States are notoriously difficult to define. Archaeologists usually describe them as complex, centralized institutions with administrative and social hierarchies that regulate access to resources and monopolize legitimate force within substantial territories. Some features typically associated with ancient states are settlement hierarchies of four tiers (with three levels of administrative decision-making), social stratification that divides the ruling elite from the nonelite, and a recognizable structure, or “palace,” which serves as a base of operations for the ruling households (Marcus and Feinman 1998, 6–8).

**AEGEAN STATE FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

In the Aegean, states did not form until the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age at the earliest. We can define three general periods of state formation:

1. the Protopalatial (“Old Palace”) states of Minoan Crete, which date to ca. 1900–1725 BC (MM IB–MM II)
2. the Neopalatial (“New Palace”) states of Minoan Crete, which date to ca. 1725–1500 BC (MM III–LM IB)
(3) the Mycenaean states of the Greek mainland and Crete (at Knossos and Khania only), which date to ca. 1500–1200 BC (LM II–LM IIIB on Crete, LH IIIA1–LH IIIB2 on the Greek mainland).

The states of these three periods have a number of features in common. All of them are “secondary,” meaning that they formed while in contact with well-developed, “primary” and secondary states elsewhere. Crete, for example, was certainly in contact with the older states of Egypt and the Near East before and after the emergence of the first palaces, although the relative importance of external contacts is still debated (Cherry in press). It is widely acknowledged, however, that contact with Neopalatial Crete (both directly and through interaction with the island societies of the Aegean) was crucial to the development of Mycenaean states on the Greek mainland. Both Minoan and Mycenaean states were relatively small, with territories of about 1500 km² and central settlements of 20–100 ha (figure 18.1). They coalesced and developed through processes of “peer polity” interaction (i.e., the exchange of goods and ideas, accompanied by competitive display and emulation) between similarly structured emergent state systems (Renfrew and Cherry 1986). Despite these similarities, however, processes of state formation followed radically different trajectories in Crete and on the Greek mainland, and the resulting states were quite different from each other.

One major axis of difference between Minoan (Protopalatial and Neopalatial) and Mycenaean states is that Minoan states pursued group-oriented, “corporate” strategies of political rule, whereas Mycenaean states pursued individualizing “network” strategies (Parkinson and Galaty 2007). Corporate political strategies typically emphasize and encourage group cohesion, deploy ideologies that value knowledge and ritual, and are financed through the production and redistribution of staple goods (Blanton et al. 1996). Network political strategies typically allow and promote individual rule and depend on systems of wealth finance (Feinman, Lightfoot, and Upham 2000). That Minoan and Mycenaean states pursued different strategies of political rule is reflected in different architectural plans found at Minoan and Mycenaean palaces.

Minoan palaces are designed around a large central court flanked by residential quarters, storage facilities, and ritual suites (for plans of Knossos, Malia, and Phaistos, see below, figures 40.1, 42.1, and 44.1). The central court is the main space around which palace traffic circulated, and various wings of the building were most easily (or only) accessible via the central court (Driessen 2002, 2004). Many Aegean prehistorians have accordingly advocated replacing the term “palace” with “court compound.” while the palace at Knossos has a “throne room,” its function appears to have been related more to ritual practices rather than political ones, and the throne itself is probably a later feature added during the Mycenaean period (Driessen 2002, 3). Other Minoan palaces do not have throne rooms, and an iconography of the ruler is missing from Minoan representational art until the very end of the Neopalatial period (Davis 1995), which is very typical of corporate states (Blanton et al. 1996).
Figure 18.1. Map of state centers in the Aegean with hypothetical polity boundaries indicated as circles with diameters of fifty km. Palatial centers are marked by circles, and important non- or pseudopalatial centers by squares. The map of Crete is for the Neopalatial period, whereas the map of the mainland pertains to the late Mycenaean period (figure drawn by the authors).
Moreover, there is an absence of very wealthy burials in Protopalatial and Neopalatial Crete that we might call “royal,” although there are major depositions of wealth within the palaces themselves. Recent work on Minoan palaces has, in fact, suggested that they were “communal, ceremonial centers that were used both by non-elite (outside) and by elite groups (inside) as meeting places for ritual, integrative actions” (Driessen 2002, 8). That the courts of the Minoan palaces were used for major communal rituals is indicated by two miniature frescoes found at Knossos, the Grandstand Fresco and the Sacred Grove Fresco.

The ritual role of Minoan palaces should not, however, diminish their administrative and economic roles, which were crucially important. Storage of agricultural staples was extensive in both Protopalatial and Neopalatial palaces (Christakis 2004, 2008), and the administrative texts of the Minoan palaces, while undeciphered, clearly monitor large amounts of foodstuffs alongside other valuable commodities and human labor (Palmer 1995). Even if these foodstuffs were ultimately destined for communal banqueting ceremonies, the economic impact of the Minoan palace cannot be ignored. It appears that Minoan economy and ritual were tightly integrated, not mutually exclusive, components of the larger, corporate state system (Day and Relaki 2002, 219–20).

Mycenaean palaces on the Greek mainland, on the other hand, are organized around a central “megaron” complex, which consists of a porch, an anteroom, and a large rectangular room with a central hearth bracketed by four columns and a throne regularly located to the right of the entrance (see figure 18.2). Flanking this megaron complex are small courts, storerooms, administrative quarters, and residential suites. Mycenaean architecture thereby emphasizes the importance of the enthroned king, whose title, as we know from the clay administrative tablets written in Linear B, was wanax (wa-na-ka).

Wealthy burials are an endemic feature of Mycenaean palatial societies and the communities that preceded them. At the palatial sites of Mycenae and Pylos, large corbeled “tholos” tombs are closely associated with the palace itself. These tombs have architectural precursors on the mainland in the form of Middle Bronze Age tumuli and on Crete in the form of large, circular tomb chambers (Rutter 1993, 789; Parkinson and Galaty 2007, 122). Mycenaean art, like Minoan art, lacks a clear iconography of the king himself; rather, the wall paintings of the palace act as a frame or focalizing device for the wanax, providing a ‘first-person’ (rather than ‘third-person’) iconography of power (Bennet 2007). As with the tholos tombs, the iconographic vocabulary of these artistic frames at Mycenaean palaces (e.g., heraldic lions/griffins, in-curved altars) is largely borrowed from the Minoan world.

In terms of political economy, Mycenaean palaces were interested in controlling the acquisition of exotic raw materials such as ivory, as well as their distribution as finished products (Burns 1999). Many of these goods are found deposited in rock-cut chamber tombs and corbeled tholos tombs, some of which are truly monumental (Cavanagh and Mee 1998). Palace-sponsored feasting (see articles in...
Wright 2004) is a feature common to all Mycenaean centers and arguably was one way for the palace to promote the centrality of the state, along with the individuals and corporate groups who contributed staples and material, in ritual practice. These features can be associated with network (as opposed to corporate) strategies that center on the individual and the control of prestige goods.

Despite the variation present within each type of Aegean state, the basic distinction between more corporate Minoan states and more networked Mycenaean states can still be made, and these characterizations can be attributed to the processes of their formation. The earliest Minoan states did not dominate the landscape to the same degree as their Neopalatial and Mycenaean successors. As such, the first palaces were relatively simple, one-story structures that lacked the elaborate architectural features, such as ashlar masonry, associated with the palaces of the Neopalatial period (Schoep 2004). On the contrary, these architectural elaborations are attested
in early houses and building complexes surrounding the palace at Malia. All of this suggests that the first Minoan palaces emerged as centers of communal ritual within a context of elite competition and emulation (Schoep 2006).

Mycenaean states, on the other hand, were preceded in the Middle Bronze Age by small communities organized around kin groups (Voutsaki in press). Elites in these small-scale societies were buried in sometimes grand fashion, with an emphasis on wealth, goods imported from the islands and elsewhere, the hunt, and warfare. These burials often contain one individual or a small number of individuals within a larger burial ground (a grave circle or tumulus) that may represent a kinship group larger than the nuclear family (Dickinson 1977, 41; Cavanagh and Mee 1998, 34).

With the growth of settlements at the start of the Late Bronze Age, however, the dominant burial form became the rock-cut chamber tomb in cemeteries that were carefully separated from settlement space. Although chamber tombs were typically reused over generations in contrast to the individualizing pit and cist graves of the early Mycenaean period, the burial group had shifted to the nuclear family. Thus, Wright (2008) argues that the chamber tomb represents promotion of the nuclear family as a political unit in Mycenaean society.

This emphasis on the nuclear family and most probably the individual head of this household was a stable feature of Mycenaean palatial society and found its most grandiose expression in the transformation of the standard Middle Bronze Age longhouse into the monumental throne room of Mycenaean palaces, the megaron with its central circular hearth (Kilian 1985, 1988; Wright 1994, 2006). As Kilian has put it, “the Mycenaean palace can be seen as a vast embodiment of personal propaganda” (Kilian 1988, 299).

**Aegean State Economy and Society**

The economic function of the Aegean states is now understood in more nuanced ways than was the case previously. Earlier work on Minoan and Mycenaean states envisioned the palaces as classic, Near Eastern–style redistributive centers that dominated the production, storage, and regional distribution of agricultural staples and wealth items (Renfrew 1972; Branigan 1987). However, this picture was largely the product of work on economy based on the Mycenaean Linear B texts (e.g., Killen 1985), which then was projected backward onto earlier, developing states and outward onto states that lacked such evidence on both Crete and the mainland. However, recent work on the Mycenaean states themselves argues that palatial control was far more selective than has been hitherto appreciated and emphasizes the need to examine areas outside of palatial control (Halstead 1992; Galaty and Parkinson 2007a, 2007b).

It now appears that the redistributive model does not apply to Mycenaean states, whose economies depended on mobilization (not, strictly speaking,
redistribution)—by which we mean that surpluses were collected primarily in order to finance the operations of the state (Halstead 2007). Moreover, their control over resources may have been highly selective in spatial terms and in terms of how different industries were managed. For example, perfumed oil and bronze production were directly monitored by the palace (Shelmerdine 1984), but the production of ceramics was only indirectly monitored (Galaty 1999, 2007, in press), and most aspects of chipped stone production were not controlled at all (Parkinson 2007). We have argued elsewhere on the basis of the textual and archaeological evidence that the Mycenaean palace at Pylos supported a “prestige economy” that operated through the distribution of both staples and wealth (Galaty and Parkinson 2007a, 2007b; Nakassis in press).

The Minoan palatial economy is also seen in a different light, especially since its redistributive role was previously inferred on the basis of the interpretation of the later Mycenaean evidence. Research has suggested that the Minoan palaces were, like their Mycenaean counterparts, largely consumers rather than producers of some palatial goods. The finely made ceramics of Protopalatial Crete, Kamares ware, whose production was previously believed to have taken place in palatial workshops, has been shown to be the product of specialized pottery workshops that were in operation prior to the emergence of the palaces (Day and Wilson 1998). Kamares ware was imported to Knossos, the largest of the Minoan centers, from the central Mesara Plain rather than being produced exclusively by palace-controlled workshops. So, although this high-quality, display-oriented good was largely consumed at palatial centers, its production was probably not managed by them.

This decentralized picture of the economic role of Minoan and Mycenaean states has led to new models of their formation and reproduction. Minoan states have been increasingly studied not as a concrete objects with static systems of hierarchy but through the lens of heterarchy (Monuments of Minos; Schoep and Knappett 2004), which in the context of political complexity means that given social units (such as corporate groups) are unranked with respect to each other or can be ranked in different ways depending on context (Crumley 1995).

Some have argued that it may be fruitful to think of the Minoan state (especially in the Protopalatial period) not as a unified territorial entity largely controlled by the palace but as composed of several corporate groups or “houses” (Driessen in press) in competition with each other. Thus, the state appears as an emergent property that results from and is reproduced by elite competition and emulation (not unlike recent studies of the Greek polis [Osborne 1996, 187–97] or state formation in the New World [Brumfiel and Fox 1994]).

Schoep (2004), for example, has shown that the features typically associated with Minoan palaces (architectural and otherwise) appear for the first time not in the palaces themselves but rather in houses and other architectural complexes located in the towns surrounding them. She therefore argues that the main social forces of Protopalatial Crete were not the palaces but elites at large. These individuals and households were consumers of exotic goods imported from Egypt and the Near East (Schoep 2006). Consequently, the emergence of the palace as an institution
needs to be seen in its larger systemic context as a product of social forces outside of its purview and control. A further result of this is that each palace needs to be examined separately since each was enmeshed in different social and historical environments (Day and Relaki 2002, 221).

Schoep’s model applies primarily to the Protopalatial period. In the later Neopalatial period of Minoan Crete, palaces are much larger, ornate buildings with extensive storage capacities (Christakis 2004, 2008), the hinterlands of which reflect political expansion and settlement hierarchies (Haggis 2002). It therefore seems likely that authority was more concentrated in this period (Dabney and Wright 1990). Palmer’s careful study (1995) has shown that the quantities of agricultural goods from the Neopalatial Linear A texts found at Hagia Triada are comparable to entries from Mycenaean Knossos, suggesting that the scale of administration was similar to that of later Mycenaean states.

On the other hand, Neopalatial Crete is far from a static period or homogenous entity (Driessen and Macdonald 1997; Macdonald 2002). The administrative center at Hagia Triada just mentioned, for example, is physically separate from the court-centered palace at Phaistos, which does not seem to have a significant administrative role in LM I. This situation seems incompatible with a model in which the elite resident in the palace exerted strict control over the hinterland and suggests instead that groups outside the palace were important to the maintenance and reproduction of the Neopalatial state.

Similar research trends have affected the study of Mycenaean states. As noted earlier, recent work has challenged the traditional picture of the palace as the center of a classic redistributive system that dominated the economic and public affairs of the polity as a whole. In terms of its internal structure, Mycenaean states are usually modeled as static bureaucracies occupied by impersonal offices and controlled by the wanax (on these offices, see Shelmerdine 2008).

Based on a prosopographical study of the Linear B texts at Pylos, however, Nakassis (2006) has argued that a large number of individuals identified primarily by personal name in the administrative texts of the palace were agents to whom important economic activities were assigned by the palatial administration. Previous work had distinguished quite sharply between elite office holders and nonelite peasants and dependent labor (Chadwick 1976, 77), but named individuals appear to constitute a class of administrators ranging from relatively low-level laborers to high-status “collectors” who were intimately involved in the highest levels of palatial administration.

Thus, the state at Pylos can be understood as the product of interaction among a network of elites with substantial nonpalatial interests in addition to their roles as administrators. The activities of these elites actively reproduced the palatial system and at the same time were simultaneously constrained by preexisting institutional systems of production, remuneration, taxation, and so on. Thus, the Mycenaean state can be seen, in general, as the direct result of elite participation in the palatial system and was likely the central arena for elite competition (cf. Blanton 1998).
CONCLUSION

Recent models of Minoan and Mycenaean states emphasize three major points. First, there is no such thing as the Minoan or Mycenaean state; rather, there is evidence for similarity and difference between individual polities. Consequently, each polity needs to be studied individually in order to observe this variability and to explain it. Second, the state cannot be studied as a freestanding entity in splendid isolation from society at large, particularly since state boundaries are not easily drawn even in modern societies (Mitchell 1999). The third point, closely related to the second, is that the internal operation of the state is not simple but is the product of dynamic interaction between individuals, social groups, and institutional structures.

The dual-processual approach, which points out that early states used different methods of political unification distributed along a continuum between corporate and network strategies, allows us to draw basic distinctions between Minoan and Mycenaean states. Minoan states, with their strategies of inclusion, present us with larger corporate groups that participated in a palatial system focused on unification through large-scale rituals. Mycenaean states, on the other hand, were focused on individual aggrandizement, the acquisition of material wealth through participation in the palatial system, and its display through sponsorship of feasts and wealth deposited with the dead in sometimes monumental graves. The differences between these different states are the result of their local historical trajectories and the processes by which they developed in interaction with other, closely and distantly related, societies.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


