Knossos without Minos

JAMES WHITLEY

KNOSSOS NORTH CEMETERY: EARLY GREEK TOMBS 1–4, edited by *J.N. Coldstream* and *H.W. Catling*. (*BSA* Suppl. 28.) Vol. 1: Tombs and Catalogue of Finds; vol. 2: Discussion; vol. 3: The Figures; vol. 4: The Plates. Pp. lxiv + 740, color pls. 2, pls. 316, figs. 212, pull-out plan 1, tables 37. British School at Athens, London 1996. $450. ISBN vol. 1: 0-904887-17-0; vol. 2: 0-904887-18-9; vol. 3: 0-904887-14-6; vol. 4: 0-904887-20-0.

Knossos is a site indelibly associated with Arthur Evans's excavations of perhaps the most glamorous of Aegean Bronze Age palaces. His use of the term Minoan to describe the civilization he claimed to have discovered has, however, created a whole host of problems for those who wish to place the Aegean Bronze Age into some wider temporal or geographical perspective. "Minoan" evokes the luster of a lost civilization, and the even more unfortunate term "post-Minoan" implies that everything that happened in Crete after this must be thought of as an aftermath, or a falling away. In fact, later periods at Knossos are no less historically important than the palatial Bronze Age. Finds of Early Iron Age date have their own particular significance. Knossos is, with Athens, Lefkandi, Argos, and a handful of others, one of the most important archaeological sites in the eastern Mediterranean in the period between 1100 and 600 B.C. Evidence from Knossos should help to shed light on important historical questions that have vexed scholars for some years. How isolated was Greece during this period? How are we to understand the social developments between the fall of the palaces and the emergence of the polis? Did Crete in general, and Knossos in particular, develop along similar lines to the mainland? And what role did Crete play in that historical process we call the "Orientalizing"? *Knossos North Cemetery* does indeed shed light on these questions, though in an oblique way. But it also represents the culmination of a particular tradition of research, a tradition that in turn carries with it a number of unspoken assumptions.

The exploration of Early Iron Age (EIA) Knossos began with the earliest British investigations of the Bronze Age palace. Evans dug through some "Geometric" levels in some areas, and Hogarth explored a number of "Geometric" tombs in the vicinity.[1] It was left to Humfry Payne and Alan Blakeway to undertake more systematic investigations. After Payne reassessed some earlier finds and made some investigations of his own,[2] an opportunity arrived with the discovery of the Fortetsa cemetery of EIA chamber tombs to the west of the main site. Here chamber tombs, similar but not identical in design to Mycenaean and LM III examples, contained a succession of interments, mainly cremations that had been placed in urns of a variey of shapes (chiefly pithoi, both painted and unpainted). These were excavated between 1933 and 1935, and revealed tomb groups dating from the so-called "Subminoan" period to the "Orientalizing" of the seventh century. The early deaths of both Payne and Blakeway interrupted study of this material, which was then assigned to J.K. Brock. Brock's *Fortetsa: Early Greek Tombs near Knossos* (Cambridge 1957) established, for the first time, a relative sequence for the Early Iron Age of Crete. Brock showed (as Wide and Desborough had only suspected) that the Cretan sequence diverged sharply from the expected path of Dark Age ceramic development, as outlined in Kübler's publication of the Kerameikos finds and Desborough's study of Protogeometric pottery from Athens.[3] Instead of there being an orderly progression from Protogeometric to Geometric, at Knossos pots of late ninth-century date were decorated in an eclectic manner that owed as much to Oriental and Orientalizing metalwork as it did to Protogeometric and Geometric Athenian styles. It would have been entirely logical to call this style "Early Cretan Orientalizing," but instead both Desborough and Brock put forward the designation "Protogeometric B," thus emphasizing links with developments in the rest of the Aegean while downplaying Knossos's links with the Levant.

Work on EIA Knossos was continued by R.W. Hutchinson, John Boardman, and Nicolas Coldstream. Of these, Boardman chafed most at the Procrustean bed into which the Knossian sequence had been forced, and, like Demargne and Dunbabin before him, looked more to Crete's connections with the eastern Mediterranean as a whole.[4] Coldstream has, by contrast, dedicated much of his academic life to the painstaking study of virtually all aspects of EIA Knossos. He has studied, excavated, and published both tomb groups and domestic deposits (as in Athens,

[1] Geometric finds from the palace were published by M. Hartley, "Early Greek Vases from Crete," *BSA* 31 (1931) 56–114. For early tomb exploration, see D.W. Hogarth, "Knossos II: Early Town and Cemeteries," *BSA* 6 (1900) 70–85.

[2] H.G.G. Payne, "Early Greek Vases from Knossos," *BSA* 29 (1928) 224–98.

[3] See V.R.d'A. Desborough, *Protogeometric Pottery* (Oxford 1952); W. Kraiker and K. Kübler, *Kerameikos* I (Berlin 1939); Kübler, *Kerameikos* IV (Berlin 1943); Kübler, *Kerameikos* V (Berlin 1954).

[4] R.W. Hutchinson and J. Boardman, "The Khaniale Tekke Tombs," *BSA* 49 (1954) 215–28; Boardman, "Protogeometric Graves at Ayios Ioannis near Knossos," *BSA* 55 (1960) 128–48; Boardman, *The Cretan Collection at Oxford* (Oxford 1961); Boardman, "The Khaniale Tekke Tombs II," *BSA* 62 (1967) 57–75; S. Hood and Boardman, "Early Iron Age Tombs at Knossos," *BSA* 56 (1961) 68–80.

these consist mainly of filled-in wells),[5] and has also been responsible for the publication of the Sanctuary of Demeter.[6] He knows more about EIA Knossos than anyone else. His approach has always been cautious, and, one might say, orthodox. Brock's scheme has been modified in part, but not substantially altered. Whether this is simply because the evidence (and "common sense") bears out Brock's interpretations is a matter to which I will turn later.

One important fact that all this work had established was that most of the EIA chamber tombs (and an occasional tholos tomb) seemed to be concentrated to the north and slightly to the west of the ancient city itself. The decision to locate the Medical Faculty of the new University of Crete on a site just north of the Venizeleion Hospital thus shows a disregard for the archaeology of the period that is little short of scandalous. In 1975–1976, members of the British School had already been engaged in a small rescue excavation of some tombs discovered through building activities in the village of Teke, as it was then called, where N. Platon had investigated a small EIA tomb in 1943, when they were invited by the Ephoria in 1978 to assess the area chosen for the new medical site. What began as archaeological assessment rapidly developed into full-scale excavation undertaken between March and November. Members of the British School at Knossos, a group of scholars accustomed to working alone or in small groups, had to reinvent themselves as a "unit" of rescue archaeologists working against the clock. Like many rescue (or salvage) archaeologists before and since, they discovered that the bulldozer could be both friend and enemy; bulldozers undoubtedly disturbed many archaeological deposits (see below), but also enabled large areas to be cleared and planned. The Medical Faculty site (KMF) excavations are (to my knowledge) the first examples of full-scale area excavation in Greece, where all attempt at fitting excavations into "Wheeler boxes" was abandoned.

Knossos North Cemetery presents the results of these excavations from the Teke and KMF sites, together with finds from some very badly looted tombs excavated near Fortetsa in 1967 and Platon's Teke excavations of 1943. With the exception of one tomb group, previously published,[7] the four volumes deal with all the material dating from the inception of the Subminoan in the 11th century B.C. to the end of Knossian Orientalizing in the seventh century. The Hellenistic tombs and Late Roman basilicas from the KMF site will be published separately at a later date. The first volume, *Tombs and Catalogue of Finds*, lists the finds by tomb group. The Teke tombs have been given letters (e.g., tomb O), whereas the KMF tombs were numbered consecutively (e.g., tomb 285). Each object has been given a unique number that relates it directly to a tomb group (e.g., 75.206 for a pot or 201.f67 for a "small find" in any other material). Catalogues and descriptions of finds from each tomb are preceded by short accounts of the tomb by the individual excavator (more often than not, J. Carrington-Smith). In this light, the publication of the figures (vol. 3) and plates (vol. 4) as separate volumes is clearly a convenience for the serious scholar, though one has to rely chiefly on the artifact numbers (there is no concordance) to find the figure or plate one wishes to consult. The drawings are generally of a high, if slightly uneven, standard, and if the plates do not quite meet German standards, they are certainly good enough.

For the significance of all these new facts one has to turn to volume 2, *Discussion*. Here the arrangement is very traditional: the finds are discussed by material first and context second, the volume being divided into three parts, "pottery," "objects," and "burials." Hector Catling engages in a fairly drastic redefinition of "Subminoan," assigning most of the finds from the Ayios Ioannis tombs to this phase. Whether or not "Subminoan" remains a useful term outside of north-central Crete, however, remains unclear. Coldstream gives us a lucid account of the Protogeometric through Late Geometric pottery (ca. 950–700 B.C.). As do the other contributors, he considers the shape of the pottery before its decoration. Nonetheless, an early "artistic personality," the Tree Painter, is discerned in the Protogeometric B phase. Coldstream also deals with chronology, giving (to me) sound reasons for retaining the traditional framework, despite recent doubts about some Near Eastern synchronisms.[8] Elizabeth Moignard describes rather than discusses the so-called "Orientalizing" (i.e., seventh century) pottery in a concise and clear manner. The most interesting contribution, however, is by David Liddy, who publishes the results of his petrological analysis of the fabrics from the North Cemetery and elsewhere. Liddy's is one of the clearest accounts that I have read of the application of chemical analyses (e.g., Atomic Absorption Spectroscopy) and statistical methods (cluster analysis using Ward's method) to the problem of provenance studies. It is particularly refreshing to read a chapter in which all the methodological cards have been laid squarely on the table.

The next section is devoted to "objects." There are short, useful discussions of both jewelry and terracottas by R.A. Higgins, faience and glass by V. Webb, textile remains by J. Cocking, and "others" by D. Evely. H.W. Catling on bronzes and A.M. Snodgrass on iron objects both attempt statistical measures of ranking the tombs according to either the quantity or the variety of the objects found

[5] J.N. Coldstream, "A Geometric Well at Knossos," *BSA* 55 (1960) 159–71; Coldstream, "Five Tombs at Knossos," *BSA* 58 (1963) 30–43; Coldstream, *Greek Geometric Pottery* (London 1968) 234–55; Coldstream, "Knossos 1951–61: Protogeometric and Geometric Pottery from the Town," *BSA* 67 (1972) 63–98; Coldstream, "Knossos 1951–61: Orientalizing and Archaic Pottery from the Town," *BSA* 68 (1973) 33–64; Coldstream, "Early Hellenic Pottery," in L.H. Sackett, *Knossos from Greek City to Roman Colony: Excavations at the Unexplored Mansion* II (*BSA* Suppl. 21, London 1992) 67–87; Coldstream and Sackett, "Knossos: Two Deposits of Orientalizing Pottery," *BSA* 73 (1978) 45–60; Coldstream, P.J. Callaghan, and J.H. Musgrave, "Knossos: An Early Greek Tomb on Lower Gypsadhes Hill," *BSA* 76 (1981) 141–65.

[6] J.N. Coldstream, *Knossos: The Sanctuary of Demeter* (*BSA* Suppl. 8, London 1973).

[7] L.H. Sackett, "A New Figured Krater from Knossos," *BSA* 71 (1976) 117–29.

[8] E.g., E.D. Francis and M. Vickers, "Greek Geometric Pottery at Hama," *Levant* 17 (1985) 131–38.

therein (tombs perforce become the fundamental unit of analysis, since it has proven so difficult to relate individual finds to individual interments). Their measures yield slightly different, if broadly compatible, results, suggesting that there was a hierarchy not only of tombs but also of the groups that habitually used them.

The last section (which should, in my view, have come first) deals with the burials themselves. S. Wall discusses the animal bones (chiefly of dogs and horses), apparently from their own graves, and J.H. Musgrave provides a full account of his macroscopic analysis of the human bones, mainly from cremations. Ancient Knossians were clearly very efficient at cremating their dead, so much so indeed that they have left Musgrave with very little on which to base determinations of age and sex for individual cremations. Despite the evident care that ancient Knossians took to collect all remains from the pyre, virtually no osteological determinations of the sex of the deceased could be made for any cremation, apart from those dating to the Subminoan period. This is the single most disappointing fact about the North Cemetery publication, and one that makes the information presented here much less amenable to the requirements of social archaeology. Nonetheless, W.G. Cavanagh, in his discussion of the "burial customs," does attempt several forms of synthesis and analysis. He effectively disproves the old idea that Iron Age Knossians simply reused old Minoan chamber tombs. But he is hampered, not only by the paucity of osteological determinations but also by the difficulty (exacerbated no doubt by the conditions under which excavation had to take place) in defining the associations of individual interments. He does, however, point out two important facts: most chamber tombs were used for no more than three generations, and many for not more than one; and that, as at other EIA sites with large cemeteries in Greece, the number of interments peaks toward the end of the eighth century, and declines thereafter. The improbability of this being simply a reflection of a rise and then fall in population is underlined by the fact that interments in the cemetery cease abruptly around 630 B.C.

The authors offer no new explanation of the notorious problem of the sixth-century gap in Crete. In the conclusion (or "Epilogue"), the editors restrict themselves to stating the traditional or the obvious. It may be that the authors feel that a site report, necessarily devoted to presenting rather than analyzing new evidence, is an inappropriate place to advance their own views or conduct a new synthesis. But this policy has been undermined in at least one area. By keeping all the Subminoan finds to himself, Catling is able to put forward a consistent thesis, one that takes us back to the theoretical framework of the 1950s. Catling has convinced himself that the custom of cremating male "grandees" (sic) with arms is an "intrusive element" (a phrase that perpetuates the confusion as to whether it is the people or the traits that are intrusive). It takes, it seems, a *neue Volk* to make a *neue Ordnung*. Elsewhere, too, old ideas maintain their hold over new facts. Two in particular stand out. The first is the notion that the collective tombs at Knossos are those of "family groups" who used a family tomb over a number of generations. Musgrave is right to point out that all ages and sexes are represented in the cemetery as a whole, but it is far from certain that there was an even representation within an individual tomb. Indeed, the preponderance of arms and "male" metal objects in some tombs could be seen as *prima facie* evidence that here we have, not tombs for individual families, but tombs for particular age or sex grades. It is a pity that this idea (which has been put forward by Robert Sallares among others) is not even seriously considered. More significant is the complete failure to reconsider the whole phenomenon of the "Orientalizing." The Knossian sequence provides us with clear evidence that objects from the Levant were moving to Knossos from at least the 10th century onward, and that Knossians were making use of these Near Eastern examples in a variety of interesting ways. At Knossos, the Orientalizing is not an event or phase confined to the seventh century, but a process that lasts for several hundred years. It is perhaps the biggest disappointment of this volume that no attempt is made to understand this process, or the criteria by which, at times, Attic or Near Eastern examples become most influential at Knossos. Indeed, there are worrying signs that discussion has been avoided. Catling, for example, makes a number of oblique but interesting points about the antique bronze Cypriot stand and tripod found in the graves, but these remarks are not integrated within any general discussion of the "Orientalizing." Nor does he speculate as to why it is that antiques of this kind are so widely associated with "warrior" cremations. Instead, everything is forced back into the Procrustean bed of panhellenic ceramic "stylistic evolution," and the Orientalizing kept firmly in its seventh-century place.

This is perhaps a sour note on which to end a review. After all, as the editors point out (723), "it is unlikely that there will ever again occur the opportunity for rapid investigation of so large an area" near Knossos. The contributors should be congratulated on the speed of their publication and in presenting all the available evidence in a clear and convenient form. These handsome volumes will be invaluable to any serious student of Early Iron Age and Archaic Greece (providing, of course, one has a large desk and a copy of *Fortetsa* close at hand). They are dedicated, fittingly enough, to Brock and the surveyor responsible for most of the excellent plans, David Smyth. This retrospective glance is nonetheless symptomatic of an approach that looks too much to the past, and not sufficiently to the future of archaeology in Greece.

SCHOOL OF HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY
P.O. BOX 909
UNIVERSITY OF WALES, CARDIFF
CARDIFF CF1 3XU WALES
UNITED KINGDOM
WHITLEYA@CARDIFF.AC.UK