (Kardulias 1999, 185–195). But this did not really help to explain why, in spite of the massive reception of Minoan elements, Mycenaean culture exhibited from the beginning a

distinctively un-Minoan character most strikingly exemplified by the Shaft Graves of Mycenae with their gold masks, weapon assemblages, jewellery and martial iconography. The differences between the incipient Mycenaean culture and that of Minoan Crete were recognized already in the beginning of the 20th century, and were then usually explained by claiming a bellicose character for the Mainlanders as opposed to the peaceful and religious nature of the Minoans (*e.g.* A. J. B. Wace in Wace *et al.* 1921–1923, 125; Rodenwaldt 1921, 47–52, 58–59; Karo 1927, 389–390; for a recent example of this kind of reasoning see Wightman 2007, 358). This reference to an immutable, almost metaphysical core of human societies, a *Volksggeist*, is of course a reflection of the essentialist definition of ethnicity prevalent at the time (Jung 2000, 77–80; Roessel 2006). But not only for this reason, but also on quite specific factual grounds such an explanation is untenable. On the Greek Mainland, prior to the strong orientation to Crete observable in the later Middle Helladic, fortified settlements are highly unusual (Maran 1995, 68; Lauter 1996, 79–96), weaponry in graves is extremely rare,<sup>1</sup> and there is also no other evidence for a particularly bellicose nature of Mainland Greek societies. Instead, ironically, we can be certain that the impressive weaponry deposited in the shaft graves is predominantly either a product of Cretan workshops or derived from Cretan prototypes (E. A. Catling and H. W. Catling in Popham, Catling and Catling 1974, 252–253; Hiller 1984; 1999, 324, 327; Wiener 1991, 331–340; Kilian-Dirlmeier 1997, 13–50; Borgna 2006, 45, 54). For the same reasons an explanation of the warrior iconography and graves of the Shaft Grave period as simply the result of an allegedly inherent aggressiveness of human males, which could be called a ‘psychological essentialism’, seems unconvincing, since the specific kind of elite representation constitutes a radical deviation from previously existing patterns and must have been based on new forms of enculturation of men of a certain status in Mainland societies (*e.g.* Muskett 2007, 50–59). So why does this emphasis on male aggressiveness occur just at the time of the intensification of relations with the allegedly peaceful Minoan sphere, and why *did* the result of Minoanization in the case of Mycenaean culture differ so markedly from what is thought to be typical for Crete at the time of the shaft graves?

In my opinion, the reasons for this phenomenon become evident when we look at it as a case of globalization rooted in the agency of specific social groups and their perception of the outside world. If relations between the members of a given society are actively mediated through the use of material items by social actors, then agency and practice are to be identified as the crucial factors linking the realms of the material and immaterial (Miller 1994, 298, 319–321; 2005, 11–15). Therefore, the decisive questions are how and by whom novel traits were appropriated and how through

such acts of re-contextualization new patterns of practice and material forms were created, conforming with what had existed neither in the receiving society, nor in the area of origin of what was received (Wright 1995, 71).

In the following this is illustrated by concentrating on the formative phase of Mycenaean culture. At the end of the so-called Old Palace Period on Crete we observe an intensification in the contacts between the island and the southern parts of the Greek Mainland (Rutter and Zerner 1984). I would agree with Oliver Dickinson's view of 1977 that this should be seen in the context of a reorientation of long-distance trade relations of the Minoan palaces in which routes to the West and Central Mediterranean gained new importance for Crete, and Mainland Greece acted as a crucial connecting link by the establishment of combined land and sea routes connecting the Corinthian Gulf via the Corinthia and Argolid to the Saronic Gulf.<sup>2</sup> These contacts affected societies on the Greek Mainland with totally different social structures than those of Minoan Crete. Not only does the archaeological record of Middle Helladic Greece lack palaces, writing and refined arts and crafts, but there are in general remarkably few indications of social inequality.

All this changed in quite a short time, since already towards the later part of the Middle Helladic period men of the social elite in certain areas of Southern Greece were buried in shaft graves with rich weapon assemblages and women were adorned with jewellery (Kilian-Dirlmeier 1986, 176–190). As Sofia Voutsaki (1997, 41–48; 1999, 105–116; 2005, 135–141) has argued, the phenomenon of the shaft graves can neither be explained solely through the interaction with Crete, nor on the basis of a purely autochthonous process. Of central importance, she emphasizes, is the clarification of the social structure of the preceding Middle Helladic societies, which she thinks were organized on the basis of kinship ties (see also Cavanagh and Mee 1998, 34; Wright 2008, 238–239). The authority of persons was exclusively based on their position within this system of kinship without any noticeable signs of social inequality. Now, it has to be acknowledged that, as shown by Imma Kilian-Dirlmeier (1997, 83–106), there are already long before the Shaft Grave period graves dating to MH II and even MH I which stand out in their manner of construction and in the quantity and quality of grave furnishings from the rest of contemporary graves. In pointing to these graves Kilian-Dirlmeier (1997, 120–122) has stated that the forms of elite representation encountered during the Shaft Grave period were basically unrelated to links to the outside world and were rather rooted in a continuous development on the Greek Mainland going back to the very beginning of the Middle Helladic period.

While Kilian-Dirlmeier has rightly stressed the existence of relatively rich grave assemblages already in earlier Middle Helladic times, I would nevertheless agree with Voutsaki

(1997, 42–48; 2005, 136) that the Shaft Grave phenomenon cannot be simply explained as the final point within a long series of Mainland Greek elite funerary customs. The crucial point seems to me that, with the exception of the Aegina shaft grave, find assemblages in rich graves of MH I and II date suggest that the elevated position of persons was expressed and legitimized differently than in the Shaft Grave period, something I would attribute to a shift in the social imaginary and specifically in the way elite gender roles were defined. The differences between rich graves of the Shaft Grave period and those of the earlier part of the Middle Helladic can be exemplified by Grave 2 in Tumulus I of Vrana in Attica which is one of the most elaborate known Middle Helladic graves (Marinatos 1970, 11). The grave consisted of a carefully stone-built chamber with a stomion and dates to MH II (Maran 1992, 321). As was convincingly demonstrated by Kilian-Dirlmeier (1997, 91–97), this grave had been attached to an earlier tumulus dating to MH I which underlines the local continuity in exceptional grave structures. On the floor of Grave 2 only one inhumation deposited in a crouched position was encountered. Around the skeleton 2 spindle-whorls and 11 vessels of Gray Minyan and Mattpainted pottery were found, among them one goblet, 3 jugs and 2 kantharoi.

On the one hand, the grave of Vrana underlines the validity of Kilian-Dirlmeier's assessment pertaining to the existence of marked social inequality in Mainland Greek societies prior to the Shaft Grave period. But on the other hand it demonstrates that no straight evolutionary line connects such earlier graves of elevated individuals to those of MH III and LH I date (Maran 1999). Clearly, the elaborate mode of construction and the number of objects accompanying the burial are features setting the said grave apart from most funerary structures of MH I and II date, which explains why the excavator, Spyridon Marinatos (1970, 11), chose to designate it as the 'queen's grave'. However, even in this exceptional grave not a single metal object appears. In contrast to the hitherto prevalent scholarly opinion I would not attribute the rarity of metal objects which is so characteristic of Middle Helladic graves to the minor importance of metallurgy or to the poverty of the communities (Dickinson 1977, 38, 107), but rather interpret it as a sign that the furnishing of burials with objects of metal was not in accordance with the value system of the community (see already Maran 1999, 539). Seemingly, it was not intended to emphasize the status and the gender of the deceased by offerings of metal weapons, tools or ornaments. With the exception of Aegina, during MH I and II neither were deceased men of the elite presented as great warriors and hunters, nor were women richly adorned with jewellery. Instead, for certain reasons much more subtle ways of expressing differences of status and gender were chosen, for instance through specific forms of grave construction or pottery assemblages (Maran 1999).

As regards the combination of vessels in the Vrana grave the appearance of more than one set of drinking vessels seems particularly noteworthy. This I would interpret as a reference to the role of the deceased woman as a host and/or participant of events of communal feasting.<sup>3</sup> The two spindle whorls on the other hand could be interpreted as symbols of the domestic activity of textile production and possibly the role of the woman as the *'oikodespoina'*. In short, the Vrana grave assemblage exhibits an emphasis on group-related 'altruistic' qualities like hospitality and domestic virtues like spinning and weaving. In my opinion, the analysis of this grave contributes to elucidating the reasons underlying the seeming 'poverty' of most Middle Helladic graves. As the main factor I would identify that Middle Helladic communities have managed to impose a rigid code of moral values setting tight limitations on the possibility to exalt the qualities of specific individuals and to display the existing social inequality between families. The peculiarities of how Middle Helladic communities imagined their particular social space is not only reflected in the graves but also in the way that normal Middle Helladic settlements were structured. The striking building continuity in sites like Lerna and Pevkakia-Magoula (Maran 1992, 10–33, 61–64; Wright 2008, 235, fig. 10.3), in which houses were rebuilt over and over again on almost exactly the same plots, points to a social order in which each kin group was thought to have a particular place in society which was not supposed to be altered. All this has contributed to the impression of the Middle Helladic as a period of 'stagnation' (Dickinson 1989, 133), although it would be more appropriate to regard this as a reflection of a precarious balance through which potentially centrifugal social forces were reigned in.

In the later part of the Middle Helladic period in certain areas of Southern Greece this dormant social dynamic which previously had been bound by social norms was unleashed, thus quickly leading to the disintegration of past forms of the social imaginary. Tellingly, at the transition from MH II to III in settlements on the Greek Mainland a swift disintegration of the previous, rigid forms of settlement organization occurred. This phenomenon I interpreted as the result of decisions of certain groups to abandon the traditional Middle Helladic architectural patterns because the latter could not meet the new demands regarding the lay-out of settlements (Maran 1995, 72). According to Voutsaki (1997, 45–47) the emergence of an elite towards the later phase of the Middle Helladic period was linked with the establishment of systems of mutual support and of gift exchange between socially elevated groups of persons of the Greek Mainland, the Cyclades and, above all, Crete. The intrusion of foreign objects and systems of value, she argues, led to the swift dissolution of the relatively undifferentiated texture of Middle Helladic societies (Voutsaki 1997, 45–48). The objects and

ideas of mostly Cretan derivation were adapted to fit local norms and were employed in strategies of competition and ostentatious display of wealth. This contributed to a redefinition of gender roles and to the emergence of an ethos of competition resulting in investments in weaponry.

With the exception of two aspects I agree with Voutsaki. First, it seems to me that Middle Helladic communities were already latently stratified, but masked this inequality by restraining the centrifugal dynamics inherent in the self-aggrandizement of specific families. Second, besides the points enumerated by Voutsaki an additional element is likely to have been involved in the strange fact, already mentioned, that, despite the numerous Minoan affinities, the specific way of expressing high status in the shaft grave period differed so markedly from everything known from Crete. As an explanation of this element I would identify a highly complex entanglement of different ways in which members of Mainland and Cretan societies perceived themselves and the Other. Before explaining what I mean, it has to be acknowledged that the assessment of this mutual perception is severely hampered by the images of Minoan and Mycenaean society created by archaeologists since the times of Arthur Evans and Heinrich Schliemann. While it has become unusual to attribute the characteristics of Mycenaean and Minoan culture to an alleged immutable difference between 'bellicose' Mainlanders and 'peaceful' Minoans, these false dichotomies still linger on, when even today images or attributes of warriors in the wall-paintings of Akrotiri are often automatically attributed to 'Mycenaeans' or at least assumed to represent a reflection of 'Mycenaean influence'. I am aware of the necessity to deconstruct long-standing research opinions which, as especially the case of Arthur Evans shows, often may tell us more about the scholar who proposed them, than about the Bronze Age societies to which they refer (S. Sherratt 2000; 2005; Fitton 2002, 205–211; Hamilakis 2002; 2006, 147–149). Nevertheless, I would argue that, beyond the images created by research, there *are* significant differences between what is called Mycenaean and Minoan culture, and that these are in need of an explanation that is not based on essentialist categories of a *Volksgeist*.

In trying to sketch an alternative explanation, I would, first of all, like to point out that it should not come as a surprise that the incorporation of foreign elements in the incipient Mycenaean culture has led to such seemingly un-Minoan results. Since the aspiring Mycenaean elites probably did not have a first hand knowledge of Crete, what counted was not what Minoan culture really looked like, but rather how it appeared to the Mainlanders and how they translated and reintegrated the foreign traits into their own culture. The archaeological evidence shows us an impressive array of weapons and jewellery borrowed from Crete. But decisive

for the associations attached to such objects was the power of images to which the peoples of the Greek Mainland were exposed. On the one hand, there were the images of the Minoan objects as such. These must have had a tremendous impact on Middle Helladic society, to whom the production of images had been almost totally unknown (Voutsaki 1999, 114; 2004, 359; Muskett 2007, 20–24). On the other hand, there were the images of Cretans themselves who were visiting the Greek Mainland or the Cyclades. It may have been this encounter which fostered an intercultural misunderstanding. It seems to me that Minoan Crete was an extreme example of a phenomenon found in a similar way in other regions and periods, namely the coexistence of two different societal faces. A peaceful face characterized by the absence of conflict and war was directed towards the interior world of Minoan Crete where divine harmony was thought to prevail,<sup>4</sup> while towards the perceived chaos of the exterior world a more militaristic face was turned. While the archaeological view of the nature of Minoan culture was guided by the peaceful face, the inhabitants of Mainland Greece and the Cyclades were confronted with the second face, whenever they came in contact with Minoan delegations carrying weapons or being accompanied by warriors (Wiener 1991, 333–334; 1999, 411–412, 419–420). This experience may have contributed to the impression that the militaristic side was the constituent ingredient of the Minoan self-image, while in reality the bellicose appearance was mostly meant for the outside world. Scenes like those depicted on the miniature fresco from the West House of Akrotiri may have referred to such intercultural contacts with weapon-bearing Cretan delegations (see already Niemeier 1990).

The consequences of these encounters must have exceeded by far the realms of economy and technology, inasmuch as they had an impact on the definition of gender roles (Voutsaki 1999, 115; 2004, 358–361). Now men of the incipient Mycenaean elite were presented as great warriors and hunters, and the women as richly adorned and probably with a changed attitude towards their bodies. To the community of the Middle Helladic settlement on the Kolonna hill on the island of Aegina I would ascribe a crucial role in the shaping of these new gender ideals through intercultural contacts with Cretans. Its position in the centre of the Saronic Gulf predestined it for the status of a ‘gateway community’ in the networks of flows of peoples, goods and ideas between different areas of the Aegean and the wider Mediterranean world (Niemeier 1995; Gauß 2006). Moreover, from its size and architectural structure the settlement on the Kolonna hill was not only by far the most complex settlement known in Middle Helladic Greece, but it also exhibited already from EH III onwards an architectural dynamic markedly differing from the building continuity, already described, in settlements on the Greek Mainland. Seen from these perspectives, it is

no coincidence that the earliest known shaft grave exhibiting the new type of male burial assemblage was found in the settlement on the Kolonna hill (Rutter 2001, 126–131), and that Aegina is the only site of the Mainland Middle Bronze Age where pictorial decoration is already attested in MH II and concentrates on signs of military and naval prowess (Rutter 2001, 128–129; Muskett 2007, 20–22).

Currently, it can only be assumed that the contact between elite groups on Aegina and Crete was also instrumental in the transformation of female gender ideals, insofar as this contact confronted Mainland societies with a radically different attitude towards the female body. Assuming that the ‘Aegina Treasure’ derives from burials (Higgins 1979), we may even have the earliest attested occurrence of the new form of female funerary representation on that island, since among the objects of this ‘treasure’ there are elements not encountered in the shaft graves of Mycenae and stylistically predating MH III (Gates 1989). Although we do not know how women of Middle Helladic Greece were clad, it is certain that from the time of the first Mycenaean human images dating to the Shaft Grave period onwards almost exclusively women in Cretan style dress are shown (Muskett 2007, 44–49). The predominance of this Minoan-style costume in my opinion makes it likely that it was actually worn by certain groups in Mainland Greece or at least, as Georgina Muskett (2007, 49) has argued, that the costume must have been sufficiently based on reality that the viewer of the images was capable of understanding what was depicted. The spread of the new forms of male and female elite self-representation from Aegina to the Mainland was facilitated by the status of the island as the regional centre of power and a model to be emulated by elites of the neighbouring regions of the Peloponnese, Attica and even Thessaly (Niemeier 1995; Rutter 2001, 127–128, 140; Gauß 2006; Maran 2007b).

In focusing on the changes in feasting practices during the Shaft Grave period James Wright (2004, 22–25) has outlined how new drinking customs were re-contextualized by expressing them through vessel shapes of a long Mainland tradition. It is also likely that the novel gender-defining traits were merged with traditions handed down from earlier parts of the Middle Helladic, but in which way this happened is still difficult to assess. An interesting case may be represented by an object group from Shaft Grave III of Grave Circle A. This grave is crucial for any attempt to define the characteristics of elite female grave furnishings of LH I date, because it contained the burials of three women and probably two children, but no interments of bodies of adult men were observed (Karo 1930, 37–38; Kilian-Dirlmeier 1984, 167 with n. 29). From Shaft Grave III come five narrow and elongated tubes of rolled gold sheet (Fig. 21.1) each furnished either with an attached large double-conical sphere or with a disc also of sheet gold (Karo 1930, 93–95,

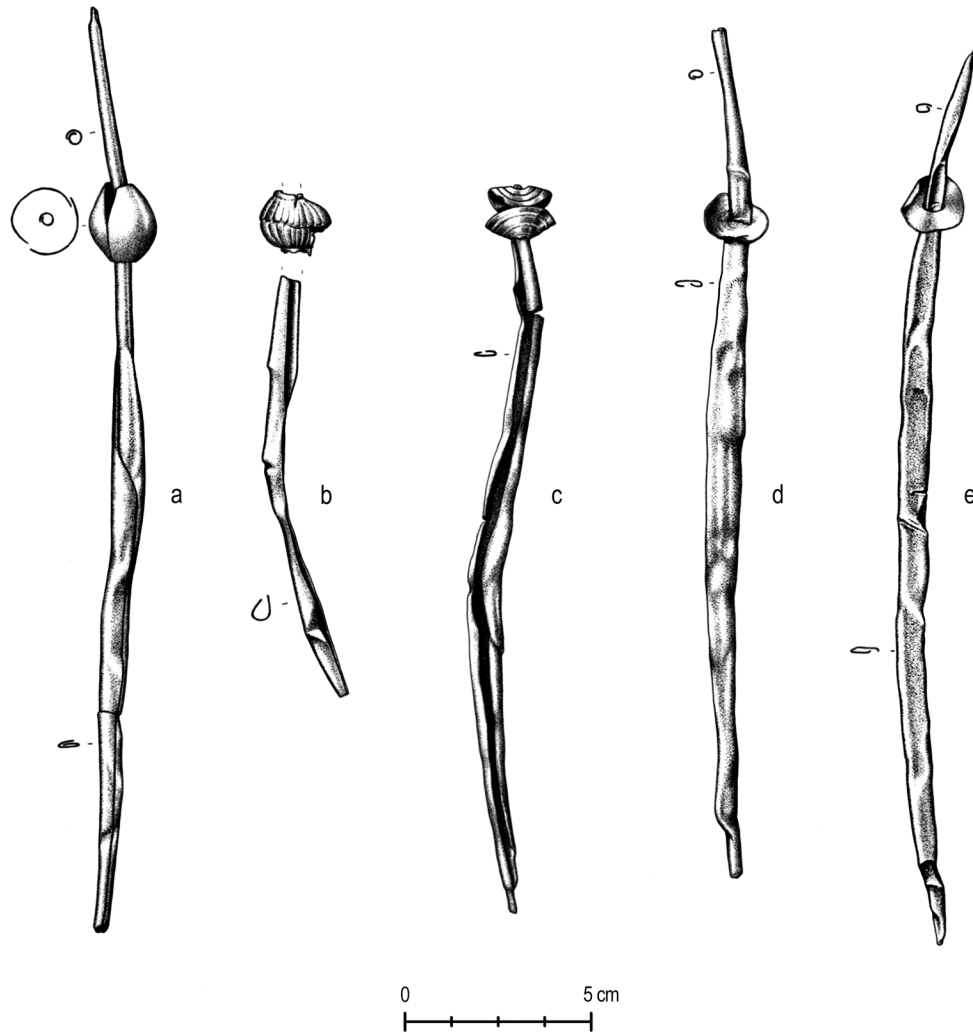


Figure 21.1. Probable gold-covered spindles from Shaft Grave III of Grave Circle A in Mycenae (after Kilian-Dirlmeier 1984, pl. 4, 106–110).

pl. 17; Kilian-Dirlmeier 1984, 106–110, pl. 4). The only two entirely preserved examples have lengths of 24.0 and 24.8cm, while the preserved lengths of the other pieces range between 11.4 and 22.7cm (Kilian-Dirlmeier 1984, 49–50). In addition, there are five fragments of similar objects from the same grave (Karo 1930, 57; Kilian-Dirlmeier 1984, 50 [nos. 111–115]). According to Georg Karo (1930, 57) the tubes had originally covered wooden rods, and he regarded them as cheap substitutes for hair or garment pins of precious metal manufactured on the occasion of the burial. Kilian-Dirlmeier (1984, 50) agreed in principle with this interpretation, but remarked that in their proportions these objects do not closely resemble the alleged prototypes. Given that the similarity to pins of the Shaft Grave period is indeed not strong, the search for the function of these objects has to move in a different direction. Already more than 25 years ago Hartmut Matthäus

(1980, 25) remarked in passing that the objects represent gold-covered spindles, but, to my knowledge, neither he nor anyone else has come back to this important observation.<sup>5</sup> As shown by Elizabeth Barber (1991, 60–61), spindles made of precious metal are attested as actual objects or through textual references from 3rd millennium BC Anatolia to the time of the *Odyssey*. In my opinion there can be little doubt that the objects from Shaft Grave III constitute another example of the rare phenomenon of spindles made of precious metal. The choice of this particular implement alluded to the sign of domestic virtue already known from the MH II Vrana grave, but by embellishing it with gold, this sign was transformed into a symbol of power of the *'oikodespoina'*.<sup>6</sup>

Strikingly, already during the formative phase of Mycenaean culture, in Late Helladic I, we can note another major shift in the reception and re-contextualization of Cretan

elements. In Schliemann's shaft graves which represent in a way the founding dynasties of Mycenaean power we encounter a wide array of Minoan religious paraphernalia which, as noted by Christian Heitz (1998, 40–46; 2008, 21–31), are absent from earlier rich graves, like the Aegina shaft grave and the Middle Helladic graves of Grave Circle B. These are exceptional cult objects which are likely to have arrived from Cretan palaces (Wright 1995, 72; 2008, 251), and probably Knossos in particular (Dickinson 1977, 79–82), as gifts to the members of the aspiring Mycenaean elite who must have been aware of the religious significance of the objects. But, again, it is unlikely that they knew about how they were used and what religious ideas were attached to them on Crete. At least it seems that in LH I Mycenae the Minoan religious objects were employed in a completely different context than in their area of origin. On Crete such paraphernalia were stored in palatial treasuries, from which they were taken out on certain occasions. But in Mycenae they were associated with individuals, combined with other objects, like weapons and precious metal vessels, and by placing them in the grave they were withdrawn from the world of the living (Karo 1925, X; Hägg 1984, 121; Voutsaki 1999, 113–114). The differing context of deposition suggests that the meaning of these objects was newly interpreted and adjusted to local needs (Voutsaki 1997, 46).

This new emphasis on objects with religious connotation is by far strongest in the case of Cretan objects, but it is not restricted to them, since there are also those items with likely supernatural meaning which had reached Mycenae from areas even more far away, like the amber necklaces of Southern English derivation (Harding and Hughes-Brock 1974; Maran 2004) or the Anatolian silver stag rhyton (Koehl 1995). If we add to these the components of horse harness with parallels in Southeastern and Eastern Europe (Penner 1998, 23–41; David 2001; Harding 2005), we can note the presence of foreign objects coming from the south, the east, the north and the west. In the discussion following the presentation of this paper in the Sheffield conference Susan Sherratt made the excellent observation that by employing these cultural elements from “all four corners of the world”, the families burying their dead in Grave Circle A may have wanted to make a statement about their place at the centre of the wider cosmos and their linkage to the supernatural powers inhabiting it.<sup>7</sup>

The turn towards elements of Minoan religion at the very beginning of the Mycenaean period indicates the importance distant centres like Knossos had gained in the social imaginary of Mycenaean elites. In addition, it shows that the latter made growing efforts to comprehend the ideological basis of Minoan power, something which is also suggested by the fact that the Cretans regarded them as worthy to receive such extraordinary objects thought to

be charged with transcendental power. This ever-increasing openness towards the Other is the prelude to a process at the end of which the Mycenaean Greeks would surpass Minoan palatial rule. Around the middle of the 15th century BC, with the exception of Knossos, all Minoan palaces were destroyed. Subsequently, there appear on Crete for the first time cultural elements linked to the Mycenaean sphere including Linear B. There are many who think that this is the result of the occupation of Crete by Mycenaean Greeks. Given the intimate connection between Mycenae and Knossos since the Shaft Grave period, a coalition of these two powers against the other Minoan palaces is indeed conceivable.

The described relations between Crete and the Greek Mainland impressively document not only the close interdependence of the historical and cultural trajectories of two geographical zones in the course of intensifying exchange, but also the importance of the agency of elites of a so-called periphery. What started as a contact initiated and controlled by Crete, is likely to have ended a few centuries later in the control of the island by Mycenaean rulers of the Greek Mainland. The background of this process was formed by the realignment of Mainland Greek societies towards a distant centre of political and, above all, religious power. The arising Mycenaean culture was not a copy of the Minoan, but rather a reflection of the image of Minoan Crete in the eyes of the Mainlanders, a hybrid based on the reinterpretation and translation of foreign traits. The attraction, even fascination, the Minoan palatial society exerted on the imagination of Mainland elites gave rise to the wish to unravel the mysteries of the other culture, to take possession of it and finally to become one with it by taking its place.

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## Notes

- 1 Kilian-Dirlmeier 1997, 13–54, 103. The number of pre-MH III graves with weapons is likely to be even lower than estimated by Kilian-Dirlmeier, since some of the graves cited by her (e.g. Thebes-Tamviskou plot; Dramesi) could date to MH III or even LH I/IIA (Maran 1999, 538–539). To be added to the

- list of weapon-bearing MH I–MH II burials is now Kastroulia (Messenia) Tumulus II, grave 3 which has yielded a dagger and a knife both of bronze/copper: Rambach 2007, 145–146.
- 2 Dickinson 1977, 54–57, 101–110. Later, Dickinson (1989, 136) retreated from this position, but I still think that it was well-founded and consistent with what we know of the importance of land routes connecting the Saronic with the Corinthian gulf as well as the strong connections between the Peloponnese and the Tyrrhenian region of Italy (Sherratt and Sherratt 1991, 370; Graziadio 2000; Rutter 2001, 142–146).
  - 3 A similar interpretation has been proposed by Rambach (2007, 147) for the large set of tableware in the female grave 2 of Tumulus II in Kastroulia. The pairing of the shape of the kantharos in the Vrana grave is probably another example of the phenomenon described by Nordquist (1999) and interpreted by her as a reflection of particular Middle Helladic drinking ceremonies.
  - 4 In light of the insufficient evidence for Neopalatial elite burial customs it is, admittedly, possible that, contemporary with the shaft graves, there were even warrior burial assemblages on Crete (see Muhly 1992, 169–175 with n. 458). But the fact remains that, as regards iconography, during the Shaft Grave period scenes of combat and hunting are much more rarely attested on Crete than in Mycenae (for a recent synopsis on the iconographic evidence, see Hiller 1999). This points to differences in the attitude towards such subjects or at least in the choice of objects with such iconography to be deposited as grave goods. For an ideological interpretation of the rarity of scenes of combat on Crete, see Gates 1999 and, for ideals of manhood on Crete, see Marinatos 2005.
  - 5 Professor Matthäus informs me that he had arrived at that conclusion due to the appearance of the objects and that he found the interpretation as imitations of pins unconvincing (pers. comm. 26 November 2008).
  - 6 Voutsaki (2004, 359–360) states that in the shaft graves women did not have exclusive rights to any artefact category. But such gold-covered spindles and the golden ‘crowns’ found in Shaft Grave III (Karo 1930, 184) seem to be linked exclusively to women.
  - 7 Already Wolpert (2004, 137–139) stressed the need to answer the question how imported items in the Shaft Grave period were incorporated into existing cosmologies, but he restricted his analysis to Minoan objects and thus fell short of recognizing the whole range of objects from widely differing areas of the ‘world’.

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