THE MYCENAEAN SEMINAR 2011-12

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SPINNING A COMMUNICATIONS WEB: MEDIA INTERACTIVITY AND THE POLITICAL MANAGEMENT OF MYCENAEAN MESSENIA[1]

MARK PETERS

Political communication in the modern world is greatly facilitated by a multitude of technological aids enabling mass communication. In the Late Bronze Age Aegean such mechanisms were unavailable and without these resources more subtle methods have to be considered. This paper explores a few of the more explicit and obvious strategies employed by the palace for political communication with the dispersed communities of Messenia. Although referring obliquely to a wide range of media the principal focus is upon the evidence provided by the wall paintings and the possible role of Linear B in a communications web.

Human communication is, of course, multi-modal, utilizing all of the basic senses. In the palace of Nestor we find material expressions of all these modalities. From the visual feast provided by the architecture and wall paintings, through the tactile qualities of the ceramic assemblages and furniture, the aromatic and taste sensations of food, perfumed oils and smoke from the hearths, to the auditory sensations of music and conversation reflected in the 'lyre player' and 'men at tables' paintings: all provide direct evidence for communication.

A Peircean approach, integrating the concepts of 'vagueness' and the 'universe of discourse' with his general semeiotic theory, provides a framework for approaching communications through such data. Furthermore, this framework recognizes that for any significant degree of communication to occur there must be a convergence of experience – signs obtain a parity of meaning between parties only when sufficient common ground exists for mutual recognition of those signs. Hence, one of the most effective ways of communicating with the potentially varied cultural traditions of the different communities would have been through conceptual communication achieved via direct engagement within the political heart of the polity.

Conceptual communication is embodied most clearly in the embedded narratives of the wall paintings. A grand narrative is suggested linking the paintings associated with the three megara and the architectural development of the palace with the historical emergence of the Pylian state. Art, architecture and spatial arrangement were combined to create a harmonious narrative bringing together the events surrounding identity, conflict, eventual resolution, and

[1] This paper is drawn from research being conducted under the auspices of a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship to whom I would like to express my sincere gratitude. Thanks are also due to John Bennet, Cyprian Broodbank, and Olga Krzyszkowska for their kind invitation to this Mycenaean Seminar.

the creation of a unified political environment. It is suggested that the complexities of this narrative and embedded concepts were communicated through a combination of architectural context, iconography, colour, placement, the oral translation of a visual narrative and observer movement.

Conceptual communication is also suggested to have occurred through, and be supported by, writing. The identification of the interrelated themes of benefits, obligation and patronage within the Linear B tablets combine to suggest a role as a tool of reinforcement for the socio-political agenda of the palace. Combined with a reanalysis of the Archives Complex, the question is posed as to whether a more dynamic role in the social arenas of the palace should be considered. Could, for example, some of the tablets have been composed within the context of social gatherings in which the benefits and obligations referred to were publicized? As with the notion of an oral performance supporting the messages contained in the visual medium of the paintings and translating them from one modality to another, it is suggested that at least some of the tablets performed a complementary role in oral performances of a socio-political nature.

In managing a territory of over 2000 km^2 the palace at Pylos faced considerable challenges in communicating with the dispersed communities of the polity. Without access to any of the technological advantages that we possess, political management and communication was not a simple task. A range of interconnected strategies and modalities were required that relied upon the more basic characteristics of human communication.

16 November 2011

MYCENAEAN PRODUCTION AND USE OF OIL IN ITS EAST MEDITERRANEAN CONTEXT[2]

IOANNIS FAPPAS

The production of olive oil and its use especially for the manufacture of aromatic oils, as this activity is recorded in the Linear B tablets, appears to have been one of the basic elements of the Mycenaean palatial economy, contributing to a significant degree to the prosperity of the Mycenaean palaces. However, aromatic oils were not staple but luxury goods, and, therefore, their role in the Mycenaean palatial economy could only be explained in terms of their symbolic value and in the way this value was manipulated in order to serve the aspirations of the elites within their own local but also 'international' environment.

In searching for this role, valuable comparative material can be offered by similar developments in the neighbouring Eastern Mediterranean. According to cuneiform texts contemporary to the Linear B tablets, the manufacture and use of highly esteemed aromatic oils was a common practice among the elites in the Eastern Mediterranean, while these products were also counted among the precious goods exchanged as gifts between the sovereigns of the great power-states of the period.

The evidence of ancient Near Eastern texts, together with modern anthropological research, ascribes a very complex ideology to the use of aromatic oils, a consequence of

[2] I would like to express my deep gratitude to the Board of the British School at Athens for granting me a 2005 British School at Athens Centenary Bursary Award, as well as to the members of the Michael Ventris Committee for awarding me the 2010 Michael Ventris Memorial Award, enabling me to spend sufficient time at the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford to pursue my research on the subject.

which was their high economic price. According to cuneiform texts, the main practice involving the use of oils was the anointment of the body or the most significant part of it, the head. This was usually practiced by priests or the sovereigns themselves during the performance of religious rituals, but also as part of the "rites of passage" marking any significant change in personal or social life: birth, wedding, liberation of slaves, ritual initiation of priests and kings, death. On all these occasions, the use of oils was accompanied by an extremely complex network of ideas and beliefs, the most important of which was the idea that they attracted and appeased the gods, alongside the concepts of purification, transmission of power, honouring, and creating common bonds. Most dominant of all these beliefs, was, however, the idea that aromatic oils caused and verified purification, and for this reason were thought to be suitable for use in all these religious rituals and "rites of passage", where purity was an essential prerequisite.

Comparison of Mycenaean and respective Near Eastern evidence concerning the manufacture and use of aromatic oils leads to the identification of important common features:

a) Palaces usually had their own aromatic oil industry, supplied mainly with olive oil in the areas surrounding the Mediterranean and with sesame oil especially in those of Mesopotamia.
b) Heads of these departments were people who enjoyed an evidently high social status.
c) Apart from palaces, aromatic oils also seem to have been produced in sanctuaries.
d) Most commonly, aromatic oils were destined for ritual use, although secular uses also existed.
e) Apart from the official version of the practices described in the texts, similar practices seem to have existed for common people too.

All this evidence shows that a common attitude towards the use of aromatic oils and their properties possibly existed in the area of the ancient East Mediterranean, and that Mycenaeans perhaps shared some elements of this ideology. Moreover, it might be the case that by investing in the production of aromatic oils, Mycenaean palatial elites tried to manipulate these products' symbolic value, no matter how they interpreted it. In this context, it may not have been simply accidental that, according to Linear B tablets from Knossos and Pylos, the various Mycenaean perfumed oils and unguents were mostly destined for religious rituals, as they were mainly offered to gods, cult places and groups of people related to cult.

7 December 2011

CACOPHONY AND SILENCE: THE PLACE OF RELIGION IN NEOPALATIAL CRETE

MATTHEW HAYSOM

This paper explored the problem of the identification of religious space in Neopalatial Crete. It began by observing that the amount of specifically religious space within Minoan settlements increased dramatically in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a result of the work of scholars such as Geraldine Gesell who identified many spaces as shrine complexes on the basis of the presence of 'religious objects' and thanks to the re-interpretation of the polytheron system as a ritual venue rather than a domestic installation. No more did Nilsson's statement that gods were not worshipped under roofs seem to hold true. But this

was a development that was founded on much longer-standing identifications of religious elements in a large proportion of Minoan material culture.

The paper went on to question the basis on which many elements of religious material culture are identified as such. It argued that patterns of contextual association, such as that between rhyta and drinking vessels, undermine traditional religious narratives for the use of these types – suggesting that even if they were occasionally used in rituals they cannot be thought of as inherently religious. At the same time the paper argued that supposed religious types are widely distributed through Minoan settlements and do not cluster into consistent sets, which undermines the interpretation of them as the furniture and fittings of shrines. Finally, it argued that there are a great many patterns which unite the known corpus of Minoan architecture and that special features such as polythyra and lustral basins are distributed through this corpus in such a way that it is more difficult to distinguish a subset of buildings, which could thus be identified as shrines or 'ritual centres' on the basis of their presence, than some accounts allow.

The paper argued that such patterns of distribution and association are more consistent with a model in which all built space within Minoan settlements was fundamentally domestic, than with one where specific buildings were delineated as specifically religious. Finally, the paper argued that the lack of built religious space is mirrored by a great deal of religious activity happening in the open air, often away from settlements and that this is mirrored in Minoan imagery.

18 January 2012

THE POWER OF PAINT: KEA AND BEYOND[3]

LYVIA MORGAN

The paintings from the NE Bastion at Ayia Irini (LCI/LMIA) were presented with new reconstructions, placing them within their context and Kea's wider role in the network of intercultural relations. Kea's proximity to the mines of Lavrion gave Ayia Irini special significance, while ochre pigments found at the site suggest another possible commodity for trade.

Built in Period VI, the NE Bastion strategically overlooked the approach to the town from the marshy bay (east) and the main Gateway leading to the Temple and House A (south). These privileged views from large painted rooms signal a special function. Linked to basement storage by a staircase, with a drain and much pottery from above, the rooms are likely to have functioned as a banqueting and meeting place for visiting and local elites. Large-scale feasting may have taken place in the open space outside, while elites gathered inside. The seminar explored the relationship between the rooms and their iconography.

Despite significant local differences, all Aegean miniature paintings relate to festivals. The NE Bastion layout and iconography is comparable to that of the West House at Akrotiri, while Tylissos offers some specific parallels, yet each painting is highly individual and different skilled artists were responsible.

The Kea frieze has striking landscapes with multi-coloured rocks, marsh, river, and unique splashing sea and cloudy sky. Notably few women are shown, inhabiting towns.

[3] Special thanks to Stuart Laidlaw and to Rosemary Robertson for their skilled graphic editing, and to INSTAP for generous funding in preparation for the forthcoming publication of the NE Bastion paintings

Numerous men in robes meet with ritualized gestures in a procession and by a river bringing produce. Ceremonial ships and a horse-drawn chariot display elite transport on sea and land. Deer are hunted by dogs; and a hunter brings back the venison. Men in loin-cloths gather on the coast, between the ships and what may be ship-sheds, to cook in giant cauldrons. Characteristically for Minoan/Cycladic art, events are evoked through preparations, rather than culminations (eating and drinking). Life-size myrtle and blackberry were painted in the room adjacent, plants that had associations in the ancient world with drinking and feasting.

Hunting showcases physical prowess, while the sharing of meat (especially venison) is traditionally a defining act of communal masculinity. Recent anthropological literature has focused on the crucial role that feasting plays in the creation and maintenance of social identities and the negotiation/control of power, reinforcing social boundaries while creating/consolidating community cohesion.

The function of miniature paintings in the Cyclades (in contrast to large-scale figurative painting) was discussed in terms of male action represented in large rooms adjacent to open spaces. The paintings speak of social relationships and the sharing of produce, suggesting cooperative alliance between social groups. The NE Bastion and its paintings were most likely created to accommodate the impact of the expansion of interrelations between the islands.

In incorporating many figures into varied settings, miniature paintings provide the ideal locus for commemorating events and places of importance to communities. These scenes, with their ritualized gestures and repetitive clothing, speak of social cohesion amongst male elites. The hunt becomes a metonym for male prowess; chariots for prestige; ships for the role of seafaring; meetings for social relations; produce for trade; and the cauldron for community feasting. Landscape, as the environment of action, plays a key role in the establishment of social memory. Paintings evoke memories, not so much of concrete events, but of community participation in the preparations for ceremonial and festive gatherings, vital in the creation and maintenance of social relations and cultural interconnections.

15 February 2012

THE SETTLEMENT AT DHASKALIO, KEROS, AND THE LATER EARLY BRONZE AGE IN THE CYCLADIC ISLANDS[4]

COLIN RENFREW AND MICHAEL BOYD

The excavations of the Cambridge Keros Project from 2006 to 2008 had as their objective the clarification of the settlement on the islet of Dhaskalio, 90 metres off the west coast of the Cycladic island of Keros and of the plundered site at Kavos, lying immediately opposite on Keros, which had at first been thought to be a rich cemetery. Investigations by Doumas in 1963 followed by those of Zapheiropoulou, and subsequently by a project in 1987 of the Universities of Athens, Ioannina and Cambridge, had called into question the identification of the Special Deposit at Kavos as a looted cemetery. The realization that the broken pottery and fragmented marble vessels and figurines were buried already broken led to the conclusion that this was instead a site of ritual deposition: *i.e.* a sanctuary.

The discovery in 2006 of a second and undisturbed Special Deposit at Kavos, the Special Deposit South, led us to conclude that these fragmentary artefacts had not in fact been broken at Kavos but were brought already in pieces for deposition.

In our seminar the focus was on the extensive settlement at Dhaskalio. Apart from the ruins of a Byzantine chapel at the summit, the finds related entirely to the early bronze age. The stratigraphy together with the pottery study by Peggy Sotirakopoulou permitted a division into three phases. The first was securely assigned to the Keros-Syros culture (Early Cycladic II). Phase B was characterized by the appearance of imports of the Kastri Group. Phase C showed continuity of development from the preceding phase and may be considered a developed Kastri phase, with some ceramic imports relating to the Phylakopi I culture. Radiocarbon determinations by the Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art at Oxford allow the duration in calendar years of Phase A to be set at *c.* 2750 to 2550 BC, Phase B from *c.* 2550 to 2400 BC, and Phase C from *c.* 2400 to 2300 BC.

Extensive remains of Phase C were excavated at the summit of the islet, where the largest structure was a Hall of length c. 16 metres. Fortification walls were not found. The pottery was of a domestic character, probably all of it imported. Micromorphological studies indicated repeated floor levels. The plants remains included wheat, barley and pulse crops as well as olive and vine. But it is clear that so large a settlement, if permanently occupied, could not have been supported by the produce of Keros alone. The possibility was discussed that, while there might have been a small permanent population of 10 to 20 persons, the numbers present may have been increased by periodic visits towards the 300 to 400 inhabitants which an assessment based simply on occupied areas might have suggested. These visitors, it was proposed, were pilgrims coming to Keros to make the ritual depositions which we subsequently recovered from the Special Deposit South. Most brought their food with them to Dhaskalio, some of it in pottery containers covered by the numerous stone discs recovered.

[4] We are grateful to the Greek Archaeological Service, to Dr Mariza Marthari, now Honorary Ephor of the KA′ Ephoreia of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, and to the Director and Management Committee of the British School at Athens for permission to excavate, to the numerous participants in the excavation and post-excavation studies for their work, and to the following for generous funding: the Institute for Aegean Prehistory, the Stavros S. Niarchos Foundation, the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, the Leventis Foundation, the British Academy, the Leverhulme Trust, the Balzan Foundation, the N. P. Goulandris Foundation.

There were numerous finds of copper spills and indications of minor metal working, to be linked perhaps with the slag and other indications of copper smelting found at Kavos Promontory at the north end of Kavos. Although no copper ores were available on Keros, the location was probably selected for the strong Etesian winds which blow in the summer. The copper ore may have been brought from Seriphos or Siphnos.

One remarkable feature of the settlement was the frequent use of imported marble as a building stone. The nearest likely source is some 10 kilometres away on southeast Naxos. The labour involved in transportation is an indication of the significance accorded to the Dhaskalio settlement, presumably on account of its proximity to Kavos with its rich ritual deposits. This, we suggest, may now be considered the earliest regional ritual centre or sanctuary yet recognized in the Aegean.

14 March 2012

OF PRISMS AND PICTOGRAPHS: SEARCHING FOR PATTERNS IN MM II GLYPTIC

MARIA ANASTASIADOU

The dominant group of seals in MM II is the Malia/Eastern Crete Steatite Group. More than 700 soft stone seals, 82% of which are three-sided prisms, are included in this group.

By studying the way the motifs are combined in an image, I have distinguished three types of images encountered on these seals and relevant to this paper. As descriptive I define images which can potentially be seen in the physical world (*e.g.* CMS XI no. 122a). 'Pictographic' images contain combinations of representational motifs whose relationship cannot be explained in terms of images seen in the physical world (*e.g.* CMS III no. 173b). Finally, there are the images with hieroglyphic inscriptions (*e.g.* CMS XI no. 11a).

Descriptive images are represented in the prisms with a considerably higher percentage than the other two types of images. However, a series of indications suggest that the nature of the descriptive images was similar to that of the motifs which take part in 'pictographic' images. There are some indications that descriptive images on different sides of one piece could at times have been meant to be 'read' in conjunction with each other in the same way the motifs combined in the 'pictographic' images were. Thus, if we accept the above assumptions and since the role played by the hieroglyphs on the prisms is small, 'pictography' arises as the main characteristic of the prism iconography.

A comparison of the Malia/Eastern Crete Steatite Group with its contemporary Hieroglyphic Deposit Group (identified by Paul Yule) underlines a striking contrast between MM II soft and hard stone glyptic. Soft stone seals are encountered in large numbers and display 'pictographs' but only restricted use of script. The more 'precious' hard stone seals are encountered in much smaller quantities, are closely connected to the Cretan Hieroglyphic, and do not display 'pictographs'.

In this context, Jean-Claude Poursat's suggestion that inscribed hard stone prisms could have belonged to officials with more than one responsibility in a palatial/administrative hierarchy sounds convincing. On the other hand, the vast numbers of soft stone prisms in MM II would point to a less exclusive group of consumers and to a variety of functions connected both with the official and the private domain.

It seems reasonable to assume, as scholars have done in the past, that the images on the prisms would have been related to their owners in one way or another. However, in my

opinion, more detailed inferences about the exact meaning of the images and their combinations are, in the present evidence, merely hypothetical.

The seals of the Malia/Eastern Crete Steatite Group were produced in Malia and eastern Crete. Yule's Hieroglyphic Deposit Group also seems to be connected with eastern Crete despite the fact that impressions of such seals are encountered in Knossos. Two other soft stone groups, the Malia Chlorite Group and the Central Crete Ornamental Group, were produced in workshops active in Central Crete. In these two groups, multi-facial seals play a much smaller role whereas 'pictographic' images and hieroglyphic inscriptions are absent. Interestingly, in the distribution map of protopalatial soft stone seal groups, the border between the Malia/Eastern Crete Group and the groups of Central Crete coincides very well with that proposed by Gerald Cadogan for separating the Malia/Lasithi from the Knossos 'state'. Moreover, the recovery of seals produced in the Knossos/Herakleion area in places in the Aegean outside Crete constitutes a further piece of evidence to the key role of Knossos in Middle Bronze Age relationships.

It seems then that in the protopalatial period, Malia and eastern Crete produce and consume seals characterized by the use of multiple seal faces, 'pictographs' and hieroglyphs. On the other hand, the prismatic shape plays a much smaller role on soft stone and possibly also hard stone (?) glyptic of central Crete where the ornamental element predominates and neither 'pictographs' nor hieroglyphs are encountered on seals. This evidence suggests a separation of Central and east central/eastern Crete in the protopalatial period and could reflect a difference in a political, social, religious or cultural level.

16 May 2012

BEFORE APHRODITE: NEW LIGHT ON KYTHERAN PREHISTORY FROM THE KYTHERA ISLAND PROJECT

CYPRIAN BROODBANK AND EVANGELIA KIRIATZI

Fieldwork by the Kythera Island Project (KIP) on the southwest Aegean island of Kythera is multidisciplinary in nature and diachronic in scope, from the earliest prehistoric remains to the ethnographic present. At its core is an intensive field survey that covered 43 sq. km of the central-eastern part of Kythera, including Kastri, its hinterland and the surroundings of the main Iron Age to Roman town, in a mosaic of some 8700 individual tracts that sampled in total 15.5% of the island. This identified over 200 archaeological sites ranging from the Neolithic to the latest phase of the Venetian occupation; the majority of these sites were studied through gridded surface collection. Closely integrated with the survey from the fieldwork stage onward is GIS, a geoarchaeological field programme of soil mapping to explore site preservation and visibility, palaeoenvironmental coring and an analysis of terracing, archival research, and a large-scale examination of ceramic fabrics and wider raw materials within their technological landscapes, involving petrographic and chemical analysis of pottery combined with replication experiments, plus a parallel study of metallurgical remains.

The seminar presentation focused on prehistoric Kythera. Currently, we have no clear sign of any pre-Neolithic presence, although passage en route to Crete is not intrinsically unlikely in the light of new finds on the latter island. Our earliest lithics, supported by scanty

finds from other archaeological research on the island, point to some presence in the Late Neolithic, with a stronger signature in the long period of the Final Neolithic to Early Bronze I (which are hard to separate in the survey material). By Early Bronze II settlement was substantial all over the survey area, and although most sites suggest farmstead-level occupation, a few larger hamlets stand out, as does a substantial coastal village at Kastri, already well plugged into sea-trade with surrounding regions. KIP fieldwork sheds much new light on the mid-to-late 3rd millennium BC inception of minoanising features, previously only recognised from the 1960s excavation at Kastri but now clearly part of a widespread pattern of coastal enclaves using largely locally manufactured Cretan-style pottery, which gradually spread inland, apparently overlapping substantially with pre-existing communities and traditions. By the start of the 2nd millennium BC, however, the minoanising vector appears to have taken over completely. The First Palace period signature is strikingly modest in terms of number and size of sites, but in the Second Palace period evidence explodes in quantity and quality (as already prefigured by earlier excavation at Kastri and the Agios Giorgios peak sanctuary). Kastri burgeoned into a town of at least 6-7 hectares in core area, ringed by chamber tombs and an almost equally extensive zone of surrounding satellite communities. Over a hundred contemporary farmsteads have been identified in the wider hinterland zone surveyed by KIP. Taking these data together, the island's population must have risen to at least 5000 people, probably in part through influx, some of it arguably involving ideological affiliations with central Crete. Striking distinctions between Knossos and the farmsteads can be discerned in the varying ratios of consumption-related pottery and storage vessels, while in our survey data both discoid loomweights and traces of metalworking are almost entirely restricted to Kastri. Clearly, the island's productive economy was strongly oriented to support a major coastal entrepot engaged in extensive Aegean networks. In contrast, activity on Kythera shrank over the course of the Third Palace ('Mycenaean') period, with strong continuities in site location, potting traditions, burial and cult but on a sharply reduced scale, perhaps as trade routes shifted and competition from mainland polities increased. There are slight traces of both a Post-palatial and Early Iron Age presence, and some continuity of occupation into the 1st millennium BC is likely.