Social Memory and Identity in the Mesara Landscape: Collective Island Memory
Contrasting with Strategies of Empire

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By
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This thesis focuses on the power center shifts in the Mesara (Crete) between Phaistos, Ayia Triada, and Gortyn from the Neolithic to Roman periods. After a critical analysis of Minoan archaeology and the way the term “palaces” (termed “court-centered buildings”) has hindered state formation theory, I hypothesize that Phaistos was a disembedded capital for the Mesara. Additionally, I consider the active role of landscape, primarily how certain natural features being identified as meaningful by past settlement could have dictated the initial decision to place the court-centered building at Phaistos. Via an exploration of collective memory, I identify the Kamares cave as one of those meaningful features, demonstrative of sociocultural significance even prior to the construction of the court-centered building.

Depending on the political period, the acknowledgement of Phaistos as a locale of significance varies. Landscape theory helps us understand which location was significant during any given period. Essentially, the acknowledgement and influence of collective memory grants landscape a more active role in determining locations of importance, meaning that buildings are simply a marker. If the Phaistos court-centered building did not exist, the location would still be considered culturally significant to the inhabitants
who shared the collective memory of the region. The assumption of power by local external forces, such as the Knossians and Mycenaeans, demonstrates an interesting balance between acknowledging preexisting collective memory, and wanting to define a new order. When drastic landscape transformation occurs, and previous sociocultural associations are abandoned, buildings are no longer just a marker, and actually hold power. Thus, the construction of Gortyn and the fall of Phaistos demonstrate a lack of concern for the previously culturally significant location, and how Gortyn, a location lacking in cultural meaning (though defensibly sensible) become a locale of power simply by the presence of a building.
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I. Introduction

The term “landscape” is often used to define a collection of geographic features in a given region, resulting in the recognition of “landscape” as a feature of geography, not archaeology. Rarely does a landscape exist without human interference, and as a result, we must think of landscape not only as a collection of geographic and celestial features encompassed in the natural space around us, of the sky, trees, plants, and rivers, but also as a space for social interaction and human activity. Landscape, then, is a fusion of nature, earth’s surface, and the results of human activity with each other and these natural features.

Ideology and power (political, economic, and administrative) can become associated with a particular location on the landscape because of the activities and interactions which occurred there. This process is in part due to collective memory (Halbwachs 1992). Past events cannot simply be erased from the landscape where they took place, even if the buildings where they took place in are dismantled. These events are embedded in the memories of the people which occupy that landscape, and can be remembered (in some form) in subsequent years by different people. Even if the buildings are no longer used, the landscape itself, as well as those dismantled structures, act as a reminder (Halbwachs 1992: 52). Landscape is thus imbued with the collective memory, ideology, and identity by its occupants—the “collective” is formed from the individual recollections and interpretations.
All too often in Mediterranean archaeology, human constructions (most often architecture) are identified as representations of memory, ideology, and identity, while the place itself, and the interactions which occurred in that place from person to person or person to the land itself, is cast aside. It is my hope that this paper can inspire Mediterranean archaeological studies to consider the place, and not just the structures built on that place. In discussing the Mesara (southern Crete) from 4000 B.C.E to 200 B.C.E. as an example, I demonstrate how certain ideologies and memories can become imbued into a landscape, subsequently making a particular location recognized by its inhabitants as one with ideological, political and administrative power.

Depending on the situation, buildings are incorporated onto the landscape as a means to mark the location--in the case of the Mesara, Minoan “palaces” and tholos tombs. The meaning and significance of these buildings to the users changes throughout time. Eventually buildings can dominate the collective memory, so that they seem to be the holders of memory, but we must look past the creation of these buildings to what influenced their creation in the first place. The buildings serve as markers of past engagement with the location they occupy. In order to understand the memories imbued in those buildings, we must understand that the buildings are part of a process of networked memories and associations (Van Dyke and Alcock 2003: 5), many of which existed prior to their construction. The buildings, in the face of humans constantly shaping memories, are constantly changing and possess a narrative representative of dynamic time.

This thesis begins with a discussion of state formation on the island of Crete, and how historical interpretations of the so-called Minoan “palaces” (referred to here as
“court-centered buildings”) have inhibited the development of understanding how power was distributed regionally. A brief history follows, discussing the fluctuations of power center in the Mesara, primarily between Phaistos and the nearby Ayia Triada, and the possible role of Phaistos as a disembedded capital. Memory and identity are then addressed, particularly how they become imbued in a particular location on the landscape. Architecture is the mechanism, as it can be used to mark a location of memories, and in turn become incorporated into its network.

Using Ashmore and Knapp’s (1999) landscape themes, I attempt to identify earlier stages of landscape identity and memory imbued in the location of Phaistos, and the development of this memory in the rest of the Mesara which results from landscape transformation. In the case of the Mesara, the collective identity of the region was developed initially at Phaistos, the earliest settlement. Memories originating here were increasingly developed, and as political power became concentrated in this location with the development of monumental architecture, the court-centered building at Phaistos acted as a “marker” not only of the political and administrative power it held, but also of the memory imbued in the location of the Phaistos landscape itself.

With the transformation of political and administrative power in the Mesara, we see that the ideological and political memory vested in the landscape of Phaistos remains, despite the fact that the monumental building placed there occasionally assumed a different role. It is only when the island of Crete gets assumed into a larger empire that landscape plays a secondary role—a location is selected for power center on the basis of “empire concerns”, and a building is placed there to act as a symbol of power, with no initial connection to landscape memory.
II. The Mesara Landscape

Crete is a large island off the coast of Greece, about 156 miles long and 8,261 km² in area. The island is fairly mountainous, the mountains acting as natural borders for modern and ancient subregions, identifiable by the differing changes in landcover, dialect, natural resources, and production (Watrous 2004: 29). The location of Crete has been highly beneficial to its economy in antiquity: besides its proximity to Santorini and the Cycladic islands, North Africa is only 320 km from the southern coast. Crete is therefore considered to be the “threshold” of the Aegean and Near East (Watrous 2004: 33). Such a name is reinforced by the ample amounts of Minoan material culture found in Egypt and the Near East, and vice versa. Less ideally, Crete’s position in the Mediterranean is defensibly difficult. The island has suffered from many periods of hostile occupation, including Mycenaean, Roman, Ottoman, and German, and has held independent status for only short segments of time (Watrous 2004).

The Mesara plain, the focus of this study, is the modern name for the South-Central region of Crete. It is an alluvial plain, encompassing 54 x 9 km range of southern Crete, bordered by the surrounding Psiloritis and Asterousia mountain ranges (Watrous 2004: 34) (figure 1). The plain encompasses 2/3 of the island’s most fertile growing land (Watrous 2004: 36). The Mesara is also home to some of the island’s most successful ports in varying periods, Kommos and Matala, which benefited from the
abundance of produce and high quality ceramics being produced in the area, in addition to the proximity to North Africa and the Near East (Watrous 2004: 37).

The relationship between the Mesara plain and Crete as a whole is not entirely understood, primarily for lack of survey data and translated language. This confusion has also likely developed from the misinterpreted and understudied relationship between the so-called “palace regions” of Crete. The topic of Minoan state formation and regional development has suffered from poorly implemented historic excavations and the continued usage of monarchical terms like “palace” and “king” imposed by Sir Arthur Evans’ excavations of Knossos in the early 1900’s. As a result, the monumental buildings (commonly referred to as “palaces”) at Phaistos, Malia, Zakros, and Galatas (and likely others) have been analyzed on the basis of European culture; rooms have been designated as the “throne room”, “queen’s megaron”, and “king’s megaron”. Comparing the abundance of temples in the Near East and Egypt to the apparent lack of religious architecture on Crete, Evans concluded that the “palaces” housed kings who held divine authority, and the structures also acted as temples (Schoep 2006: 37).

Despite the acknowledgement that Evans’ above interpretations were misguided, and despite some efforts to question and reinterpret the understanding of Minoan palatial contexts, the study of Minoan state formation and the role of these major “palatial” structures on the landscape are severely underdeveloped. Furthermore, though anthropologists and archaeologists have tried to decipher the complexities of Minoan power structures and the organization of the state, there is a lack of continuity between their theories and the way in which they apply them.
Figure 1: The Mesara plain and historic locations of power.
If we are ready to acknowledge that the “throne rooms” at the “palaces” are perhaps the result of a European monarchical-minded construction, then why do scholars continue to refer to the monumental structures in this way? Many scholars defend this choice because they wish to avoid confusion-- they are in fact further muddying the archaeological record, and preventing significant strides from being made.

In taking my own advice, I shall thus far refer to the Minoan “palaces” as “court-centered buildings”. Court-centered buildings include any building with the following features: monumental scale, rooms arranged around a large, open court, specific structural features (pier-and-door partitions and light wells), and ashlar masonry (McEnroe 2010: 54)\(^1\)—these features are shared by all of the buildings which have been declared Minoan “palaces”. Finally, I use numeric dates as opposed to the traditional “palatial” period markers common to Minoan archaeology—I believe these labels are too fixed on conceptualizing the court centered buildings as functioning royal residences, and we cannot assume that each of the buildings experienced the universal historic timeline which these period labels suggest.

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\(^1\) Ashlar masonry refers to stones that have been finely cut, polished, and fitted.
III. The Development of Minoan Centralized Authority

Before I can address the changes in settlement and power distribution in the Mesara, I must address the organization of the island of Crete as a whole. Several controversies are present in the understanding of Minoan archaeology, primarily the role of Knossos, the largest and most wealthy court-centered building. One of the most important controversies in need of addressing is whether it was in control of the entire island at the time of state formation, or if Crete was home to several, independent polities until 1700 B.C.E., at which point Knossos did seize control. Understanding the development of the Minoan “state” could likely illuminate the answer.

Most scholars agree that the earliest settlements on Crete were based on tribes, from which chiefdoms eventually formed—these chiefdoms would have been in control of several area tribes (Parkinson and Galaty 2008: 119 and Haggis 1999). Because the chiefdoms would be gathering several kin-based tribes together, the centralized authority would have “cross-cut” kinship groups and village boundaries/territories in order to develop relationships that would encompass a larger community and address the needs of a higher authority that existed beyond the means of a smaller, likely familial based control (Haggis 1999: 72).

Settlement is an excellent means for understanding the development of the court-centered buildings from these chiefdoms, particularly because in the locations where state centers would eventually be located, we see evidence for earlier “central buildings”
This phenomenon is apparent in the Phaistos region, where there were central buildings developed around a large, open space. The apparent “highlighting” of the central area “may point to the existence of some type of social rite and accompanying ideology” (Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou 2004a: 230). A similar circumstance occurs in northern Crete, at the settlement from which the Knossos court-centered building would develop (Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou 2004a: 231 and Parkinson and Galaty 2008: 119). The social hierarchies which formed, initially from within the tribes, and in the chiefdom based system, resulted from increases in trade and controlling agriculture on a local and then regional level (Haggis 1999: 70). Wealth increased as a result of trade relationships forming with Egypt, the Cyclades, Byblos, Ebla, Qatna, and Ugarit. Seal stones develop, showing evidence of organization and administration around the creation of surplus and procurement of goods (Schoep 2006: 53). Besides the material culture found demonstrating a hierarchy in ownership and status, the cemeteries indicate social stratification and separation based on the basis of wealth (Haggis 1999: 70).

Circa 2000 B.C.E, or the “Protopalatial period”, archaeologists have decisively claimed that Minoan state formation occurred, on the basis of the apparent “sudden” appearance of the monumental, obviously permanent court-centered buildings. The nature of the state is up for debate, but in every option proposed, the court-centered buildings are functioning as political, administrative, and ideological centers in control of a region. This will be discussed in greater detail in the next section, focusing on Phaistos.

Some archaeologists are convinced that the northern Knossos court-centered building was the administrative and political center in control of the entire island because
of its size, wealth, and larger agricultural stores. In this model, all other regions that possess a court-centered building would be engaged in a sort of feudal relationship. Other scholars believe that Knossos was not in control of every polity, and that each region with a court-centered building was independent (Knappett and Schoep 2000: 365). I am inclined to agree with the latter, but I do wish to stress the fact that many archaeologists believe not all of the Minoan court-centered buildings have been found—certainly another large court-centered building like Knossos or Phaistos would be rare, but a smaller building, like Gournia, is plausible. Without knowing the locations, sizes, and architectural features of all possible court-centered buildings, it is difficult to determine if any sort of hierarchy was in place—perhaps some of the larger court-centered buildings did dominate smaller or less wealthy regions. Perhaps some of the smaller court-centered buildings in the north were subservient to Knossos, and perhaps some of the known Minoan “villas” played a more major or minor role than what is currently established.

Briefly, in defense of independent polities controlling Crete, evidence of certain defensive structures, iconography, and texts indicate that the island was not unified under one rule prior to 1700 B.C.E. Defensive structures on the island prior to 1700 B.C.E. indicate that in the absence of an island wide domination by Knossos, Minoan Crete was subject to internal or external threat and rivalry. Military watch towers and defensive works have been found in east and central Crete, often connected by well built roads. These road networks do not appear to act as connectors to towns or between court-centered buildings, but instead they only connect to other defensive structures (MacGillivray 1997: 22-23). Defensive works in coastal areas, like Malia, have also been found, though previously have been identified as a means to defend Crete from
foreigners—but perhaps foreigners were not their only worry. Because these defensive structures were built prior to the “agreed upon” dates for Knossos taking over the island (1700 B.C.E.), perhaps the defensive structures are the first evidence of Knossos, the largest and most economically successful court-centered building, trying to expand away from their territory, and other court-centered buildings reacting (Macgillivray 1997: 23).

Archaeologists are unable to extract identities of rulers or kings from the record, at Knossos or any other court-center. The Minoan court-centered buildings are universal in their lack of iconography depicting specific rulers, and their failure to recognize dynasties (Driessen 2003). The Minoan bull head, once recognized at Knossos as a symbol of ultimate power over the island because of the frequency in which it appears, has actually been found in more instances at Malia, a smaller court-centered building. Finally, besides the evidence of storage magazines and later industrial areas in each of the court-centered buildings (Hitchcock 2009: 194), there appears to be a lack of control over the production and distribution of materials and agriculture over the entire island (Parkinson and Galaty 2008: 119). Certainly, if Knossos was in charge of a single, unified state encompassing the whole island, there would be evidence for controlling production and distribution across Crete.

Here, I have offer an admittedly small summary of the multitude of reasons for proving that the polities of Crete were not subservient to Knossos until 1700 B.C.E.. Unfortunately, I am unable to address here the web of relationships between each of the polities—my focus is specifically on the role of Phaistos within the Mesara. My point in addressing these few issues, however, is to indicate that there is certainly justification in moving away from the Knossos-centered theories.
IV. Phaistos: A Court-Centered Building Acting as a Disembedded Capital

With the caveat that there is a large gap in translated textual evidence, and that political interactions between court-centered buildings are not entirely understood throughout the entirety of the Minoan occupation of Crete, I now attempt to explain the complex historic shifts in location and culture of political power within the Mesara from 4000 B.C.E., prior to the construction of the court-centered buildings, to 200 B.C.E., when Crete was incorporated into the Greek Empire (figure 2).

In this discussion, “location of power center” refers to the location where political and administrative control over a region was concentrated. The way in which this concentration occurs varies from period to period, as does the type of building used to do so. The “Phaistos region” refers to the immediate settlement controlled by the Phaistos court-centered building, though the structure itself was in control of the western Mesara region. Depending on the period under discussion, the ruler of the Mesara might be independent, or subsumed within a hierarchy. Both location and building should be considered simultaneously. Depending on the period, power would be associated with one or both. As we will come to understand, buildings in which these activities took place were at times occupied, but not always in the manner for which they were intended. The Phaistos court-centered building, for example, was a structure that housed the political
power, but then stripped of that role to function as a center for industry, with Ayia Triada, a Minoan “villa”\(^2\), assuming the power instead.

\(^2\) The questionable term “villa” will be addressed on page 22.
The region surrounding Phaistos was first occupied during the Final Neolithic (4000-3000 B.C.E), and appears to have been the dominant settlement in the Mesara, proven by the large amounts of pottery found and the presence of walls (Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou 2004a: 226). The later constructed court-centered building is located in this long-inhabited area. There is evidence of a deposit on the Phaistos hill identified as “Chalcolithic”, underneath the later central court, and extending to where a town would flourish circa 2000 B.C.E. The finds are plentiful and elite, including early polychromy decorated pottery, considered a “prelude” to the locally made Kamares fineware, as well as ceramics indicative of later developed Pyrgos and Vasiliki fineware (Levi 1964: 4-5).

From 4000 B.C.E-3500 B.C.E (considered Late Neolithic) levels at Phaistos show evidence of interaction with the Knossos region, due to exchanges in pottery, as well as the presence of obsidian, and steatopygous figurines. Similar figurines have been found on the island of Cyprus, and the rectangular and round buildings occurring at Phaistos are quite similar as well. The nature of settlements in the region, in combination with subsistence data, suggests that Phaistos was an egalitarian society in which divisions of labor and gender are clearly distinguishable (Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou 2004a: 225-6). From 3100 B.C.E.-2000 B.C.E., the Mesara plain (and the whole island)\(^3\) was divided into territories claimed by distinct lineage groups, or tribes (Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou 2004a: 231; Parkinson and Galaty 2008: 118-119). Phaistos was the largest, reaching a size of four hectares, whereas the other area occupations range from 7x7 meters, to 150x40 meters (Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou 2004a: 227) (table 1 and figure 3).

\(^3\) See Parkinson and Galaty 2008: 118.
At the Phaistos-center, elite appears to have emerged in the location where the court-centered building would eventually be built. A “mansion” was constructed sometime between 3000-2700 B.C.E, though excavations reports on the structure are limited. The mansion had a maze of basement rooms separated by thick walls, startlingly similar to those seen at the later Phaistos court-centered building, both in design and implementation. The shared general location, in addition to similarity in construction, gives way to the possibility of court-centered style architecture being developed within Crete, per indigenous design (Branigan 1979: 103).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Function</th>
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<tr>
<td>Phaistos</td>
<td>4 hectares</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hamlet</td>
<td>Settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>60(?) x (?)</td>
<td>Settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>15 x 40m</td>
<td>Camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>80 x 100m</td>
<td>Cemetery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>40 x 55m</td>
<td>Settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>7 x 7m</td>
<td>Camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>150 x (?) m</td>
<td>Settlement</td>
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<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>70 x 40 m</td>
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<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>40 x 110 m</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>82</td>
<td>20 x 20m</td>
<td>Settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83</td>
<td>40 x 35 m</td>
<td>Cemetery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84</td>
<td>20 x 50 m</td>
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<tr>
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<td>130 x 40 m</td>
<td>Cemetery</td>
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<td>Camp</td>
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<tr>
<td>111</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Settlement</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 1: Sites dating to 3200-2000 B.C.E. (Early Minoan I) period, found in the Mesara survey (Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou 2004a: 227). The term “settlement” encompasses villages, hamlets, and farms, listed hierarchically. Please reference figure 3 to determine the specific settlement type.
Figure 3: Distribution of the EMII settlements. Table 1 condenses village, hamlet, and farms into “settlement”; tholos and burial are condensed as “cemetery”. Please reference accompanying site numbers for distinctions. Developed from Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou’s survey (2004a: 228).
Beginning in 2000 B.C.E., regional variability becomes extremely apparent across the island; in this period that we begin to see the development of the Phaistos state within the Mesara. Unique to this region were methods of administration and exchange, as well as writing systems to record this exchange. Burial practices were also extremely different in the Mesara than on the rest of Crete (Parkinson and Galaty 2008: 119). Between 2000-1850 B.C.E., in the so-called “Proto-Palatial Period” of Minoan occupation, the court-centered building at Phaistos was constructed (figure 4) as were the other Minoan court-centered buildings across the island, signifying its political and economic control over the smaller settlements of the Mesara (figure 4 and 5).4

Considering the questionable excavation records (see footnote 4) one is left to determine when exactly the court-centered building was altered. Figure 4 is based off of Levi’s excavation records, which lacked a state plan, and figure 5 is taken from a recent German pamphlet handed out at the site to tourists. I believe that figure 5, most likely based on the current Italian excavation data, demonstrates the inaccuracies present in the excavation records, as there are no indications of the “prepalatial” and “Neolithic” (ranging 4000 -2000 B.C.E) occupations found in the central court (#40).

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4 Figure 5 demonstrates the alterations made to the court-centered building at Phaistos per period. Unfortunately, plans of the building distinguishing periods of occupation and construction are rare and poorly done— in fact, no state plan was included in the excavation report, done by Dori Levi in the 1970’s. Some of the best plans are, in fact, from tourist booklets available at the site. Branigan rightly states that the illustrations and photographs included in the reports are “surprising” considering their (fairly) recent date, as one “will look in vain for a scale or a ranging pole. The finds are illustrated by photographs and colour paintings but not by line drawings and profiles. There are some colourful sections showing walls but not the levels which filled the area between them…all of this will be disappointing to present and future archaeologists who want to know the stratigraphic relationships of the deep deposits at Phaistos and want to see those relationships graphically demonstrated” (Branigan 1979: 102).
Figure 4: Phaistos court-centered building from 2000 B.C.E.-1700 B.C.E. (called “protopalatial”) (McEnroe 2010: 46).
The role of the court-centered building in the Mesara between 2000 B.C.E-1700 B.C.E. is most important in understanding the shifts in power center which would occur during its use. As demonstrated by the state plans, Minoan court-centered buildings are characterized by their apparent lack of floor plan, the labyrinth of rooms and corridors, and then the sudden change in architecture and light with the opening of the central court (McEnroe 2010: 49). Though only a fragmentary portion of the court-centered building is preserved, and the upper level stories are missing, we can gather some understanding of the activities which would have occurred here. Many rooms were used for pottery and agricultural storage, as well as occasional food preparation (McEnroe 2010: 49). The

Figure 5: Phaistos plan.
central courtyards (figure 6) and “theatric spaces” (figure 7) are indicative of the need for congregations of people.

Figure 6: Phaistos’ central courtyard, facing south. Photo credit: author.
We do not need to discuss the structure’s biography in detail, with the exception of pointing out the significance of the central court. McEnroe, in his discussion of the construction of Phaistos, claims that the orientation of the court-centered building was entirely “arbitrary”, and does so without explanation. Despite the claim of an “arbitrary” north to south orientation, he points out that the initial construction of the court-centered building necessitated that “much of the ridge was completely reshaped and geometrically ordered to accommodate it” (McEnroe 2010: 48). I discuss this more in detail in later sections, but the central courtyard (indicated on figures 4 and 5) of a Minoan court-centered building was arguably the most important feature of the structure. Besides being

Figure 7: Phaistos’ “theatric court” facing north. Kamares cave is visible from this location, in particular when standing on the steps. Photo credit: author.
present in every court-centered building on the island, they all share a variety of characteristics indicative of a key role in Minoan culture.

McEnroe’s argument of “arbitrariness” can first be trumped when considering the regularized size of the central court across the island. All of the court-centered buildings share a rough ratio of 2:1 (length to width), and they all occupy fairly large portions of the building. The central courtyard at Knossos, for example, is estimated to accommodate up to 5,435 people, likely about 1/4 of the population of the Knossos settlement. Thus, the size of the courtyards considered alongside Minoan wall paintings indicates regular feasting and congregations in large open areas. The central court could have been the space for this activity (Driessen 2003: 57-61). Secondly, when one considers the construction undergone to make the courts, McEnroe’s argument becomes moot. The immense effort taken to terrace the hill and reinforce the foundations of the court-centered building, while assigning what he calls an “arbitrary” orientation to the building is illogical, especially when one considers the exact orientation of the central courtyard to the Kamares cave. Driessen states it best: in considering the universality of design and ratio of all Minoan court-centered building “this [implies] that this ritual action was so important that it determined the general layout of the building complex from its very beginning” (Driessen 57-61: 2003).

Was the court-centered building at Phaistos a “palace” in the sense of Evans’ and later archaeologists’ interpretations? Did it house a central ruler, and act as the monarchical center over the entirety of the Mesara? We must consider both the architecture of Phaistos (and other court-centered buildings), as well as the role of social organization in the Mesara. Though Phaistos accomplishes the role of monumentality,
being constructed atop a large hill, in proximity to the ideologically significant Kamares cave, we must recall the point made by Driessen: Minoan court-centered building are seemingly void of any indications of dynasties or the acknowledgement of a single person in power (Driessen 2003). Who controlled this immense and finely made structure, with enough space for a large congregation, areas for storage and production?

Understanding the role of Minoan “villas”, also present in the Mesara, will aid in understanding the role of Phaistos as a court-centered building. Ayia Triada (figure 8) will serve as an excellent example. The nearby structure has been mistaken as a “summer home” for the Phaistos elite. Several other so-called “villas” were located in the Mesara at this time: Kommos, Kalamaki, and other unnamed sites (figure 9).
Figure 9: MMIB settlement in the Mesara. “Village” is interpreted as “villa” in this paper. Developed from Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou’s survey (2004b: 278).
Archaeologists have referred collectively to many different types of buildings as “villas”, or what they believe are “governors’ houses”, “chieftains’ houses, and “miniature palaces”. Similar to the issue of court-centered buildings, the Minoan villa is a troublesome discussion because not all of the structures have been found. Certainly, if we were to compare structures on the basis of scale and elaborateness, we would see some evidence of a hierarchy—a study for another time. Betancourt and Marinatos, however, do the possibility for three categories: country (standing alone), manorial (dominating a small village or town), and urban (dominating a greater city or suburbs) (1992: 91). In the spirit of this discussion, and the critical means by which I have approached the term “palace”, the so-called Minoan “villas” to which I refer are in fact “redistributive elite residences”—the term “villa” appears to me to be troubled, especially when considering the three options mentioned above that it could encapsulate, ranging from a large home in isolation to a home in an urban center.

We will suffice ourselves with the fact that the redistributive elite residences of the Mesara were grand houses with some characteristics referencing the court-centered buildings, such as ashlar masonry, but with the caveat that these redistributive elite residences were also locales to monitor manufacturing, trade, and agriculture (Betancourt and Marinatos 1992: 91). Essentially, they would house an elite figure in the region, and would also be the location in which settlements within the Mesara could have operated an independently functioning redistributive economy, separate of the court-centered building. Malia, for example, was less than 200 m from Knossos, but it held its own storerooms, areas for craftsmen, and evidence of a redistribution system, thus pointing to an economy which was not reliant on the court-centered building for administration or
redistribution (Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou 2004b: 290). An important fact to point out: there is a lack of evidence for fortifications between redistributive elite residences in any region, meaning there a high likelihood for some sort of authority ensuring peace on a higher scale (Betancourt and Marinatos 1992: 92).

The more individualized and administrative functionality apparent in the architecture of Minoan redistributive elite residences, when compared with the more “communal” sense of architecture present in the court-centered buildings indicates that perhaps the court-centered buildings were more involved with the communal-based religion of Minoan Crete. As mentioned, the central courtyard at Phaistos was large (about 25x52 meters), as were the central courtyards of all such buildings found on Crete—likely meant to hold large throngs of people and capacitate the dancing which might have occurred in the central court and theatric spaces (figure 10).

Figure 10: Sketch of the “Sacred Grove and Dance Fresco” found at the court-centered building at Knossos (Driessen 2004). Note the plausible similarity in the walkways shown in the sketch, which are also visible on the floors of the “theater” at Phaistos (figure 7). Knossos has similar walkways.
The role of Phaistos as a court-centered building could have been partially ideological. Religious symbology is apparent in the building (material culture and decorations), in its alignment with the religiously significant Kamares cave, as well as the fact that the central court was built nearly on top of a settlement center from previous periods, where religious activities would have occurred. Some have argued that Phaistos is a purely religious location, but interpreting the site as having no connection to the economic and political activities taking place in the Mesara is difficult. First and foremost, the seals\textsuperscript{5} found in the storerooms at Phaistos are indicative of a hierarchical system of people present in the building, and more specifically, dealing within the storerooms. The seals reveal a tripartite hierarchical structure, with three types of “top” seals, 41 “middle” seals, and 283 “bottom” seals, with several seals found within each category. There could have possibly been a fourth tier within the hierarchy of population, but these people would have lacked seals because they were not permitted to enter Phaistos (Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou 2004c: 290).

Most archaeologists currently believe that the seals exhibit a hierarchy, one which reveals a central authority, owner of the “top” seals, who would have been in charge of

\textsuperscript{5} Minoan seals were stones (ranging in quality and wealth) cut into a series of standardized shapes with various ornamental patterns or inscriptions engraved onto them. The seals would function as a marker on clay or wax tablets, and some would be mounted onto jewelry. Based on the frequency of inscriptions found, it is believed that the seals were a means to identify the owner on a tablet, likely one which detailed a transaction of goods or property. The topic of seals is a large one, but we should focus on some crucial details: seals could indicate the wealth of the owner on the basis of the quality of the impression and the material of the seal itself (Weingarten 2012: 818-321). Furthermore, some seals are demonstrative of foreign contact, particularly with Egypt, and would likely be found on those owned by the elite. Most seals found at Phaistos were of geometric design, but at least 22% are showing plants, animals, and humans (Weingarten 2012: 321-22). Later developed seals, particularly those at Ayia Triada, show there might not be a connection between wealth and design of the deal, as there is a large variety of seal quality. Perhaps some seals were used by elites despite their “mediocre” quality because the design possessed familial or amulet significance (Weingarten 2012: 323).
the 41 members of the bureaucracy, who would have controlled a group of elite families, and beneath them all was the general populous. Their argument is not necessarily incorrect—it simply lacks a great deal of evidence. Perhaps a four-tiered hierarchical structure is reflected in the seals, in which case there are in fact several rulers at the “top”, indicative of a sort of corporate ruling scheme (Blanton et al 1996: 2). We cannot, however, assume that because there was only three types of “top” seals found, that there were three elite figures at the top of the structure—we are not entirely sure of the function of the seals, and we cannot be sure that they have all been found. As I have argued, a single central figure in charge of Phaistos is likely impossible, due to the evidence in the archaeological record for any person in this role.

Besides the seals, we should consider the “communal” atmosphere of Phaistos. The building is, of course, somewhat restrictive, not only in its floorplan but in the fact that we cannot assume that such a grand building would be constantly open to the public. But the size and seating/standing capacity in spaces like the central court and theatric spaces, as well as the large amounts of people shown in the frescos, hint that the builders of the court-centered building expected large groups of people on a normal basis. This sense of collectivity or community, I believe, is demonstrative of the building holding economic and ideological power in some way, though the power was not vested in the hands of one particular person. The lack of evidence for an individual ruler, combined with the presence of several redistributive elite residences in the area, indicates a larger group of individuals with power. The individualized economic and administrative success of the redistributive elite residences in the region indicates that any of them could not have been identified as the “elite residence” for whoever was in charge of Phaistos.
These characteristics of the court-centered building, as well as the Mesara region, are suggestive of a type of social organization in which power was not concentrated in the hands of one particular person, yet still centered on a specific location. In consideration of these characteristics, I would like to propose the possibility of Phaistos acting as a disembedded capital. The capital would have functioned for the Mesara elite, elite who have developed from the earliest forms of settlement in the Mesara. The concept of disembedded capitals have been applied to seemingly similar archaeological contexts across the world, but not yet applied to Crete.\(^6\) A disembedded capital is defined as a neutral location in which political decision making is housed; separate from the general society’s commercial and socioeconomic functions (Willey 1979: 123). They are used as means for elites to gain authority, while avoiding issues of competition between one another (Joffe 1998: 549). Establishing a disembedded capital in a neutral location would enable the elites in any given area to monitor political and administrative business in a way that would avoid any of them assuming any sense of political or economic authority over one another.

Throughout the development of settlement in the Mesara, the elite managed to gain control over specific regions (often agriculturally-specialized)—in earlier periods, through chiefdoms, and beginning in 2000 B.C.E., through the development of the Minoan redistributive elite residences system. The owners of these redistributive elite residences, in choosing the location of Phaistos as the neutral center, were able to handle the administrative and economic business within their own territories, and then

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\(^6\) Please see Willey (1979), Santley (1980), Joffe (1998), Gat (2003), and Parkinson and Galaty (2007).
congregate at Phaistos for whatever larger administrative or ideological-related business that needed to be carried out in a group.

Driessen seems to have grasped the plausibility of this scenario, without actually using the term “disembedded capital”: communal feasting would have occurred at Knossos by the elite members of the society, hence the presence of storerooms and kitchens at Knossos (or any other court-centered building). He claims that the participants in these activities would not have lived in the actual building, but in the elite “mansions” (redistributive residences) in the surrounding areas. The participants would have been the owners (Driessen 2004). He is correct—the court-centered building at Phaistos, with its storerooms and kitchens, monumental buildings and areas for congregating, could easily have been mistaken as an elite residence. Perhaps the “apartment” areas could have even been for temporary residence of any elite individual—but the fact remains that there is no decisive evidence for picking out the individual for that role. Furthermore, a monumental building with elite occupants is not always indicative of a system of government.

How is Phaistos different from the other elite structures in the area? Because of the apparent lack of a central court and theatric space, as well as the fact that, though Phaistos was monumental and decorated for an elite-audience, the redistributive elite residences in the Mesara show evidence for a wealthier, residential purpose. While Phaistos had storerooms (“koulouras”) like the redistributive elite residences, the court-centered building was evidently not holding any sort of major role in redistribution of goods or produce—if it was the “redistribution center” for the entirety of the Mesara, the storerooms would have been much larger. Some scholars have also argued that the koulouras at Phaistos and Knossos would have been incapable of storing grain without
spoiling it, whereas the koulouras at the much smaller Malia and other villas would likely have been able to, due to their smaller size and watertight design.

The koulouras at Phaistos were found in the west court, in nearly the same position as those at Knossos, and were no longer in use by 1700 B.C.E. The pits are not lined, have very porous walls, and soil bottoms (Strasser 1997: 78). Malia’s storage facilities are very different. They show evidence of longer usage, past 1700 B.C.E., are much smaller in size but greater in quantity, and appear to have had a flat lid. They are located above ground, in a central open area and would have had easy access, unlike the underground structures at Knossos and Phaistos. They are also sealed with watertight plaster, and have smaller sub units indicative of a need for organization (Strasser 1997: 78-79).

As a result of experimental archaeology and later textual sources, Strasser indicates that the koulouras at Phaistos and Knossos, located below ground, would need to be well-lined in order to store grain without it becoming moist. In order for them to be effective dry storage, they would need to be capped like those at Malia, but there is no indication that they were. He also points out that the koulouras at Phaistos and Knossos are large enough to hold grain for 300 people for a whole year (Strasser 1997: 91). Though this is a substantial size, and much larger than that at Malia, it is not large enough to capacitate the grain production that would have occurred in the Mesara.

Their large size is in fact the problem. The containers are simply too large to hold a large capacity of grain that large without spoiling first, but they are not large enough to indicate the court-centered building being the hub of redistribution. Connecting these koulouras with those at Malia, which are much smaller is size but greater in number, it
becomes clear that effective grain storage would have necessitated climate controlled containers, as well as containers that could not hold so much grain that it would spoil before being consumed. Therefore, the likelihood that the containers at Phaistos and Knossos actually held grain is quite slim (Strasser 1997: 81-91). Strasser’s final point is quite insightful: “The sometimes fallacious model of state emergence coupled with food storage and redistribution has a long history in archaeology, and has been continually reinforced by hasty interpretations of the field data” (Strasser 1997: 93). Indeed, if the Mesara already held a long tradition of specialized regional crop production, why should we assume that the center of power needed to be the location in which the output was stored? And finally, if they were in fact capable of storage for a large population, should they not have been in use in the periods when Phaistos was demoted to an industrial center?

The lack of a tholos tomb at Phaistos is another powerful indication of separation in function between the court-centered buildings and the redistributive elite residences. Every redistributive elite residence in the Mesara that was in command of a settlement would have had one. Tholoi will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent sections, but it is sufficient to indicate now that they played major roles in the organizational and

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7 Strasser comments that there is a possibility for the koulouras acting as “symbolic” granaries, which is in fact plausible in this scenario of disembedded capital—the elites would have wanted Phaistos to be regarded as having the capability of functioning in the same way as the villas did, but simply did not carry out the proper construction of the koulouras because it was not necessary. Another option that has been suggested is intriguing, in that the koulouras were meant as tree pits. As shown in figure 10, the Sacred Grove Fresco depicts women dancing near trees, though the architecture suggests they were inside the court-centered building. Though the bottoms of the koulouras are not lined, the stone lining along the sides could be an argument against this theory. Excavations at Avaris in the Nile Delta show tree pits that had been encased with brickwork, meaning growth could be possible in the koulouras (Strasser 1997: 90-91).
ideological activities in the Mesara (Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou 2004a: 230). Thus, the court-centered building seems to warrant the question: if elite were living at Phaistos, where would they have been buried? The answer is simple: Phaistos did not function as a permanent elite residence—elite were distributed across the Mesara, in the countryside redistributive residences, and would eventually be buried in the associated villa. These characteristics—the unique building, the troublesome identification of large-scale storage, and lack of tholoi, separate Phaistos from the rest of the Mesara elite buildings, enabling it to be identified as the “center” of Mesara power—in later sections it will become clear why this location was chosen in particular, and why it was so “neutral”.

Around 1800 B.C.E., Phaistos reduced drastically in size—the theatric space was cut in half, much of the western side knocked down, as was the central court (figure 11) (McEnroe 2010: 82). During this period, more rural redistributive elite residences appear, and wealth appears to be distributed widely across the Mesara (Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou 2004c: 296). Around 1775 B.C.E, there was an earthquake that diminished these new redistributive elite residences, but excavations reveal extensive occupation at Phaistos, Ayia Triada, Kommos, Selli (near Kamilari), and Kouses (Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou 2004c: 296).
Following the earthquake, the Phaistos court-centered building was damaged. Following a brief attempt at reconstruction (McEnroe 2010: 82) it no longer functioned as the neutral center. Those still-successful surrounding redistributive elite residences in the Mesara, however, became larger in size and number (Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou 2004b: 295). Their architectural layout changed, perhaps mimicking the court-centered buildings—a redistributive elite residence at Gournia, for example, shows evidence of a theatric space, as does Ayia Triada (McEnroe 2010: 109). Administrative functions in the
Mesara began to be concentrated more locally, in the redistributive elite residences. The disembedded capital was disassembled, and the structural changes to redistributive elite residences hint at an increase in competition, and a change in political organization.

Ayia Triada shows the most significant growth in this period. Tax records on clay tablets were kept near the south entrance of the structure, the area that has been identified as servants’ quarters. These servant quarters have been identified on the basis of the quality of residential artifacts that are separate from the more wealthy residential area, where the villa owner likely stayed. Being placed near the servants’ quarters, Watrous suggests that the placement of the tax records near the servant quarters is evidence for inventories of commodity distribution, likely for daily or weekly rations (1984: 128). The inscriptions include names of personnel, payments, rations, and vessels; the commodities mention include wheat, barley, olive oil, spices, wine, wool, other cloth, and copper. Mentions of names and functions verify that in connection to Ayia Triada, there were coppersmiths, masons, carpenters, weavers, scribes, cooks, and farmers who were dependent on the villa for subsistence, on a larger scale than in previous periods (Watrous 1984: 128).

Following the eruption of Thera, a nearby occupied volcanic island, Knossos was able to seize control of the entire island of Crete (Driessen 2001: 63).8 Phaistos was reconstructed for olive oil pressing, metalworking, pottery production, and large-scale

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8 The date of the Thera eruption is one of debate, but beginning in 1500 B.C.E., there is a series of earthquakes and an eruption around 1470 B.C.E. The proximity of Crete to the volcano meant that the geological disturbances would have severely impacted the island. Northern coastal lands would have likely experienced huge tidal waves, and there is evidence for severe earthquake damage across Crete, as well as other Cycladic islands. Thera pumice has also been found at many sites on Crete. The simultaneous destruction of architecture across the island being very close in date to the eruption indicates that the eruption, and earthquakes before and after, had a severe impact on the Minoan population (Shelmerdine 2008).
storage. Continuing its success, Ayia Triada appears to assume the role of power center (though under the control of Knossos). The other area redistributive elite residences that had been at one point equal to Ayia Triada were now subservient, a result of the turmoil which occurred when Phaistos was not rebuilt.

Ayia Triada was remodeled with many features that are clearly Knossian. Bull-leaping frescoes were added, and are stylistically indicative of a Knossos-based artist commissioned to do them. The building’s ceramic record demonstrates a significant increase in Knossos-style fineware. Scholars believe that the alterations were not made solely at the hands of the Knossians; alterations seem to have been a result of a mixture of Mesara-based locals, as well as workers from Knossos, on the basis of the mason marks found on the ashlar blocks. Besides these stylistic changes, the structure became more “monumental”, with the addition of a lower court, stoa, and large storage facility (Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou, 2004b: 298). One could perhaps argue that Knossos, in restructuring the island’s political order, placed a northern elite person at Ayia Triada to act as the regional power. I believe, however, that as Phaistos lost its role as the disembedded capital and Ayia Triada was apparently becoming the most successful redistributive elite residence in the region, that as Knossos took over the island, the

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9 The topic of mason marks is somewhat troublesome to me. Mason marks have been identified on Minoan masonry, and supposed to be marks meant to identify workmen, but I wonder how much of this is influenced on the discovery of similar circumstances in Egypt, Greece, and Rome in a variety of periods. The mason marks at Knossos are most commonly showing the “double axes” symbol, which is apparent on many other items related to the structure (Begg 2004: 10). Only one mark was found at Gournia, also a double ax or trident, which Boyd believes is a sign of “secular meaning” indicative either of the person who cut the stone, or for whom they were cutting (Begg 2004: 12). If a “standardized set” of symbols became popular on Crete around 1700 B.C.E., some of which were manifested on mason marks (Begg 2004: 19) I am led to wonder if we can suppose the mason marks are most definitely marks of a certain person, or even group of people, connected to the cutting of stones, especially if there were only ten signs being used at this point, “too few for a syllabry, an alphabet, or names of individuals” (Begg 2004: 20).
Mesara was able to keep a regional ruler—the apparent redecoration of the redistributive elite residence in a “Knossos style” was simply an elite emulation of the new order.

In 1450 B.C.E. the Mycenaeans came to Crete and eventually gained control; Ayia Triada, Phaistos, and the Kommos seaport to the east were all destroyed in the midst of defense (Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou, 2004b: 298). A few years followed with unsettled population, turmoil, and political unrest as Mycenaean elite moved into the area. The location where Ayia Triada once occupied became home to the Mycenaean leader, who was under the direct control of the new Mycenaean kingdom based out of Knossos. Instead of reusing the redistributive elite residence, Ayia Triada was knocked down and a Mycenaean megaron was built in its place, directly above the structure’s rubble (La Rosa 1985: 5). Though they would often use poorly executed Minoan style paintings within megara, the buildings were very different from Minoan court-centered buildings. They consisted of a tripartite division of porch, anteroom, and throne room, with a large circular hearth in the middle of the throne room (Fields and Spedaliere 2004). The megaron was considered the focal point of Mycenaean political and administrative power. Knowledge of Phaistos in these periods is minimal—it is believed that the area in which the Phaistos settlement would have occupied (at the base of the hill) was abandoned and was used for pasture, because it became marshy (Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou 2004b: 300).

From 1000 B.C.E.-200 B.C.E., Ayia Triada functioned as a sanctuary. The focus of the sanctuary is somewhat debated, though various bit of evidences points to an apparent connection to females and fertility, and eventually, to the goddess Demeter (Dagata 1995: 25). In this period, the location of power shifted back to Phaistos. Its
dominance is not unprecedented, however, as there is evidence for large population centers at Kourtes, Viglia, Kamares, and Vigles. Most likely, these settlements rose because of their location in the mountains. They would be more defensible than the Phaistos plain in this period of uncertainty, a result of the turmoil due to the Mycenaean invasions (Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou 2004b: 309). Contemporary with this shift, a smaller settlement develops in the east, at Gortyn. Initially a religious site, a city was eventually settled around 900 B.C.E. (Divita 1992: 96).

Political uncertainty and a lack of unity makes control over the Mesara a struggle; Phaistos and Gortyn, each a separate polis, competed to succeed in virtually shared territory, as they were both geographically constricted by the mountains, shared the same coast and port access, and had to compete with one another for access to land and water. Appearing to attempt an effort at cooperation, they jointly rebuilt the Kommos port—the evidence indicates the building project was too large for either to accomplish this project on their own. Tensions grew as either polis tried to succeed over the other, demonstrated in the fact that either state would competitively construct religious shrines in the other’s territory (Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou 2004c: 323-324). The Greek polis at Phaistos was destroyed by the Gortyn polis in 200-150 B.C.E. according to Strabo’s texts,\textsuperscript{10} and the land that Phaistos controlled became incorporated into Gortyn (Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou 2004d: 351).

\textsuperscript{10} Strabo writes “Of the three cities that were united under one metropolis by Minos, the third, which was Phaestus, was razed to the ground by the Gortynians; it is sixty stadia distance from Gortyn, twenty from the sea, and forty from the seaport Matalum; and the country is held by those who razed it” (Strabo Geography 10.14.1).
This summary has discussed the political shifts that occurred in the Mesara from 4000 B.C.E. to around 200 B.C.E., demonstrating that the location of power centers shifted a small geographic distance of about two miles. The benefits of either location, Phaistos or Ayia Triada, did not outweigh the other, speaking in terms of agriculture, trade, or defense. Scholars have cited the lucrative position of Ayia Triada in comparison to Phaistos for trade because of its proximity to Kommos (Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou 2004). I cannot see how moving a mere two miles westward from Phaistos to Ayia Triada would increase trade significantly; from that logic, Kommos would be a more logical place to concentrate power because of its seaport location. Furthermore, though the different regions of the Mesara had specialized production, the political rulers at any of these locations would have been in control of the agricultural output of the entire plain. The expensive and labor intensive shifts back and forth to either location were a decision linked to other factors imbued in the landscape, factors which eventually did not matter when the power of the island was in the hands of a non-Cretan empire with an entirely different perception of the land.

This discussion aims to go beyond the purely historic facts and consider the people and customs that were embedded in the landscape in question. Indeed, “we [should] understand how we recapture the past only by understanding how it is, in effect, preserved by our physical surroundings” (Halbwachs 1992: 53). In consideration of the relationship between land and people, I must emphasize that the landscape of the Mesara, as with any landscape, was a space in which people could move and interact, creating meaning around them. Beyond the physical geography, the ground on which buildings and court-centered buildings were constructed, there is a perceived landscape imbued
with memory and identity. In order to understand why identity, memory, and subsequently political power becomes concentrated in a particular location, at Phaistos for example, we must consider the landscape itself: what identity became vested in this space, and did this identity remain effective for subsequent generations?
V. Social Memory and Identity in the Phaistos Landscape

Ashmore and Knapp (1999) claim that the landscape is a physical space for living occupants, as well as a conceptualized space that can be manifested in memory, identity, social order, and transformation. Transformation, as applies to our question at hand, occurs when groups of people with different understandings of world and identity relocate themselves into a new space (Ashmore and Knapp 1999: 13-18). The transformation of the Mesara landscape, manifested in the shifts of power center, occurred when there was interference in social order and cultural identity: the assumption of control by the Knossians, the Mycenaean invaders, and finally by the Greeks and Romans. That is not to say that landscape does not constantly changing; indeed, the smaller, less noticeable daily events can alter perceptions of landscape quite significantly. Thinking of the case at hand, however, we can see how major political shifts of power and the accompanying movement of peoples can severely alter how a landscape is perceived, and how the physical and symbolic structures operating on that landscape are subsequently changed as well.

The degree to which memory, identity, and social order are linked to landscape is not universal. The continued use of the location at Phaistos for a significant period of time is one linked to landscape memory and identity, in that even those “outsiders” could either find connection with the previous order, or chose to not disrupt it entirely. Phaistos is a landscape in which memory, identity, and social order within the Mesara, built upon
and layered over thousands of years, are imbued in one particular spot, specifically at the court-centered building. I do not mean to say that other locations within the Mesara are not imbued with stages of memory as well; Phaistos is the location where memories having to do with power and Minoan identity are arguably the strongest.

Groups of people occupying spaces together, on the scale of household, town, state, and all that lies between, share experiences, opinions, thoughts, and memories of events—this is what is known to be the collective memory (Halbwachs 1992: 53). These moments of their lives are engraved in some way into the space which they occupy. Within a group who shares a collective sense of identity, there lies memory “situated in a specific temporal and historical context…often the means of organizing, using, and living in the landscape” (Ashmore and Knapp 1999: 14). Though we lack the textual and archaeological data¹¹ to understand completely the choice in settling at Phaistos during the Neolithic period, we do know that the court-centered building of Phaistos, the original center of power, is in close proximity to Phaistos-based Neolithic settlements, which are the earliest known in the Mesara region (Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou 2004a: 231) (figures 12 and 13). There is clearly a sense of continuity from the choices of earlier groups of people in this region, so much that later settlement is affected. This sense of continuity warrants discussion, as it will help us understand why specific locations like Ayia Traidia or Phaistos were chosen as centers of power, and why they eventually fell into disuse. To answer these questions, we need to consider individual experiences and

¹¹ Though test pits have been dug into the courtyards at Phaistos, to my knowledge there are no intentions of excavation to understand the disbursement of Neolithic material. I am also unaware of any projects involving geophysical survey.
memories, the collective memories which then developed from these individual experiences, as well as inscribed landscapes.

The development of political and administrative organization for the entire region developed in an area with longstanding significance, in regards to ideology and the development of political and social order. The identities of the Mesara people were manifested from this one region, because this was where their earliest ancestors first inhabited. As time progressed, and the landscape of the Mesara experienced the changes described in the previous section, memories continued to be embedded in the landscape. The Mesara grew in size, contracted, and experienced periods of success and hardship. The initial settlement of the Mesara occurred in the Phaistos region, and then the disembodied capital was placed there because of the already longstanding significance of the location to the Mesara culture. As time progressed and more memories became embedded in the landscape, that location became not only a representation of the earliest remembered ideals of the Mesara people and their ancestors, but a representation of the development of culture through time.

Identity can become embedded in a landscape when groups “recognize, inscribe, and collectively maintain certain places or regions in ritual, symbolic, or ceremonial terms; conversely these places create and express sociocultural identity” (Ashmore and Knapp 1999: 14-15). Indeed, the Mesara is an excellent case study for understanding the relationship between landscape and identity because of the longstanding acknowledgment of the Phaistos region as a location tied to collective memory. The inscription and maintenance of the collective memory is represented in various forms of architecture,
Figure 12: Settlement ("Neolithic") from 4000 B.C.E-3300 B.C.E. Developed from Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou’s survey (2004b: 222).
Figure 13: Settlement (“Late Neolithic-Early Minoan”) from 3500-2000 B.C.E. Developed from Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou’s survey (2004b: 228).
apparent on two levels. The first level honors the location where social and political power, as well as Mesara-Minoan ideology derived, and subsequently flourished with the construction of the court-centered building. The culturally significant location was developed, recognized for thousands of years, and resulted in what appears to be the development of political and social power in the region—this development is eventually verified when Phaistos is constructed.

The second level shows the re-creation of this environment in times of change, both to the internal political state of Crete, and on the larger scale of empire. The nature of this change differs from period to period, and is likely affected the scale of the change—and when I speak of scale, I refer to the size and political prowess of those who controlled the region. The re-creation of environment would have been greatly affected by how those who came to control the region wished to maintain continuity with whatever sociocultural symbols were of significance to the people of the Mesara. When Phaistos initially developed as the center of power, the later developed collective memory and acknowledgment of that location by the Mesara people meant that they needed to supply themselves with a means of historical consciousness, of understanding why they are unified despite changes in political and social order (Holtorf 1997: 50). Contrasting this arrangement, when the political and social order was altered, the original building which housed power was no longer used by the new regimes. The general locale, however, was still recognized as one of significance, because of the longstanding connection with power (ideological and political) to that region. The meaning would change slightly, however, because memories cannot be “[captured] and [fixed]” (Stanton and Magnoni 2008: 5).
As time is recalled and formulated into memory, those moments recalled are altered from their original form; depending on who remembers them, the same instance remembered could be quite varied, thus multiple meanings are generated through time (Stanton and Magnoni 2008: 5). In the case of the Mesara, the general locale of Phaistos was remembered to be significant, though its significance would differ depending on the audience. When the Mycenaeans took over, for example, the court-centered building at Phaistos would be remembered by the Mycenaeans as a location of power. To the Minoans, the memory would be far more complex. The building was not simply a place of power, but one representative of their ancestral past, and all the cultural associations significant to that past.

We need to regard the court-centered building at Phaistos as something more than a constructed space that served an administrative (and perhaps religious) function. The building was constructed for these purposes, yes, but the selection of the location of the building, the orientation of it, as well as the cultural development that occurred over many years to make the political and ideological functions necessary are all the result of social memory developing in the Mesara landscape. Buildings are not simply blank spaces, places which once held people and objects before they fell into disuse. Phaistos, and all other buildings, are meant to serve a social function—memories are embedded in buildings as a result of the construction, the use, and the eventual disuse of them (Child and Golden 2008: 66). As the previous sections have also hinted, the location of the court-centered building at Phaistos is culturally significant. Its location was not an arbitrary choice based on obvious factors like agricultural output or trading prospects. The location of the court-centered building is one where social memory has become
embedded, a place of “invented” meaning where the Mesara people felt a needed connection should be maintained (Child and Golden 2008: 66).

The following chapters consider the link between the Kamares cave, tholoi, Phaistos, and its hinterland. They will specifically focus on the longstanding recognition of the Kamares cave by the inhabitants of Phaistos and how the two locales, though each significant in its own regard, could function as a unit in the Mesara culture. Architectural features in the Mesara region, specifically tholoi and the Phaistos court-centered building, follow Ashmore and Knapp’s criteria for a landscape becoming “inscribed”—the process when a certain place is recognized as one representative of sociocultural identity, and then the identity is literally embedded into that place (Ashmore and Knapp 1999: 14-15). The cave and Phaistos region are landscapes that hold a collective memory, and the court-centered building and tholoi structures are the way in which these memories were inscribed. The structures are a means of maintaining the collective memory and cultural identity even in locations that could not easily maintain a regularized relationship with the location of Phaistos.

Thus, the Mesara region as a whole was inscribed with the collective memory of Phaistos and all that was associated with it, though the comprehension of this memory would have varied in different periods, from person to person, and particularly between statuses. Because people experience and remember events in an individualized way (even when in a group) their interpretation (or memory) will differ from those around them (Halbwachs 1992: 24). This reference to individualized memory is necessary for understanding the collective, because “it is connected with the thoughts that come to use from the social milieu” (Halbwachs 1992: 53). Indeed, the individual living in the Mesara
would have their own memory of Phaistos, the court-centered building, the Mesara at large, as well as the settlement in which they inhabited. These individualized memories, daresay individual representations, would participate in forming the larger collective representation of the Mesara people.

The lower classes would not have likely come into contact with the court-centered building at Phaistos, particularly those lower class people living in settlements farther south. Despite this separation, they would have understood on some level the cultural significance of that location due to the collective memory of the region. The region’s collective memory would be a conglomeration of other lower class members, as well as elites. The collective memory of the elite versus the lower class, would differ greatly, because the elite were the Mesara population who would have a more individualized relationship with the court-centered building at Phaistos. Their status would enable access to the building, and if not immediate access, a relationship with those who did. Their individual memories of Phaistos, the Mesara, their settlement, would be in a different capacity, but would be part of the input for the larger collective memory.

The apparent mimicry that was occurring in the settlements of the Mesara, using the tholoi and villas as reminders of the cultural significance occurring at their center, was created from a foundation of cultural memory focused on the center. The variations of social status and the access that accompanied it would have created variations of understanding. Perhaps some people of the Mesara, depending on their age or status, were not entirely aware of the total cultural significance of the Phaistos court-centered building, of why the location was chosen for the building; we can even go further back --
why the location was significant prior to the construction. Understanding the historic shifts is entirely necessary for comprehending the changes in power center linearly.

Now, I would now like to focus on a few layers of the collective memory in the Mesara, conceptualizing time in a more dynamic fashion: why Phaistos was constructed where it was, and how the Kamares cave and the Minoan tholoi participate in reinforcing the collective memory of the people.
VI. Understanding Memory and Identity: Phaistos Palace and the Kamares Cave

The Kamares cave lies in clear sight from the Phaistos theatric court, nestled between two “horns” of Mount Ida (figure 14). The cave is quite large—its mouth measures 18-20 meters high and 33 meters wide. The main chamber is 95 meters deep at a steep, thirty degree incline, and there is a secondary, contorting passageway leading to a 35 meter long interior chamber (Van der Moortel 2011: 303). The origins of human activity in the Kamares cave date to the Final Neolithic period, corresponding to the initial settlement of the Phaistos region, before the court-centered building was constructed (Faro 2008: 99).

The cave’s activity is linked to the rise and fall of the Phaistos court-centered building (Van der Moortel 2011: 310). Pottery finds demonstrate a continued elite presence at the cave beginning in 3000 B.C.E., steadily increasing with the construction of the court-centered building. Elite pottery assemblages decline with the assumption of

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12 It is generally agreed upon by Minoan archaeologists that there is plausible connection between the importance of the Phaistos cave in Minoan culture to the startling appearance of the peaks to bull horns, a symbol imbued heavily in Minoan island ideology. As mentioned, the Minoan bull motif (also referred to as “horns of consecration”) was found in many of the court-centered buildings, and occurred so frequently at Knossos in comparison to the others that archaeologists originally mistook the symbol to be indicative of the king of all the Minoans (Driessen 2003). Bull themes manifest themselves in rhytons, wall paintings, and mosaics, most famously in the bull-leaping frescoes found across the island. The arena in which games would have occurred is highly debated, and some believe the only space in which it could have occurred (within the palace) would have been in the central court. The highly regularized size of the courts across the island suggests there were specifications for certain events that would require that courtyards of a certain size be constructed (Graham 1957: 255). Other spaces exterior to the central courts have been noted as more plausible arenas for the activity, but the connection of bulls was most definitely maintained in the court-centered building via bull-related material culture. Perhaps not a suitable place for such a dangerous sport, the Minoans were clearly invested in their bull-leaping culture, so much that elite objects and spaces were decorated with images of the animal.
Knossian power around 1700 B.C.E. – pottery is still present, but it is no longer of an 
elite style (Faro 90-101). There is, then, an obvious recognition of the spot from the 
period of the Final Neolithic, when the Phaistos region was initially being occupied and 
dominating other area settlements. In later years, the cave gained prominence as evidence 
by the elite goods found, and though it was continued to be used past the era of Phaistos 
control, the cave was never as prominent as when the Phaistos court-centered building 
was under the control of the Phaistos elite.

Figure 14: Horned mountain peaks from the central court of Phaistos. Kamares Cave is 
located in the center-right of the peaks. Photo credit: author.

It is curious how a cave on a peak so steep could manage to assume such an active 
role in the Mesara landscape. Despite the treacherous geography, the size of the cave and 
prominence of its location make it visible from nearly every spot in the Mesara, thus 
demonstrating the potential for its acting as a major feature in the region. Besides its 
being visible from nearly every location within the Mesara, the importance of this natural 
feature is clearly tied into the design of a predominant structure in the region-- the cave 
aligns perfectly with the courtyard of the Phaistos court-centered building, and would
have been so in antiquity as well, prior to the destruction of walls and pillars (figure 4). The connection between mountain peaks and court-centered buildings is not uncommon; indeed a similar scenario occurs at Knossos—its central courtyard is aligned with Mount Iuktas (Muhly 1990: 54-55). Horns of consecration have been reconstructed to align perfectly with the view of the cave (figure 15).

Though the alignment is debatable, and perhaps a result of Evans’ over interpretations at the time of Knossos’ preservation and reconstruction, the horns were found in the fill of the pillar crypt room. They likely were placed on the roof of the colonnaded room located above (Preziosi 2010: 108). Interestingly so, the material culture found at the mountain shrine at Mount Iuktas increases in wealth and quality around 1700 B.C.E, directly correlating to the period of Knossos’ presumed takeover of the entire island, and the subsequent decline in wealthy objects found at Kamares (Peatfield 1983: 277). Though conjecture, I do think there is a plausible connection between open air bull horn motifs and court-centered buildings.

Figure 15: Partially reconstructed horns of consecration in the colonnade room at the court-centered building at Knossos (Applegate 2008). The horns are so arranged in a view that would frame Mount Iuktas (not visible in this photo).
The visibility of the Kamares cave, and the connection between cave and court-centered building suggests that the Kamares cave was also meant to act as a peak sanctuary—proven by continual religious activities in the so-called “Protopalatial period”, dominated by elite pottery and other materials, as well as the possibility of deliberate orientation of the central court at Phaistos (Faro 2008: 85). Declaring the Kamares cave to be solely a cave sanctuary is difficult, in that it shares many of the attributes of a peak sanctuary, an equally popular though less religiously significant Minoan structure. More likely it is a mixture of both: a cave sanctuary for obvious reasons, and also a peak sanctuary because it is obviously visible to the court-centered building at Phaistos.

Though it is necessary to mention that the Kamares cave is a “unique” peak sanctuary, addressing the differences at length is unnecessary. Regarding the Kamares cave in either category (cave or peak) would have enabled the locale to hold a position of central significance in relation to the political and religious atmosphere of the Mesara, while under control of the court-centered building at Phaistos. The fact that the Phaistos cave can toggle between being considered a “natural” sanctuary (one in which people populate a natural space with little or no human-made structures added), as well as one functionally similar to other man-made sanctuaries on the island, demonstrates that the natural environment was a major player in Minoan religion, perhaps more so than the structure itself. In simple terms, the location of any particular activity was superior to the structure (Nixon 271).
Thus a religious locale, emphasizing steep inclines and higher elevations for religious and political structures suggests that height, and in turn visibility, was of primary importance—whether or not this occurred in a human-made structure or a cave was not. In thinking about the role of the Kamares cave specifically with the Phaistos region, we understand now that the location of the Kamares cave became inscribed in the cultural identity of the region because of its longstanding usage—first as a seasonal habitation site, and later as a religious site (Faro 99). The settlers of the region recognized that locale, and desired to settle in a region within its shadow. The court-centered building at Phaistos would eventually be built in that region. Settlement, and subsequently power became concentrated at Phaistos, where an easy relationship could be maintained with the Kamares cave, and ancestral activities could be honored architecturally. Still, I would argue that the location plays a greater role in identity than the structure, because settlement occurred prior to the construction of any major building.

The cultural identity surrounding the Phaistos court-centered building region spread, though the power remained fixed in the center. As we have learned from the previous section, the most successful chiefdoms derived from the Phaistos region. When the Phaistos court-centered building was constructed, the power symbolically concentrated in that building (by elites scattered across the plain), was under control of the entirety of the Mesara. One might assume that as the groups of settlers moved away from the center, and later as the elites built up their villas and countryside, the identity manifested in the relationship between cave and Phaistos would be lost.

Or, assuming that the lower class populations either never saw, or never ventured within the court-centered building, they would never see the visual connection between
cave and building (and the locale which it occupied). I am arguing against these scenarios, in utilizing a more “active” role of buildings on the landscape: the utilization of Phaistos reinforced the collective memory of the people. But, not everyone had access to this building, not everyone was able to visit the cave, and perhaps not everyone had seen the cave from the central court. Because humans create memory as a means to reconstruct, and to not forget, buildings are sites of memory; they are created with the motivation to stop time, to stop the forgetting (Holtorf 1997: 50-51). We must look in the Mesara landscape for reference points, buildings or locales which would maintain the collective memory of the cave and the court-centered building, even without access to them.
VII.    Tholoi Tombs: A Reference Point to Phaistos?

How then, could relationship between the two locales be maintained? Ashmore and Knapp discuss the role of the “place”, determining that “place” is a means to create and express identity—we have seen this identity creation in the previous section. But what happens when that “place” subsequently is powerful enough to spread its identity? Indeed, how do far-away settlements achieve a connection to their political center, a place where their social memory and identity are concentrated?

I believe that the inhabitants of Phaistos, who had a longstanding ideological and power-based relationship with the locale, chose to mimic the court-centered feature found at Phaistos (and earlier settlements in the area) in order to emphasize the connection between political authority and the traditions remembered in the locale. The monumental court-centered building that had been constructed at the center was not only practical, home to several necessary features for the functioning of the capital, but also as a means to demonstrate how the collective identity was manifested and represented in that area (Holtorf 1997: 46). Because of the significance of this locale, and in turn the building constructed there, they needed to mimic this relationship in the regions across the plain.

In realizing the layers of activities which occurred in that place and that were associated with political and ideological power, Phaistos became a “key reference point” for the individual and collection expressions of Phaistos identity (Ashmore and Knapp 1999: 54).
16). This mimicry could be manifested in many possible ways. I would like to present Minoan tholoi as one possible solution to the problem.

Minoan tholoi (figures 16 and 17) are tombs constructed with a corbel vaulting technique (figure 18). Their diameters range between 2.5-13 meters, but by majority are on the larger end of the scale, likely due to their communal functionality (Branigan 1970a: 29). Most of the tholoi found have annexes or antechambers (figures 19-21),

Figure 16: A reconstruction of Kamilari A tholos, assuming a fully vaulted roof. There are debates as to whether some of the larger tholoi were able to achieve a fully vaulted construction, and perhaps would have had a flat roof (Branigan 1993: 54).

Figure 17: Plan of the Koumasa tholos.
built as add-ons to the central, round chamber. The antechamber walls have never been found to exceed two meters, made of stones, or packed clay and mud. The size of the antechambers and annexes does not seem to correlate with the size of the tombs, in terms of size—Platanos A, for example, is a tholos with an external diameter of 18 meters, but the antechamber was only 2.75 meters high by 1.5 meters wide (Murphy 2003: 264).

The doorways connecting the antechamber to the actual tholos have been termed “needle-eye openings” because their small size would have made passing a body through extremely difficult (Branigan 1970b: 167-8). Despite the fact that the tombs seem to emphasize small spaces and difficult access, the nature of tholoi burial is communal. Bodies would be brought into the tholoi, and then when more room was needed, the remains would be swept away, brought into the antechambers, burned (proven by remains of ash, as well as seemingly controlled burning on the interior walls) or perhaps removed entirely (Murphy 1998: 34-5).

![Figure 18: Interior wall of the Kaloi Limenes tholos. The vaulting technique is evident in this photo; smaller stones are placed on the bottom, and larger stones are placed on the top, reaching further towards the center of the structure, achieving a structurally-sound vault (Murphy 1993: 450).](image)

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Figure 19: Antechamber of the Kamilari tholos. Photo credit: author.

Figure 20: Annex rooms of the Kamilari tholos. Photo credit: author.
Figure 21: Doorway with massive lintel block, leading into the Kamilari tholos. Photo credit: author.

Studies have been performed with the tholoi in relation to settlement and visibility. Tholoi are very different structures from any other type of Minoan structure, and are seemingly unique to the Mesara, despite the fact that there are clearly architectural similarities in the court-centered buildings and redistributive elite residences across the island. In this way, tholoi are very “obvious” structures in the landscape, while also being kept at a somewhat uniform distance from the settlement (table 2).
To reiterate Branigan’s assertion, the probability that settlements and tombs were consciously constructed together is high, and furthermore that close proximity was emphasized in choosing the location of the tombs (Branigan 1998: 18). He cites that only one tholos out of a total 28 surveyed in which settlement-directionality relationship can be affirmed shows an anomaly, this one tholos having a settlement located to the east. Alternatively, the majority of tholoi in his survey (37 out of 45) have a doorway facing the east, and subsequently have, or would be likely to have, a settlement located to the west. This apparent opposition of placing the settlement in sight of the tholos doorway is evidently characteristic of the tholoi functionality. Branigan believes there was a universal preference in which settlements should not be east of the tombs, while the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tombs Cemetery</th>
<th>Distance to Settlement (Meters)</th>
<th>Direction to Settlement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ayia Triada A, B</td>
<td>Within 200 m</td>
<td>south</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karrilou A-C</td>
<td>~100 m</td>
<td>S/SE and N/NW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Odhynia A, B</td>
<td>Within 250 m, possibly nearer</td>
<td>north</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megaloi Skinoi A-B</td>
<td>Immediately Alongside</td>
<td>west and north</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayia Kynaki A</td>
<td>~100 m</td>
<td>north</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aylas Georgios</td>
<td>~200 m</td>
<td>north</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aylas Andronoi</td>
<td>Within 750 m</td>
<td>north</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaloi Limeres A, B</td>
<td>~250 m</td>
<td>south/south-east</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chrysochomos A, B</td>
<td>100-150 m</td>
<td>north-west</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lasaita A, B</td>
<td>Less than 50 m</td>
<td>north and south</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebena P1, 1b</td>
<td>Within 400 m</td>
<td>south</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trypiti A</td>
<td>~150 m</td>
<td>north-west</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korakies A, E</td>
<td>‘village with tombs’</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krotos</td>
<td>70-100 m</td>
<td>south-west</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christos X</td>
<td>‘nearby’</td>
<td>south</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kremmata A, B, E</td>
<td>100 m</td>
<td>south</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salamis/Kouskoxera</td>
<td>10 m and 90 m</td>
<td>south and west</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drakones D, Z</td>
<td>‘closeto tombs’</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayia Eirene E</td>
<td>‘closeto tombs’</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foti</td>
<td>‘slope below tombs’</td>
<td>south</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flitasos A-C</td>
<td>Believed to be 150 m</td>
<td>east</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marathonephalo A, B</td>
<td>‘nearby settlement’</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalathiana K, B</td>
<td>‘near’</td>
<td>north</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verou A, B</td>
<td>‘nearby’</td>
<td>north</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apesokari A, B</td>
<td>~100 m and 50 m</td>
<td>south-east and south-west</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yialomonohore</td>
<td>250 m</td>
<td>North-east</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Distance of tholoi to settlements, according to Branigan’s survey prior to 1998 (Branigan 1998: 17).

To reiterate Branigan’s assertion, the probability that settlements and tombs were consciously constructed together is high, and furthermore that close proximity was emphasized in choosing the location of the tombs (Branigan 1998: 18). He cites that only one tholos out of a total 28 surveyed in which settlement-directionality relationship can be affirmed shows an anomaly, this one tholos having a settlement located to the east. Alternatively, the majority of tholoi in his survey (37 out of 45) have a doorway facing the east, and subsequently have, or would be likely to have, a settlement located to the west. This apparent opposition of placing the settlement in sight of the tholos doorway is evidently characteristic of the tholoi functionality. Branigan believes there was a universal preference in which settlements should not be east of the tombs, while the
tombs should still be close enough to the settlement so that they are both accessible and visible to the living. Having a doorway to the east in the majority of cases emphasizes the need for the tombs to “look away” from the settlement—the living can see where the dead are, without the dead seeing into the world of the living. Having antechambers, too, would enable the living to interact with the tomb without actually coming into visual contact with the dead (Branigan 1998: 19).

The temporality of the tholoi is difficult to address in a discussion such as this, when long term settlement is in question. The tholoi were first constructed prior to the court-centered buildings, but were used well past their initial construction. Some tholoi were constructed much later than the early pre-court-centered building tombs, such as at Kamilari, Drakones, Apesokari, and Vorou (Branigan 1993: 65-66). If some tholoi were constructed prior to the construction of the court-centered buildings, we need to understand that perhaps the use of tholoi (of their function besides burial) altered over time. What could the initial purpose have been? I believe the link lies with the Kamares cave.

Leach, referencing Bourdieu’s theory on habitus, claims that when an individual moves into a new region, they will “inhabit the parameters of a certain situation, and modify them into a new situation” (Leach 2002: 298). In attempting to achieve a cultural identity within the landscape, any subgroup of a larger, collective unit can adjust their new environment so that it serves the same purpose as the environment from which their cultural identity is derived. The Mesara elite accepted the location of Phaistos as their center. The acceptance and acknowledgement of this locale was a result of the initial occupation at Phaistos, the ideological and social developments that occurred there, and
subsequent generations accepting that location as the most dominant settlement in the region. Phaistos was the neutral center of the Mesara, the center in which all of the Minoan elite could congregate, interact, and carry out decisions that will affect the greater populous. Perhaps the tholoi, in being absent from Phaistos, but present in almost every settlement besides, were a possible means to recreate, or almost remind the inhabitants of the court-centered building which would eventually control them.

The tholoi, constructed by the Minoan elite in control of the Mesara, could perhaps be mimicking the role of the central court. When thinking of the court-centered, we must not think simply of the large court found in the building at Phaistos, but of the earlier versions of that feature. Recall that the earlier settlements in the Phaistos region would carry out important religious and other social activities in a central space surrounded by buildings (Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou 2004a: 230). Meetings occurring within the center, or even at a specific, universally acknowledged locale, were obviously of importance to this culture, even from an early period. Subsequently, the need for a central space became manifested in the monumental political and ideological structures.

Any ritual activity occurring at the tholoi would have likely been a reduplication of activities occurring at Phaistos (Relaki 2004: 182)—and in turn a development from activities occurring generations before. We see such a connection in the archaeological record. Evidence of drinking rituals (primarily vessels) that were found in the central space at Phaistos, prior to 3000 B.C.E., was also found in many of the annex rooms and antechambers in the settlement tholoi. The drinking rituals continued, and evidence of vessels have been found in the well under the court-centered building’s first phase, around 2100 B.C.E. (Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou 2004a). Though changes were made
in vessel shape and decoration, the continuation of these drinking rituals in tholoi in area settlements, similar to the activities seen at Phaistos, indicates a strong connection between the role of the tholos and the central court (in any form). Furthermore, tholoi were used and reused over many generations, and at times abandoned. Evidence of drinking rituals continuing past the usage of the tholoi as a burial space is apparent, indicating that the drinking was not necessarily a funerary-related practice, and could have been “primarily ceremonial” (Relaki 2004: 182).

The nature of Minoan tholoi burial is indicative of further connection with the court-centered spaces. Recall that the court-centered buildings, though here identified as a place where major political, economic, and social decision making could be carried out by certain elite members of society with a specific role in the political function of the disembedded capital, were in essence communal buildings. Phaistos was not restricted to any one family or person—a group of people held a claim to it. The fact that there are no records or indications of the people who would have controlled the building cannot be ignored—the same scenario occurs in tholoi burial. Social ranking is apparent in the burials, and would have been made evident through goods and the scale of elaboration in ritual.

When the body was present, distinctions in status were quite obvious because of the objects included with the body, but this greatly juxtaposes what happened post decomposition. The bones were swept away, burnt, or removed, and separated from the objects they once wore, often highly elaborate, wealthy, and occasionally foreign (Murphy 2011: 37). According to Murphy, the ratio of bodies to wealthy objects indicates that in the tombs, though reserved for elite, there was social stratification, though it
essentially became erased from the record once the body decomposed (Murphy 2011: 37). She argues: “any ranking or individuality that was expressed in the burial was de-emphasized in the long-term social ideology of the community” (Murphy 2011: 38).

Koumasa, for example, is a tholoi cemetery where the deceased would have Aegean-wide objects in the facility. According to Herrero, the lack of objects exterior to the tholoi and the presence of objects only in the antechambers and main chambers indicate that a large communal activity would not have occurred outside the tomb (Herrero 2011: 73). This statement might be overreaching, especially when considering the number of objects found outside of the Platanos tholos (Herrero 2011: 74) but there is definitely a difference in the nature of activities which would have occurred inside the tholoi versus outside—Herrero points out that the immediate interment activities would have occurred only with a small group of people, because of the size of the chambers (Herrero 2011: 73).

I do not mean to suggest that the tholoi were spaces where activities occurring at the court-centered building would have literally been reduplicated—there lies a similarity in the fact that certain activities could only be carried out in either location.

Considerations of the separation between the general public and central court, as well as between the general public and tholoi must be addressed—the tholoi were buildings in which the elites could visually reinforce their division from the rest of the population. This would have occurred on two levels: physically, in that the lower classes would never have been buried there, but also symbolically, in that the tholoi were spaces where activities would have occurred that were beyond the discourse of the lower classes. The court-centered building at Phaistos, in being monumental, a labyrinth of rooms, and
surely inaccessible to the majority of the population, enabled the elite to physically separate themselves from the people as a privileged group. This symbol would not necessarily have carried through the countryside-- while away from Phaistos, the elite would have been in need of a means to define themselves as the population with “differential and unequal access” to a variety of resources (Schoep 2006: 50).

Surely, their redistributive elite residences could have accomplished this, but tholoi should be considered as well. Tholoi, though they provided a symbolic service for the larger settlement, who could in later periods be buried in pithoi and larnakes, were associated with elite usage, as they were the ones paying for, and being buried in them (Branigan 1970a). The limited access of the tholoi, in combination with the obvious visibility of the buildings, would have emphasized the role of the Mesara elite as different and unattainable (Schoep 2006: 50). Extrapolating further, if the tholoi were in fact structures that could cause one to recall the immediate Phaistos region (cave, plain, and court-centered building), the Mesara elite, who would have constructed such buildings, were identifying themselves as part of the “original elite”. As a result, the organization and operation of the society would have been legitimized (Schoep 2006: 50). From the perspective of the general populace, understanding the connection of their own settlement to the center would have reinforced their role in the social order, as well as the elite who controlled them. Those who controlled the general populace had access to the center (Ingold 1993: 155-6).

The general location of Phaistos, therefore, encompassing the earliest occupations to the construction of the court-centered building, is a location imbued with a sense of memory and identity, which is then carried beyond that initial location to the entire
landscape which the court-centered building comes to control (Cosgrove 1984: 35).
Architecture plays a role in representing the location, but the meaning and identity at Phaistos was in place much earlier—the court-centered building was constructed for practical reasons, to provide a building in which to carry out administrative, political, and ideological functions, but furthermore was a material representation of the memory and identity imbued in that particular spot.

Though a collective memory can be built upon, so that the court-centered building eventually became engaged in the role of the landscape, the initial recognition of the Phaistos locale as one of cultural significance was created long before. Memory does not develop from the past, as many believe. The understanding of the past is a result of the collective memory, in this case, the collective memory of what occurred in the region of Phaistos, and in particular, in proximity to the court-centered building (Holtorf 1997: 49). Acknowledgement of the importance of that location essentially constructed a collective past and identity reliant on maintaining use of that location, manifested in tholoi.

If we agree that Phaistos was a disembedded capital, it makes sense why the elite did not construct court-centered buildings in their own settlements. Doing so would have removed the sense of neutrality available at Phaistos, in making that structure unique in design within the region of the Mesara. Prevented from constructing this iconic feature in their own territories, but recognizing the need to recall that staple to their society, they chose a different architectural feature to recreate the atmosphere of the central court. The tholoi were structures that enabled certain court-centered atmospheres to be recreated, primarily communal nature and simultaneous seclusion, while being obvious visual
markers on the landscape, acting as constant reminders not only of the meaning embedded in the Phaistos location, but also of the role of the elite.

The dual functionality of the tholoi, being both obvious features on the landscape and secluded spaces for select groups, enabled a separation to be emphasized within the population. Like Phaistos, where the common population could not enter and engage in the activities which occurred, the tholoi were eventually reserved for elite activities and burials alone. As an exterior visual marker, the tholoi and the Phaistos court-centered building engaged the entire population, reminding and reinforcing the collective memory which had developed prior to the construction of the court-centered building, and which continued to develop. Like the court-centered building, however, the tholoi were a visual aid from the outside; understanding what occurred inside was an activity limited to a specific group of people.
VIII. Landscape Transformation and the Role of Architecture

Identity and memory imbued within a landscape is not permanent. Indeed, landscape is a constantly changing interface comprised of the natural geography and the people’s activities within it. As a result, the memories and identities held in a particular place might change, or even be lost. Alternatively, they could remain, though overwhelmed by a new cultural identity. In a landscape, when certain memories are ignored, it is a result of transformation. This transformation could manifest itself in many ways. In the case of Phaistos and the Mesara, we see how transformation occurs when individuals from a different culture (Knossos and the Mycenaeans) relocate themselves (Ashmore and Knapp 1999: 15). We find that in the process of landscape transformation, the role of architecture becomes more important, as it can serve as a marker of power in many forms. In the case of Phaistos, the role of architecture was administrative, political, as well as ideological.

The degree of landscape transformation is entirely dependent on the degree to which the cultural identity of an entering group differs from the current group. Landscape, because it is imbued with a collective identity and memory, holds a social order. In the case of the Mesara, we have seen certain structures housing certain social orders. In a seemingly odd set of events, structures were rebuilt and reused, and the center of political power shifted a short distance of about two miles: between Phaistos and Ayia Triada.
The distance between the two locations is only two miles, perhaps so miniscule that one might argue the investigation of this movement is unnecessary. Though the power was no longer concentrated at Phaistos, Kamares cave is still in view from Ayia Triada, and the collective memory and identity of Phaistos region might be maintained from this new spot. Furthermore, Ayia Triada was not a “new” location-- the area surrounding the Phaistos location, including the eventual location of the Ayia Triada villa, was occupied for an extensive period of time, since around 4000 B.C.E. (see figure 11). Memory and identity were imbued in this area of the Mesara as well; though Ayia Triada was not necessarily manifested with the memory of “power” from an early period, the locale was associated with the longevity of the Mesara culture.

Despite these factors, the miniscule distance is what makes the shift of power center significant. The distance is demonstrative of a calculated decision to remain in a region of identity and memory, while moving away from the location where this memory and identity was originally associated. Moving a small distance away from the original location of concentrated meaning was an acknowledgement of the alteration of the terms of control. The movement defined the parameters of their new order. The small distance also demonstrates that the Knossians were insistent on creating a new sense of structure, regardless of what may appear to be practical.

Ashmore and Knapp point out that the link between architecture and landscape transformation is one which can still acknowledge an unused building. A previously used or abandoned building can be reused to recreate the past (1999: 19). Certainly, issues of power came to mind. In the disembedded capital scenario, the elite living in the Ayia Triada villa would have assumed a role of power under the control of Knossos. Perhaps
this elite lord could have moved to Phaistos when the capital was dismantled and Knossos took over, but this could have only occurred if Knossos was not involved, which was not the case. The continued use of Phaistos would deemphasize the change in regime, and also be viewed as a “threat” to Knossos. However, the fact remains that the regional lord was housed in a location significantly close to the former location of power. The choice to remain in proximity to Phaistos, though within a new building, suggests that Knossos recognized the ancestral ties and developed memory of the region, likely a result of their own belief system. As mentioned, the court-centered buildings across the island shared a collective ideology—the cave would have been considered religiously significant to Knossos, considering their relationship to Mount Iuktas. This recognition holds great political significance, in that it ensures continuity of structure and collective belief.

Indeed, “each place is part of a network that connects places together in a chain…The condition of moving into a new place to take over from other people is that links of the same type continue to remain in place” (Morphy 1995: 186). As the Knossians moved into the Mesara, certain links to the former regime remained in place—the hierarchical relationship between social status and building remained, though the roles shifted. Previously, the highest power of the Mesara was concentrated in a court-centered building. This remained true with the Knossians, except in this case, the power was concentrated at Knossos, not Phaistos. And, similar to the previous arrangement, the second tier elites occupied their redistributive residences, in this case, Ayia Triada. We must consider these issues of landscape memory, identity, and transformation, then, on the smaller scale of region, and on a larger scale, in this case, an entire island. Because
the Knossians were simply assuming the power of their neighbors, with whom they were closely related, they could rebuild structures to meet their political needs and become imbedded within the pre existing structure (Morphy 1995: 204).

The Mycenaeans are similar in this regard. Though they chose to construct a megaron over the Minoan building in an emphatic declaration of power, their actions and material culture are demonstrable of a group concerned with incorporation of the Mycenaean culture into the Minoan population with as little resistance as possible. Objects found within the megaron demonstrate this purposeful fusion of identities, a case of emulating the old while simultaneously introducing a new style. The Ayia Triada sarcophagus (figure 22) is a hybrid of Minoan iconography and current Mycenaean style. There are symbols and techniques present on the sarcophagus that are equally important to either culture, such as the depiction of the Mycenaean griffin and the Minoan agrimi (goat). The style of the sarcophagus is painted in that of the older Minoan painting tradition, more naturalistic with narrative scenes. The implementation of the sarcophagus, however, is Mycenaean, in that it was constructed out of limestone, depicts processions, not more nature-based scenes, as well as linear patterns like the running spiral (Burke 2005: 415-417). The implementation of both styles onto one burial object, obviously intended for an elite who was connected to the rule at Ayia Triada is indicative of the simultaneous change in rule and incorporation (or recognition) of former ideologies (Burke 2005: 405).

The Mycenaeans recognized the significance of the general Phaistos location, as the location of political and administrative power, and decided to create meaning there, but on their own terms (Leach 2002: 299). Whoever assumed control of that region
would then be regarded by the occupants as one associated with the memory and identity from previous regions (that of political and administrative power), and the Mycenaeans would not have to work to build an entirely new memory separate from Phaistos. Because of the recognition of Phaistos as a location of significance, the Mycenaeans’ incorporation into the landscape could be less startling than if they changed the entire organization and meaning of the Mesara. The best course of action was essentially to write themselves into the memory of the location (Morphy 1995), as it eased the transition for a group that was building a small empire.

Figure 22: Ayia Triada sarcophagus.

When buildings operate with the collective memory and identity in the landscape, they can serve as a means for identifying locations of power, alterations to structure, as well as the movement of ideology and cultural identity away from the center. The court-centered building at Phaistos was not regarded as the center of power in the Mesara—the

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landscape upon which that building was constructed. No matter what kind of building
was used, so long as it occupied that general spot, the memory and identity was being
acknowledged and reinforced (Holtorf 1997). This is not to say that the construction of
the building did not manifest the creation of additional memories concerning political and
ideological power—my argument is that the manifestation of power was created before
the court-centered building at Phaistos was constructed, and that the choice in using that
particular spot had to do with preexisting memories concerning power that had been
building up for generations.

We have considered landscape transformation on what I see as a smaller scale--the
shifts that occurred within the Mesara prior to the Mycenaeans’ entrance on Crete did
not, in my opinion, entirely alter the Minoan identity of the region or the island at large.
This, I believe, is partially a result of the scale of the invasion, for the transformation at
the hands of the Greeks and Romans was entirely different. Let Gortyn now serve as a
brief example of how the landscape can transform at the hands of a much larger empire,
in which the scale of said empire reduces the role of importance and acknowledgement of
a smaller city-state or province.

At this later point in history, the cultural significance of the Phaistos region was
perhaps forgotten; the landscape was shaped by those who occupied it. Though the region
surrounding Phaistos was still heavily settled at this point (figure 23), the universal
ideologies of Crete had altered: the religious beliefs, political system, and social order.
Pottery assemblages indicate the abandonment of Kamares cave. Bull imagery was no
longer used, and tholoi tombs were abandoned. This is not to say that the social memory
linked to the landscape of Phaistos was entirely forgotten—there is evidence for a
locally-built shrine being placed near a former Minoan tholos tomb. Though partially believed to be a means of legally marking ownership of the land in the midst of territory struggles between Gortyn and Phaistos, the fact that it was placed at the Kamilari tholos is indicative of recognition of the territory’s collective memory (Watrous and Hadzi-Vallianou 2004c: 323-324). Though the social order and culture and significantly altered from when the tholos was actually in use, and perhaps the original meaning of the tholos was misinterpreted or somewhat forgotten, the place was still recognized as culturally significant. Still, the fact that the tholos was not reused, and a different building with different religious significance attached to it was constructed in its stead, indicates how much the Mesara had changed.

The new power did not recognize or acknowledge the previous structure, as was the case in many Greek or Roman invasions, and were concerned with creating their own. Furthermore, the eventual Roman invaders incorporated Crete into the larger Roman Empire, far greater than any nation it had been assumed under in previous centuries, and the choice in that specific location was likely a mix of military, cultural, agricultural, and economic concerns. They used architecture as a means to mark their territory, while simultaneously defining the culture of the new order, something entirely separate from the local identity. Power was embedded in the structure built onto the Cretan countryside, and Gortyn stood as a symbol of something new and different. The visual effect of the new buildings were powerful; the architectural style was demonstrative of the new Roman order. And, as we discuss the location now, we see how the location of Gortyn has become imbued with the identity and memory of a change in political order, and the location of Roman power.
I recognize that I have not completely discussed this shift from Ayia Triada to Gortyn; let it serve simply as a contrast from the relationship between Phaistos and Ayia Triada, and perhaps beckon archaeologists to consider the longstanding history of occupied Crete. The situation at Gortyn is much different from previous periods, when Crete was not subsumed into a larger empire and when the ideology of the Mesara was still acknowledged and perhaps respected by its inhabitants. The movement of the center of power away from a region of social significance demonstrates that social memory and identity can be forgotten, and that eventually, architecture can become a means of embedding power into the landscape. The movement away from Phaistos, and the construction of a Greek polis and temple was a simple and clear message that the Mesara, and Crete as a whole, was being forced to digress away from the Minoan, and then Mycenaean, modes of life. Though buildings on the landscape acted as reminders for what once controlled the landscape, and as former power symbols, they were no longer representations of the power that was currently at hand.
Figure 23: Settlement distribution circa Gortyn developing. Developed from Watrous and Hadzi Vallianou’s survey (2004c: 326).
IX. Conclusion

This thesis has focused on the role of landscape and building in the Mesara, with the intention of understanding why certain buildings were considered locations of power at any given time. In attempting to answer this question, I aim to weigh the role of landscape before the role of the building, because the activities which occur on a landscape prior to the construction of any building can influence their later development. I see this influence as a means of the collective memory becoming imbedded onto the landscape, eventually manifested in “permanent structure”.

In understanding the role of a landscape in relation to the groups of people who occupy it, we must remember that the landscape is constantly changing in form and in function, a canvas of space in which power, ideology, memory, identity, and social structure can be shaped. Identifying the reasons for why an initial settlement appeared in a particular region is difficult; indeed, in the case of Bronze-Age Crete, the lack of textual inscriptions and archaeological records makes understanding initial occupation quite difficult. We can perhaps, however, understand why in later periods these locations of early settlement developed into locations with religious and political significance.

I insist that the development of cultural identity and memory within the landscape is not dependent on human-made architecture. Indeed, the activities of the Neolithic people cannot be entirely understood, but I have presented some evidence for initial occupation being related to activities at the Kamares cave. This is not to say that there
were no buildings in the Neolithic, or that I wish to downplay their significant role in social development. Instead, I believe that the later buildings built on a more massive scale, (the court-centered building at Phaistos, for example), were influenced by activities which occurred at a much smaller scale—the control of the Mesara, and the concentration of power at Phaistos was influenced by micoregional development of chiefdoms. The activities of the Neolithic were not forgotten, though perhaps they were being remembered unconsciously. Because the location was imbued with a longstanding cultural identity and memory, it was able to rise in power, both in ideological and administrative roles—whether the occupants of the Mesara were entirely aware of their history is unknown to us. Still, we see a strong connection to the area in subsequent generations, so much that a large, grand building was constructed, and served to mark the culturally significant location. The connection was so strong that it was maintained for centuries to come, as the power center shifted from Phaistos, to Knossos, to the Mycenaeans.

Certainly when the inhabitants saw the court-centered building at Phaistos, they were reminded of political and administrative power, both of the present and past. But we must remember that the features of the landscape were what influenced the significance of the location, not the building itself. The presence of the Phaistos court-centered building was reliant on the activities and associations to that general locale which had preceded its construction. The significance of the locale was developed from a relationship between people and landscape, and that significance was present prior to construction.
I do not wish to downplay the influential role of buildings on a landscape—just because landscape in some cases can override architecture in cultural significance does not mean architecture is powerless. Cultural transformations on a landscape can provide a means for architecture and building to assume the dominant role, so that is no longer is just marking the location of power, but holding it as well. In the case of the Mesara, political change and turmoil influenced the movement of power center, giving buildings a more active role on the landscape. Building began to assume a more active role with the assumption of power by the Knossians and Mycenaeans—because they were exterior to the collective memories of Phaistos, the movement away from the building to Ayia Triada is recognizable of a definitive transformation of the landscape and they way in which it was comprehended, so that the building did begin to digress away from its “marking” function.

“Drastic” landscape transformation can occur when the memory or identity associated with a particular location is either lost or purposefully ignored. Contrasting the Minoan control of Phaistos with that of the Mycenaeans and Knossians, the incorporation of Crete into the larger Greek and Roman empires is demonstrative of drastic transformation. The collective identity and memory vested at Phaistos was forgotten because the new regime placed their power centers in locations that vested economical, agricultural, political, and defensible benefits. That is not to say that the court-centered building at Phaistos did not face such concerns during its time of power—simply that there were other locations in the Mesara that could serve equally as well, and since the collective memory was no longer an issue, any number of locations could be considered.
Arguably, when larger empires are faced with the choice of placing regional powers on the landscape, buildings fall into the role of simply “marking” power—not collective memory or long term identity, as the court-centered building at Phaistos did. Such buildings can be placed in locations chosen on the basis of factors like defense or economy. Certainly, that building will eventually become layered with memories and a collective identity could be developed from that spot, but it was not developed as a result of a relationship with the landscape, as was the case at Phaistos, and likely other court-centered regions on Crete. The location is not significant to the collective memory, but the building is. We see, then, that only as landscape transformation occurs at a larger political scale that architecture falls into a more active role in identifying power, identity, and memory.
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