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THE PALACE OF KNOSSOS:
ITS DESTRUCTION AND REOCCUPATION RECONSIDERED

In his article on the "Last Palace" and the "Reoccupation" at Knossos, Mr. Hood has carefully considered certain aspects of two of probably the most important questions concerning the history of the Palace there: they are, the date when the last Palace was destroyed and the date and nature of the so-called reoccupation of the building¹. To the first, he suggests a provisional date for the destruction of "about 1350 or not much later", "during the Amarna period". His answer to the second is that the published pottery ascribed to the reoccupation period was in fact the plain and coarser decorated vases in use at the time of the Late Minoan III A destruction of the Palace, though it is admitted in one case, the area of the Lapidary's Workshop, that true reoccupation of III B date is indicated by the pottery.

On the first question Mr. Hood does not detail his reasons for preferring to the traditional date of 1400 one around 1350 or later, though he maintains that the character of the pottery "indicates that the 'Last Palace' was destroyed some time within the horizon of the Amarna period" and cites the views of Evans on the proximity of the catastrophe and the occupation of Amarna. But on the latter point the mature views of Evans are specific². He says, and the italics are mine, "If therefore, as there are converging reasons for concluding, the great Catastrophe of the Palace at Knossos took place about 1400 B. C., an interval of not more than twenty-five years — a short generation — can be allowed to account for *the marked difference* already visible in the ceramic style" at Tell-el-Amarna. Nor is he thinking particularly of the large Palace style vases, for he goes on to speak of a "distinct approximation"

¹ Kadmos IV (1), 1965 pp. 16—44. My thanks are due to Mr. A. H. S. Megaw for reading through my manuscript and suggesting many improvements; the views are, of course, my own.

² PM IV 748, Mr. Hood's own reference, footnote 107, but he suggests that some of the LM II material Evans had in mind might have been actually LM IB. This is unlikely as late as 1935 and, in any case, Evans makes it clear that he has later material in mind.

in date of the last palatial elements at Knossos to those at Amarna, using for his illustration III A sherd from Knossos which he had previously ascribed to the reoccupation period. This opinion of Evans is considerably different from Mr. Hood's view and suggested date which would make the destruction at Knossos contemporary with the abandonment of Amarna or even later.

As for the character of the pottery, it is true I have suggested that some of the decorated pottery of Late Minoan III A style, which Evans and Mackenzie would probably have ascribed to the reoccupation period, should be considered to be part of the destruction material; but this does not seem to me to entail any such substantial lowering of Evans's date as Mr. Hood proposes³. For, if I am right, there would still remain a stylistic gap between the pottery belonging to the destruction at Knossos and the Aegean pottery of Amarna. To be more precise, time would have been required for the Mycenaean pottery style of the beginning of the III A 2 phase (dated about 1400—1375), which I hold to be contemporary with the latest Minoan vases from the destruction, to develop into the advanced Mycenaean III A 2 style represented at Amarna belonging to about 1360—1350 B. C.⁴ The publication in the near future of some of the newly restored vases from the Palace will, I hope, help to substantiate this view⁵. Mr. Hood will need to produce other grounds to support his lowering of the traditional destruction date by some fifty years or more.

His approach to the second question is more radical but on first sight more attractive: it is to consider the plain and coarse ware previously ascribed to a III B reoccupation as having been in use in the Palace together with the finely decorated vases of LM II and III A style. The nature and purpose of the reoccupation present problems for which no entirely convincing solutions have been

³ On the Knossos Tablets, henceforth abbreviated to OKT, Appendix A page 93 revised in *AJA* 68 (1964) 352, "a date at the beginning of LM III A 2".

⁴ It is unfortunate that such emphasis is placed on Amarna and on the excavators' comparisons in 1900—1905 to pottery from that site. The value of their comparisons at that early time is clear from such remarks as "the late pottery was of the mature Mycenaean class, analogous to that found at Mycenae, Ialysos and Tell-el-Amarna" (*BSA* 6, 1899—1900, p. 65) and compare Mackenzie in *JHS* 23 (1903) 199. They were still feeling their way towards an understanding of the development of Mycenaean pottery and almost certainly had in mind material which would be contained within most of Furumark's subdivisions of III A and III B.

⁵ *Antiquity* 40 (1966) 24—8

proposed. It would, indeed, be convenient if this concept could be abandoned and the material that gave rise to it assigned to the last Palace, which would thereby be furnished with stores of plain and coarse vases of which at present it has a seeming lack. But can it be done? As Mr. Hood admits, the pottery itself must be the final arbiter.

The whole vases in the "reoccupation" material have been published in some detail since Mr. Hood's article was written⁶ and they are accepted by him in a postscript as indicating in one case true reoccupation. As for the rest he baldly states that they are in his view contemporary with the fine decorated vases and sherds belonging to the Palace destruction. We shall have to await the arguments on which this hypothesis is based before it can be tested. We should like to know, for example, where elsewhere in III A 1 to early III A 2 contexts in Crete are found the low "champagne glass" type of kylix with roll handle, the coarse stirrup-jar with wavy line decoration and distinctive shoulder decoration, the large flask decorated with concentric circles, the trough-spouted mugs and the fine small octopus stirrup-jar hitherto accepted as typical III B. Again, to establish this hypothesis, III A 1 to early III A 2 parallels would have to be found for the whole furnishing of the Shrine of the Double Axes with its vases and statuettes⁷. On the contrary, such contexts and parallels for these types of vases as are known to the present writer collectively suggest a III B date. Unfortunately, as so often in archaeology, the tidy solution is not necessarily the correct one.

This applies also to the attempt made by Mr. Hood to present the disaster at Knossos, not as an isolated event, but as having some link with the " 'Reoccupation' horizons at the great coastal sites like Mallia, Gournia and Palaikastro". This might be a profitable point to pursue if we were confining our attention to the deposits of LM III A style, but it is clear that Mr. Hood has other material in mind. He says "Furumark has assigned deposits from Gournia and Palaikastro to the same LM III B 1 horizon as that of his final 'Reoccupation' period at Knossos. It may be possible therefore to identify a horizon of destruction on these sites contemporary with that to which the 'Reoccupation' material from Knossos

⁶ Popham, *Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology* V, *The Last Days of the Palace at Knossos*, henceforth abbreviated to LDPK

⁷ Eg. LDPK plates 9(a), 3(d-f), 4(f), 7(e), 5(a) and 2(a)

belongs". So far we are in agreement and I have indeed made the same suggestion myself, but with the difference that these deposits, including those in the Palace, appear to me, as to the excavators of both Palaikastro and Knossos, to be generally the result of desertions and not of destructions⁸. Mr. Hood continues, "On the assumption that the 'Reoccupation' pottery found in the site of the palace at Knossos belongs to the 'Last Palace' . . . the destruction of the 'Last Palace' will then no longer appear as an isolated event, but as the central episode in some great disaster which overwhelmed the whole island at this time" (i. e. about 1350). This historical reconstruction is suggested at the expense of making the III A pottery and that usually considered III B contemporary. But on what grounds? The latest vases from the 'reoccupation' at Mallia have recently been reconsidered by Desborough who is tempted to believe that they may go even into the III C period⁹. At Gournia, one of the reoccupation vases is Mycenaean in decoration, if not manufacture, and is Mainland and not Cretan III B in style; the same is true of one vase at Palaikastro¹⁰ and it is here that we find the excavators as early as 1904 able to divide their later material into two distinct stylistic groups, III A and III B¹¹. In one case, a house in Block Gamma, successive contexts produced material from both phases; and it is the earlier group, classified as III A and sealed in the filling below a staircase, that is near in style to the Knossos destruction material, while the later group, called III B and belonging to the abandonment of the house, more closely resembles the reoccupation material at Knossos¹². Contrary indications such as these will have to be resolved by Mr. Hood if he attempts to substantiate his equation of III A destruction at Knossos with III B abandonments elsewhere.

It might be profitable, however, to look briefly at the main reasons which caused Mr. Hood to doubt the existence of a reoccupation phase in the Palace. They are: his belief that the division between the "Last Palace" and the "Reoccupation" was made in the first place, not on stratigraphical but on stylistic grounds (i. e. that

⁸ JHS 84 (1964) 200 and LDPK 9

⁹ The Last Mycenaeans and their Successors 169—171

¹⁰ Cf. LDPK 9

¹¹ BSA 10 (1903—4) 196

¹² Discussed in BSA Suppl. Paper I, The Unpublished Objects from the Palaikastro Excavations, 84 and 106

the vases decorated in the fine Palace Style could not be contemporary with others of a degenerate style); the scarcity of walls and floors assignable to the "Reoccupation"; the comparative lack of clay vases of ordinary domestic use ascribed to the destruction level; and lastly the quality and quantity of the "reoccupation" pottery which does not, he believes, fit with Evans's picture of LM III B squatters.

On the origin of the reoccupation conception, Mr. Hood has been misled. He may be correct in maintaining that it was Mackenzie and not Evans who evolved the idea, but the evidence he cites, Mackenzie's excavation note book covering the first few weeks of the first campaign, makes it quite clear that it was a difference in floor levels, structural alterations and the position of the pithoi in the S. Propylaeum, and not pottery styles, which prompted Mackenzie to suggest there was "a period when the Palace was no longer inhabited as such". Indeed it is doubtful if the pottery had even been studied at the time. So, rightly or wrongly, the idea arose from stratigraphical and architectural observations, not from analysis of the pottery, as Mr. Hood claims. It may be that Evans was at first not convinced. If so, it was the subsequent study of the pottery and the finding of further deposits and more structural changes in the second campaign which led him to agree.

On the scarcity of structural remains, it is suggested that "it would be natural to expect that in many places 'squatters' of the 'Reoccupation' would have made their floors above the debris of the 'Last Palace'". The unexpected is an everyday hazard for the field archaeologist, as Mr. Hood well knows, but, to get some idea of what one might expect in the III B period at Knossos, let us look at conditions elsewhere in Crete at the same time. In the town site of Palaikastro it seems that the general practice for those who reoccupied part of its ruins after the LM IB destruction — and the date of this destruction and the fact of reoccupation are not in question — was to clear out damaged buildings rather than construct on top of the ruins; side by side with a house occupied in LM III were found other buildings still choked with their LM IB debris and left deserted¹³. In the Gournia publication there is some reference to LM III houses over the LM IB ruins but where there is doubt about the dating of other areas, such as the shrine, this uncertainty arises because the floor levels of the LM IB town and of

¹³ Eg. in Blocks B and Δ

the possible LM III B shrine were indistinguishable¹⁴. Parallel conditions appear to be true at Metropolis, where within the same building the excavator was unable to find any stratigraphical distinction between the main part of the house containing LM IB destruction debris and the rooms containing the shrine, statuettes and a vase apparently of LM III B date¹⁵. Finally turning to the recent excavation of House E at Mallia, we are told that after its destruction in LM IB it was reoccupied; "La réoccupation ne fut pas totale. La majeure partie de la moitié Nord dut être laissée dans l'état où elle se trouvait. On ne jugea pas utile de relever le portique. Les installations nouvelles se concentrèrent là où il était encore possible de trouver un abri sans se donner trop de mal... Des murs s'élevèrent un peu partout au petit bonheur, destinés soit à former des nouvelles séparations soit à étager des parties peu solides. Aucun effort ne fut tenté pour redonner à l'ensemble l'aspect d'une maison"¹⁶. How reminiscent of Evans's squatters! With these instances in mind, it is perhaps not natural after all to expect the reoccupiers at Knossos as a general rule to have laid their floors and built new walls above the Palace destruction material.

Mr. Hood's next problem is the comparative lack of clay vessels of ordinary domestic use ascribed to the III A destruction level in the Palace. I would be inclined to widen the scope of the problem even further and include the scarcity of finely decorated wares as well, a situation improved but still unusual even after counting in with the destruction material the sherds of early III A type, as I have suggested should be done. It is arguable that the pottery stores of the Palace in its last period were situated in one of the areas which has eroded away, for instance in the NE area where the Middle Minoan stores were housed. But can we even be certain that much of the Palace building was used for domestic, as distinct from ceremonial and official purposes just before its destruction in LM III A? The distribution of the tablets within the building alone suggests a spread of archive rooms with their scribes which is difficult to harmonise with private domestic quarters. Even so, deco-

¹⁴ Gournia, 47 and Alexiou, *KChron* (1958) 185

¹⁵ D. Levi, *Bd A* (1969) 237–264. The excavator, indeed, considers all the material to be contemporary. Alexiou *ibid.* 198.

¹⁶ Dessenne, *Mallia Maisons II*, 150: this house, unusually, appears to have been destroyed by fire rather than abandoned.

rated fine wares though scarce do exist and there should be some plain domestic vases to go with them. The answer is in fact simple. They were thrown away by the excavators. With few exceptions, mainly, the later tests, the only material they kept were the decorated sherds and a selection of whole plain and coarse vases¹⁷. We may assume that the LM III A plain vases, like every one of the contemporary fine vessels, were broken. In which case they would not have been kept. Indeed, it is the unbroken condition of many of the "reoccupation" vases which, among other things, suggests that they were abandoned in a subsequent desertion in III B rather than caught in the III A holocaust¹⁸.

The last problem remains, "how explain the quality and quantity of the fine decorated pottery and the great deposits of store jars of the 'reoccupation' period?" If the early III A pottery is to be counted as part of the destruction material, as Mr. Hood agrees it should, "the quality and quantity of the fine decorated pottery" that remains is unimpressive. There is left a small amount of fine ware of certain III B character, enough to confirm occupation in that period in various areas of the Palace building, in the Royal Villa and especially in the Little Palace, though in all these cases Mr. Hood seems to question its III B classification; but it is not sufficient to justify in the case of the Palace and Royal Villa, at least, the assumption of anything like a palatial, or intensive reoccupation¹⁹. But what of the stores of plain pottery ascribed to the reoccupation? I readily admit that I know of no entirely satisfactory explanation of their presence, and it would perhaps be more helpful if our energies were directed to finding an explanation rather than to attempt to remove the problem by incorporating them into the debris of the Last Palace, where chronologically they do not appear to belong. The religious character of the reoccupation at Gournia, Metropolis and Phaestos are suggestive pointers²⁰.

¹⁷ This is clear from Mackenzie's pottery notebooks; indeed, it seems probable that the pottery had already been heavily presorted before Mackenzie even saw it and made his own selection of material to be kept. However, an idea of the plain and coarser wares in use at the time of the destruction can be obtained from a few deposits which were apparently retained in full; compare my remarks in *AJA* 68 (1964) 349—350.

¹⁸ Cf. Boardman in *OKT* II 84

¹⁹ Cf. my remarks in *OKT* II 94 and note 2. It seems necessary to emphasize that the sherds in question are decorated and are definitely III B in style.

²⁰ Cf. *LDPK* and note 30

And is this problem of the quantity of the reoccupation plain and coarse wares any greater than those which would be created by assigning the reoccupation deposits to the destruction of the Last Palace? With the translation of the III B occupations and their deposits of vases to the early III A 2 period, we are left wondering what sites were occupied and what style of pottery was being used during the 150 years' gap thereby created before the beginning of the III C period? Another consequence would be that at Knossos we should have to envisage a III A palace in which the visitor, after being led through the impressive stone flagged Corridor of the Procession, with its fine series of frescoes, would have had to stumble through a store of pithoi lying in the stately South Propylaeum²¹, to reach the main reception rooms above. Should he have looked below the floor of the Corridor into the unlighted basements along the south front, he would have found a clutter of coarse pots "the larger . . . on stone slabs, the smaller on pebbles", and the area obstructed by "rubble walls inserted . . . to buttress up the main south wall" and makeshift compartments "of the same poor construction"²². And should he have wished to leave the Palace by the North Entrance, his way would have been blocked by a room filled with rather unlovely coarse double amphoras, among which, surprisingly, a clerk, or rather several clerks, would have sat compiling Palace archives²³.

Any such attempt to recreate in living terms the implications of assigning the reoccupation deposits to the Last Palace remains as unconvincing now as it was to the excavators who uncovered them.

Nevertheless, if it can be shown from evidence outside the Palace that the vases hitherto ascribed to the reoccupation are matched elsewhere in early III A contexts and are alien to the thirteenth century, then there would indeed be grounds for reconsidering the traditional view: that at some time after the destruction of the Palace around 1400, certain areas were cleared out and re-occupied, to be finally abandoned in the late thirteenth century.

²¹ Mackenzie's own point quoted in OKT II 13

²² BSA 7 (1901) 12 quoted in LDPK 5—6

²³ I accept Boardman's well supported contention that the N. Entrance was blocked at the final stage of its history, OKT II 49.