

## **Sects and the City: Factional ideologies in representations of performance from Bronze Age Crete**

Analyses of performance (and performance events) depicted in the iconography from Minoan Crete most often focus upon religious aspects of these activities. In this article, a performance approach is adopted; this alternative viewpoint emphasizes the significance of performances for materializing ideologies, reinforcing elements of the socio-political order, and the negotiation of power relations. Using archaeological material from the Minoan period of Crete, the role of depictions of dances, bull leaping, and boxing for the development of power relations and socio-political change are examined. It is concluded that both the representations of these activities, and perhaps the activities themselves, played significant roles in shaping competitive authority structures and a social order frequently influenced by competition among rival factions.

Keywords: Bronze Age Crete, performance, bull leaping, dance, boxing, factions

### **Introduction**

Images of performances abound in Minoan Crete. Since Arthur Evans' first excavations at the turn of the twentieth century, numerous representations of dance, bull-leaping and other performative events have come to light; images are found on wall-paintings, seals, sealings, figurines, and other media. Yet most archaeologists working to reconstruct the socio-political strategies employed during the Minoan period on Crete have focused attention on power relations as articulated through architecture, artefact distributions, territoriality, subsistence strategies, demographic changes, and evidence for administrative activities. Performance, when it is discussed, is often seen as epiphenomenal to political and social organisation, often consigned to the area of religious ritual. Yet performative approaches to power are not a new concept – Geertz's *Theatre State* (1980) explored the ritual and performative foundations of statehood in 19<sup>th</sup> century Bali. This approach, which considers performance in terms of the

exercise of political power, has been explored for case studies from New World archaeology (see, for example, Holt 2009), while similar ideas have yet to be developed for the Aegean.

This article addresses the role of performance and its iconographic representation in Minoan society, in particular during the Neopalatial period. The aim is to utilise new insights from performance theory to disentangle Minoan performance from simply religious behaviour, instead approaching it as part of a wider definition of meaningful action that has social and material consequences (Rappaport 1997: 27), in particular as a strategy for the construction of power relations (Bell 1992: 197). This allows us to situate performance in a wider cultural context, in which it not only passively responds to, or is situated separately from, prevalent socio-political trends, but plays an active role in changing social relationships of the later Bronze Age on Crete. Activities commonly regarded solely as ritual, in a religious sense, are in fact multi-faceted, and reflexively constitutive of society. In particular the aim of this paper is to situate the changing representations of performance, from the earlier Bronze Age into the Late Bronze Age, in their ideological context, and to show how these can be used to interpret the relationship between social change and power relations.

Performance events such as dance and bull-leaping are all widely discussed in the literature for the Aegean Bronze Age. However, many of these studies have focused on the ritual components of performance, seeing them solely as a means of understanding religious practices and beliefs. In Minoan Crete, performance is also usually discussed in terms of artistic representation (for example, Immerwahr 1990), religion and ritual (e.g. Warren 1986), or a combination of both (see, for example, Kontorli-Papadopoulou 1996, who catalogues artistic depictions of religious action, including dance and bull-leaping). This approach to performance as ritual activity can be traced back to Arthur Evans's original publications, influenced by Lewis Farnell (1896-1909), where, for example, he concludes that the point of Minoan dance was ritual, the majority of participants were priestesses, and the aim was the epiphany of the goddess or possession of the dancers by the priestess (Evans 1930: 68ff).

With notable exceptions, embodied aspects (e.g. Morris and Peatfield 2002, 2004) and social implications (German 2005) of performance remain unexamined. While there were undoubtedly religious elements to all these events, most performances were embodied activities and communicative events. The traditional approach can produce a rather one-dimensional understanding of performance, seeing it as epiphenomenal to religious ritual in general. But since Minoan performances encompassed a range of actions, with repercussions and ramifications beyond the religious sphere, they objectified and embodied wider cultural and moral values of Minoan society, inculcated as part of active, bodily participation (Inomata 2006b: 805).

### **Archaeology and performance**

The archaeology of performance has become increasingly well-studied during the last few years (see Inomata and Coben 2006). The attraction of performance for archaeologists lies in its emphasis on experiential activities in the past, an approach which calls upon recent theoretical developments in archaeology which see the past as active and embodied, focusing upon the individual's subjective experience as a starting point for an understanding of people in the object world (Gröhn 2004: 19). Analysis of performance draws together divergent theoretical strands to focus upon the physicality and materiality of the human body, viewing it as a critical medium between the social person and the external world. As actions through which humans project images of themselves and their world to an audience (Palmer and Jankowiak 1996: 226), performance reveals the ideologies and values of practitioners. The bodily element of performance is crucial to its impacts, as embodied knowledge creates, preserves, and transmits knowledge, allowing participants and audiences to memorise and rehearse their principles (Taylor 2003). In a society which was presumably mostly non-literate, people learned through memorisation, physical training, and participation in social events (Taylor 2003: 365).

As a multi-disciplinary approach, performance covers a broad spectrum of activities, inviting a degree of controversy (Striff 2003: 6). At one end of the spectrum, performances are highly conventionalised, public and spectacular, while at the other end they encompass cultural behaviour at any level, including mundane or everyday events (Palmer and Jankowiak 1996: 225). In the first instance, performance is a specially marked out mode of action, which is separate from the everyday, heightened and on display (Schechner 1993: 1). In the second, just about anything or any action can be studied as performance. As a consequence, performance now has a broad range of meanings; however, all of them involve the idea of performance as an act of transfer, the transmitting of social knowledge (Taylor 2002: 44).

Definitions of performance are wide-ranging: some scholars (Goffman 1959; Hodder 2006) see performance as a social activity, which involves ordinary behaviour; phenomena which are not performances in the conventional sense of the word, but everyday actions and activities (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 2001: 218). At the other end of the spectrum, scholars such as Milton Singer (1972) and Eugenio Barba (1995) offer definitions of performance which focus on the non-quotidian - 'cultural performances' and 'extra-daily performances'. In ceremonies and other dramatic public events, performers are also audiences; they enter into a reflexive and reciprocal process wherein they collectively present images of society to one another (Palmer and Jankowiak 1996: 240). These definitions and approaches view performance as an action or series of actions which are distinct from the everyday, marked out by special types of behaviour, viewed by audiences and manifest in scheduled events which are spatially and temporally bound (Pearson 1998: 33).

In this article, the performances to be discussed appear as artistic representations of performances, and as such are inherently performative in that they are designed to be viewed by an audience. Due to limited space, a selection of performance acts will be discussed here: dance, bull-leaping and boxing. While some of the actions discussed are 'traditional' performances (e.g. dance), others, such as boxing and possibly bull-leaping, were probably

athletic activities. But one does not exclude the other. All three share the distinction that they are not everyday actions in a performative sense – they are all, as Richard Schechner would put it, 'heightened behaviours' (Schechner 1993: 1), or 'extra-daily' behaviours (Barba 1995: 15-16). As I will show in these examples, performance is a mode of communicative behaviour and a type of communicative event, which is 'bracketed' or 'framed' (Goffman 1974) to mark it out aesthetically and to put it on display for an audience.

Due to its public nature, performance – as a cultural practice and a practice of representation – is closely linked with ideology (Counsell and Wolf 2001: 31). For modern critical and performance theorists, the function of ideology is to maintain and to reproduce the social and productive relationships of the prevailing order, so that individuals within that society develop a conception of themselves that promotes allegiance to the social order (Counsell and Wolf 2001: 32). Building on the work of Louis Althusser, this approach stresses that ideology is the medium through which we experience the world (Althusser 1971). This interpretation of ideology stresses the irreducibility and materiality of ideology – “material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals” (Althusser 1971: 169) – maintaining that ideology is a determining force in its own right, and that it exists in practice and practices (Hawkes 1996: 122). Althusser emphasises practices as “the realization of an ideology” (Althusser 1971: 166), arguing that ideology is realised in institutions and their associated rituals and practices (Althusser 1971, 184).

Due to the ephemeral nature of performances, our evidence for its practice during the Cretan Bronze Age is mostly confined to images, which introduces further dimensions of display and agency into a discussion of power dialectics and ideologies. Recent discussions on iconography have drawn attention to its performativity and agency, especially its ability to actively play a part in the creation of identity through its influence on viewers. Images are not just symbolic, but “a system of action, intended to change the world” and play an important role in the creation of the social process (Gell 1998: 6). As such, images of performance in the Later

Bronze Age are active elements in the construction of social hierarchies, not merely reflective of status (German 2005: 16). This is especially true for the Neopalatial and Final palatial periods, when large scale human figures in wall-paintings were introduced into the artistic repertoire for the first time. This development was indicative of a move away from the communication of social status toward a new 'palatial' ideology, closely associated with ceremonial and ritual – and thus performative – activities (Blakolmer 2010: 149). Since representations of performance are inherently performative acts in themselves, designed by those who commissioned them to mould the social realities of those who view them (Gell 1998; Dakouri-Hild 2008), these images can further inform archaeologists about ideology and competition for power.

In this regard, performance, as practice, action, and representation, can be viewed as the materialisation of ideology, part of an ideological transaction between performers and their audience (Kershaw 1992: 16). Performance translates ideology into readable signs, which are first encoded by institutions and then decoded by audiences (Kershaw 1992: 16). Performance, as a form and style of communication, is an important area for the continual negotiation of social and cultural values, and as an arena where these values can be resisted or challenged, it provides important information about power structures. Performance has the potential not only to maintain collective identities but also to transform and resist them (Coben 2012: 45). In particular, changes in these performances and their representation across the Cretan Bronze Age – most specifically, the increase in their representation in the Late Bronze Age and the introduction of competitive elements - can help us understand changing power relations and societal organization.

### **Performances in Bronze Age Crete**

Depictions of performance occur in the Prepalatial period on Crete (c.3200-1950 BC), the Protopalatial period (c.1950-1700 BC) and most frequently in the Neopalatial (c.1700-1450 BC) and Final Palatial (c.1450-1350 BC) periods (Dickinson 1994: 10-17; Fitton 2002: 28-9). The

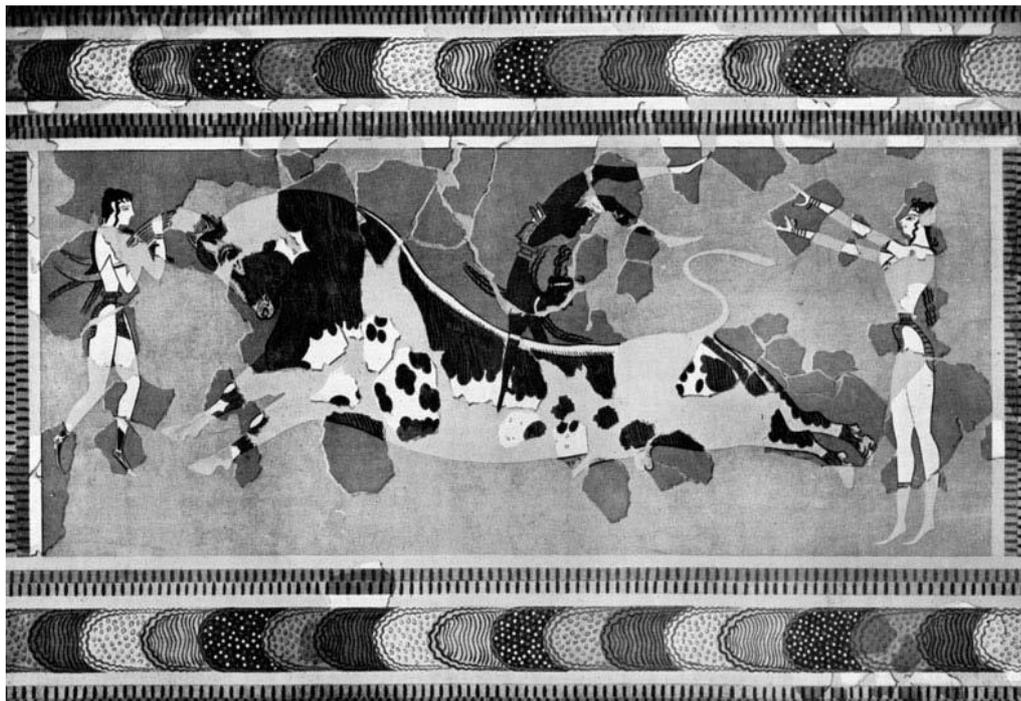
earliest representation of performance comes from the Prepalatial period, where bull-shaped rhyta (vessels used to carry liquid and perform libations (Koehl 2006)) were found at the tholos tombs of Koumasa and Porti, dating to Early Minoan (EM) II (c.2700-2150 BC) (figure 1). The figurine from Koumasa depicts a bull with two small human figures hanging off its horns. Between the horns of the bull (which is exaggeratedly large) is a third human figure, flattened against the bull's head. The right horn of the Porti is example is not preserved, while on the left a small human figure hangs from the horn shaft; presumably a similar figure would have appeared on the unpreserved right horn (Espinosa 1998:46). However, unlike the Koumasa rhyton, no third figure appears over the animal's face. In these representations, the bull is the dominant figure, while the leapers appear to be grappling with the bull in an attempt to wrestle it to the ground (Younger 1995: 509). In this case, bull leaping seems to be a rural, community-based activity - one in which bulls may have been emblematic of the agrarian sphere. Furthermore, bulls were probably linked ideas of the wild, due to their strength and unpredictable nature (Zeimbekis 2006), and represented by the size of the bull in relation to the 'leapers' in the early depictions.



Figure 1 Early Minoan II bull rhyta from Koumasa and Porti (Evans 1921, 188, fig. 137).

There is a dearth of bull-leaping imagery from this point until the Neopalatial period (Middle Minoan (MM) IIIB/Late Minoan (LM) IA (c.1700-1500 BC)) when bull leaping reappears in the form of a *chryselephantine* bull leaper figurine from the Stair Closet and East Treasury at

Knossos. All other known representations of this performance date from either this period or the Final Palatial (LM II-III A1), and are mainly found at the Palace of Knossos. A fragment, dated to MM IIIB (Hood 2005), comes from the Queen's Megaron and shows an acrobat leaping toward a bull, while another acrobat, visible only by their hair, leaps the bull (Evans 1930: 208-10, fig. 143). During the Final Palatial period, evidence comes from the famous Taureador Fresco from the Court of the Stone Spout (figure 2) (LM IB/LM II (Hood 2005)), which depicts three individuals and a charging bull. Found in a fragmentary condition, the Taureador Fresco is thought to be part of a frieze of five panels (Cameron 1976; Marinatos and Palyvou 2007), each of which shows acrobats leaping over the bull, landing behind it, and grappling with the horns. Other fresco evidence from Knossos includes the 'Bull and Tree Grappling' scene from the Northwest Treasure House at Knossos (LM II/III), in the remains of which the hoofs of a charging bull are depicted, along with the tresses of a bull-leaper's hair (Evans 1928: 618-22, fig. 389).



*Figure 2 Taureador fresco from Knossos (Evans 1930, 212, fig. 144).*

Bull-leaping is also represented in other media. A small ivory pyxis found in a tomb at Katsamba (LM II), is decorated with a landscape scene that includes a representation of either

bull-leaping or the hunting and catching of the bull prior to the leap (Hood 1994: 121). Examples in relief come from the Boxer Rhyton from Ayia Triada (LM IB), divided into four panels showing different sporting events. In the second register (figure 3), two charging bulls are shown, including a man who has been gored and tossed (Marinatos 1993: 214). A crystal plaque with a painted scene of bull-leaping was recovered from LM I Knossos (Evans 1930, 108-111, figs. 60-61, col. pl. XIX), and a three-dimensional relief from MM III-LM I/II Knossos depicts the forearm of a leaper grasping a bull's horn (Evans 1930: 504ff). Glyptic images of bull-leaping have been found across Crete, from Knossos, Zakros, Ayia Triada, and one example from Kastelli Chania. Several of the examples, such as those from Zakros (CMS II.6:42), depict a ground line, as do two others from Ayia Triada (CMS II.6:43; CMS II.6:44). The majority show a leaper diving across the back of a bull, while one (CMS II.6:39, from Ayia Triada) depicts a leaper in front of the face of a charging bull.



*Figure 3 Scene of bull leaping on the Boxer Rhyton from Ayia Triada (Evans 1930, 224, fig.157).*

It has been suggested that depictions found outside Knossos originated from the Palace itself (Hallager and Hallager 1995, 548), and that the rings from Ayia Triada, Zakros and Sklavokambos (amongst others) were originally produced in a Knossian workshop (Hallager and

Hallager 1995, 549; Goren and Panagiotopoulos 2009: 257-8). The inference is that bull-leaping was a purely Knossian event, its staging restricted to the Palace or Palatial grounds.

From the Prepalatial to the Neopalatial, the representation of bull leaping changed in both its emphasis and its proliferation: in later depictions, some 700 years after the rhyta, the bull is no longer as dominant. Human figures in the later scenes are larger. While not suggesting they are dominant, the change suggests a closer contest and a shift in the relationship between man and beast (Shapland 2013).

### *Dance*

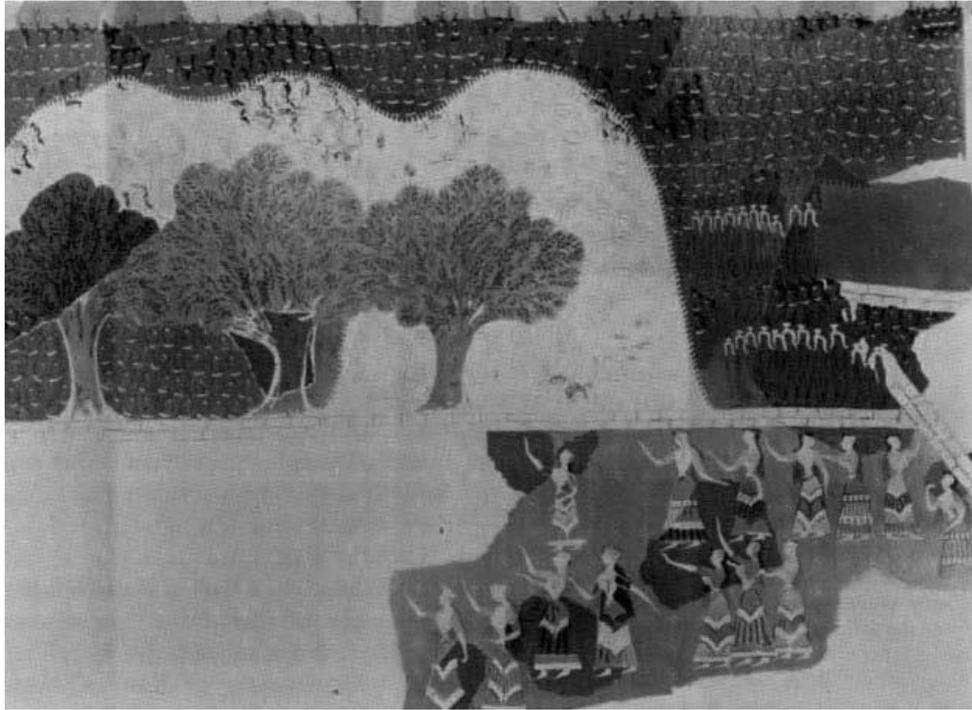
Dance during the Prepalatial period is suggested by the presence of paved areas outside of the tholos tombs of the Mesara. A figurine found at Kamilari, of MM II - IIIB date (Kanta and Tzigounaki 2001, 154), has led to the suggestion that these paved areas were used for dancing (Branigan 1993, 180; 2008, 21). This figurine depicts four nude figures who hold each other by the arms and shoulders and appear to be participating in a circular dance. While later in date than the creation of the tholos tombs, the figurine provides a link between these community spaces and the idea of circular dance.

Clear representations of dancing first appear during the Protopalatial period, on two MM IIB vessels from Phaistos – a fruitstand and a one-handed bowl (Levi 1976, 256ff). The bowl depicts two figures, one arm up and the other down, seemingly dancing around a stationary figure at the bottom-centre. On the plate of the fruitstand, a central character with raised arms is flanked by two other figures, with one armed raised and one lowered. On the pedestal, four more figures are represented, with their arms on their hips. They are represented separately but convey the idea of a circular dance (Liveri 2008, 6).

During the Neopalatial period, dance appeared in wall paintings as well as in glyptic imagery. But as with bull-leaping, there was a shift in emphasis. Earlier representations

emphasised a degree of unity, of 'moving together in time', highlighted specifically by the use of the circular dance form, either in the image itself or through the shape of the vessel on which the scene was depicted (Soar 2010). Neopalatial representations, by contrast, introduce ideas of exclusivity and display into dance depictions, either through the depiction of audiences or through the individuality of the figural representation – e.g. through dress, gesture, or pose.

The primary site for Neopalatial representations of dance is the Palace of Knossos, where depictions appear throughout the entire Neopalatial and during the Final Palatial. The earliest depiction comes from the MM IIIB-LM IA 'Sacred Grove and Dance' miniature fresco (figure 4). Among the most famous of all the Knossos wall paintings, this fresco depicts groups of people in an outdoor setting, including approximately fourteen women who are thought to be taking part in a 'sacred dance' (Immerwahr 1990: 65; Smith 2003: 36; Kontorli-Papadopoulou 1996: 41). This fresco is heavily fragmented and conjecturally restored, and debate continues as to whether the female figures are in fact dancing. Some (German 1999, 2005, 2007) believe they are, while others (Davis 1987; Marinatos 1987) see them performing 'dance-like gestures' or 'sacred mime'. However, if one follows a definition of dance that considers it to be rhythmic action done for some purpose transcending utility (Royce 1977, 5), then the women in the fresco can be said to be dancing. The women are dressed in elaborate court dress (Smith 2003: 36), with flounced skirts and sleeved bodices, each one individually patterned. The appearance of causeways that divide the fresco suggest the gathering took place in the West Court of the Palace. Of particular importance here is the introduction of an audience, those who watch the performance but do not take part.



*Figure 4 'Sacred Grove and Dance' miniature fresco from Knossos (Evans 1930, pl. 18).*

Other representations of public dance were recovered from House A, Room 17 at Tylissos. Here figural frescoes in miniature scale (Immerwahr 1990: 66) dating to LM IA include a representation of dancing, amongst other 'festive scenes'. The women in the restored scene appear to be dressed in similar garb to the female dancers in the 'Sacred Grove and Dance' fresco and they make the same gestures. The male figures in the scene appear to be carrying large amphorae, possibly for a feast (Immerwahr 1990: 67). Parallels with the Knossos miniature fresco can be seen in the depiction of spectators. Another similarity is the outdoor setting, shown by the presence of trees and a building with possible isodomonic masonry and a double window (Shaw 1972: 178).

Dance is also represented on glyptic imagery. Many of these, like the miniature frescoes, depict dancing occurring near buildings or architectural features. The provenance of the images is usually palatial or villa sites. A seal impression from Kastelli Chania depicts a rectangular altar,

perhaps with a tree growing from its centre, and two women dancing with both arms out and down (German 2005: 61), between two architectural features, possibly parts of a building (Krattenmaker 1995: 133). A seal impression from Ayia Triada (CMS II.61) depicts three swaying women, the middle woman the largest, on paved ground and in front of a structure. Like the Sacred Grove and Dance fresco and the Tylissos miniature fresco, this impression shows an outdoor setting located near a building.

### *Boxing*

Representations of sports and athletic events also proliferated in the imagery of the Neopalatial period. In this corpus, bull leaping could be included, although other sporting activities were depicted in diverse media. After bull leaping, boxing is the most commonly depicted Minoan sport. Early in the Neopalatial period, terracotta figurines placed at the peak sanctuary site of Kophinas. The figurines wore boxing gloves and other boxing gear (Rethemiotakis 2001). Over 20 additional representations of boxers are known (Coulomb 1981: 47), including several from Knossos and others recovered from Ayia Triada and Tylissos. Twelve boxers are depicted on the Ayia Triada Boxer Rhyton (figure 5), either standing in profile, in traditional pugilistic poses, or fallen to the floor (Coulomb 1981: 28). Other depictions of Neopalatial boxers are found carved on vases, including a fragment of pyxis from Knossos (Evans 1921: 689-90), which depicts a young boxer with long hair and a codpiece, with a fallen boxer at his feet; a fragment found west of the Little Palace at Knossos (Evans 1935: 600, fig. 595), and a rhyton fragment of unknown origin now in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (Warren 1969: 177). Another fragmentary scene, possibly from a steatite rhyton, depicts boxers within a sacred setting, suggested by the presence of isodomonic masonry with topped with horns of consecration (Marinatos 2005: 149).



*Figure 5 Lower zones of the Boxer Rhyton from Ayia Triada (Evans 1921, 690, fig. 511).*

Representations of boxing in other media are uncommon but not unknown. In wall painting, figures who may be boxers, wearing white kilts, are visible in fragments from Tylissos (Shaw 1972, 172f, nos.3-4). Although they are highly fragmentary images, the similarities in postures observed for these figures and those on the Boxer Rhyton are suggestive (Shaw 1972, 186). Glyptic representations of boxing are rare. Some are ambiguous in relation to boxing - seal impressions from Zakros (CMS II.7:19 and 20) and Ayia Triada (CMS II.6: 17) show male figures in combat, although they appear to be fighting with spears as opposed to boxing. There is one glyptic depiction of boxing (Evans 1930: 504) found at Knossos which depicts a boxer shown from the rear. An ivory model of the upper right arm of a boxer was found in a workshop situated between the Royal Road at Knossos and the House of the Frescoes (Hood 1957: 22). Finally, there are two relief stucco moulds of boxers from Knossos, one depicting the torso of a boxer and another depicting an upper arm (Evans 1930: 497-504).

Several further representations of boxing suggest that this activity occurred within architectural settings; the evidence— columns, altars and trees – suggests an official, perhaps ceremonial, setting (Marinatos 2005: 150). Intriguingly, Coulomb, after examining the

controversial 'Priest King' fresco from the Corridor of the Procession, concluded that Evans' reconstruction was incorrect and that it actually depicted a boxer (Coulomb 1979; 1990). The Corridor of the Procession would have been the main access route to the Central Court from the south, paralleled to the north by the North Entrance Passage, where the famous stucco relief of a charging bull is found. If Coulomb's interpretation is correct (although see Shaw 2004 for an alternative hypothesis), visitors to the Palace from either direction would have been presented with an image of competitive performance.

### **Neopalatial Crete – a political perspective**

This overview of images from the Neopalatial period has stressed two main features: (1) – an increase in representations of performance, and (2) the introduction of themes of competition and display to audiences. These changes, taken together, are illuminating, particularly in relation to recent developments in the study of Neopalatial period politics.

Hierarchical and top-down approaches to explaining power relations in Neopalatial Crete have recently been called into question. Scholars have argued instead for more varied and dynamic socio-political institutions, moving away from earlier models of centralised leadership focussed around Knossos. Rather than a centralized and homogenous political hierarchy, evidence has led some researchers to acknowledge greater regional diversity in political relationships during the Neopalatial period (see Schoep 1999; Day and Relaki 2002).

One approach that explains this fluidity is the existence of heterarchical power relations. Heterarchy has been defined as 'a situation in which coalitions, federations, and other examples of shared counterpoised power abound and interactive elements in complex systems need not be permanently ranked relative to one another' (Fox *et al* 1996: 797). In a heterarchy, elites and non-elites share access to power using a range of resources to compete. As a result, organisational and political institutions tend to be configured as horizontal networks, rather than as centrally unified and hierarchical structures. Heterarchy emphasises the decentralised

nature of power (Parkinson and Galaty 2007: 116), recognising bottom-up as well as top-down structures (Mehrer 2000: 46). The appeal of this model lies in the way it forces a reconsideration of the complex roles of different groups (or factions) who interact in diverse ways as part of organisational structures.

Factional competition is one potential means for archaeologists to conceptualise power relations outside of a hierarchical structure. In factions, leaders hold comparable social positions, are organised in and function in similar ways, and factional leaders compete with one another for material and social resources and positions of power, recruitment and retention of retinue, in order to gain social power (Conlee 2005: 212; Hamilakis 1998: 233). According to this scenario, Neopalatial palaces and villas would have operated as bases for factions of different sizes and socio-political influence (Hamilakis 2002: 188).

Evidence from Knossos suggests socio-political competition within the built environment (Adams 2004). A second arena for political competition were feasts, which provided opportunities for hosts to assert status and claim authority (Kantner 1996: 53). More generally, archaeologists have recognized that feasts offer opportunities for hosts to transform surplus into personal power (Hayden 1995: 24; Hill 1999:14). Feasting and drinking ceremonies would have been an appropriate settings for reaffirming factional identity, attracting new members, and attempting to out-do competing factions through performances that mobilised bodily senses to evoke or generate new social memories (Hamilakis 2002: 197). Interestingly, in some of the depictions of performance – such as the Tyllisos miniature wall painting – there is also evidence for feasting in the same context as performance events, indicating the importance of various forms of social competition in Late Bronze Age art.

### **Performance and Factional Competition**

Ethnographic studies have pointed to the importance of performance within the sphere of political behaviour and patronage (see Beekman 2000). Performances take place and are

witnessed before audiences, with the aim of gathering new adherents, and building alliances to enhance a faction's standing in relation to other elites. That followers witnessed or participated in these occasions was vitally important, as they were not just simply entertainment, but opportunities for factions to display their power and connections (Beekman 2000: 388). Public performances should, therefore, not only emphasise particular factions and gather adherents, but create an expanded labour pool from which the faction could create even more ostentatious performances (Beekman 2000: 393). Public performances also should act as arenas for negotiation and resolution of conflicts of interest. The strong emphasis on public events would imply that power relations were under constant review by peers and subjects (Inomata 2006a: 211). In other words, these events were probably critical arenas where communities were formed and reformed as power relations were imposed, negotiated or resisted (Inomata 2006a: 213).

Sport is the most obviously competitive performance act under discussion. However, until fairly recently its sociological implications remained relatively unexamined. It has been argued that sport is not only a reflection of society, but is also a major mode of expression, making it a means to reflect on society (MacClancy 1996: 4). As well as entertainment, it has also been argued that the primary social function of sport is the maintenance of inequality (Gruneau 1975; Hill 1999: 26). MacClancy stresses the importance of power in this context: 'sport and sporting events cannot be comprehended without reference to relations of power' (1996: 5). As such, sport is a performance that stimulates social conflict as well as nurturing social harmony. Sport is a vehicle of identity, which provides people, or groups of people, with a sense of difference and a way of classifying themselves (McClancy 1996: 3-4). The very nature of physical sports ties success to biological parameters of strength, speed and coordination (Hill and Clark 2001: 340), and one benefit of sporting activities was the possibility of humiliating one's rivals. A clear outcome of contests of physical prowess and skill could be, or would be, changes in the social status of a person, or, in the case of factionalism, the social rank of the group to which the individual belonged (Hill and Clark 2001: 341). Minoan boxers and bull

leapers would have garnered greater prestige and higher status for themselves – and their respective factions – through repeated successes in the sporting arena, particularly when their exploits were immortalised in iconography.

Neopalatial dance, with its emphasis on display, engages with the same competitive ideology as that seen in boxing and bull leaping. Anthropological studies of dance generally allude to competition through display (Spencer 1985: 21), as dancers reveal the same power, initiative and coordinated discipline that gives strength in any other form of encounter (Spencer 1985: 22). Dance, therefore, can serve as a symbolic setting where groups compete for power (Hanna 1987: 136; Looper 2009: 200). While dance is not as overtly competitive or combative as boxing or wrestling, it is none the less a physical activity which requires training, poise and elegance. A skilful rendition of a dance is just as powerful a motivational technique or ideological tool as a successful boxing bout. Dance, as display of prowess, may therefore in some cases be related to performance as factional competition. While display is normally discussed in archaeological terms in relation to artefacts, such as grave goods or monumental architecture, it can also be examined in relation to performances and their material costs. In some settings, performance can be considered, like feasting, as another form of competitive conspicuous consumption.

Given the placement of the iconography discussed and the attire of the participants depicted in these performances, they appear to be members of the elite in Late Bronze Age Minoan society, which suggests a degree of propaganda in the depiction of Neopalatial performance, if not within the performances themselves. I argue that elite members of the factions of Neopalatial Crete competed with one another for political dominance, using performance as a key vehicle for the expression of their ideologies. These elites also promoted their high status positions within society, allowing their attire to act as evidence of the wealth of their particular faction.

The element of display inherent in performance is also reflected in the iconography that represents it. The representation of the human figure in the Neopalatial and Final palatial periods follows a distinctive idealism (Adams 2013: 7) rather than representation of specific individuals. In one way, such formality can be explained by the palatial or elite settings of many frescoes (Adams 2013: 8), but it may also relate to wider trends in Minoan wall painting that stressed homogeneity and a lack of individualism (German 2000; Alberti 2005). In particular, it has been noted that there is a lack of any definite representation of a single ruler in Minoan imagery, especially in common with contemporary Near Eastern societies (Rehak 1995). In these contemporary cultures, specific representations act instead of physical presence, whereas in Minoan Crete, the emphasis is on presence and action in context (Bennet 2013: 114). In this regard, it is action that constitutes leadership and power – and action is negotiable and changeable – and thus it is action, not the individual, which is emphasised in the art. This same element, I argue, is inherent in representations of performance, where the emphasis is on the action, rather than on a specific ‘winner’. While specific individuals are not represented, it is interesting that depictions of bull leaping occur only at Knossos. Perhaps, then, bull leaping was a performance which was only undertaken by one specific faction, reserved solely for the use of the dominant group, a form of performance reserved for those of the highest social order, located at the largest of the palaces (Soar 2009).

## **Conclusion**

Performance events and their representations during the Bronze Age of Crete were vehicles for power dialectics and ideologies, allowing various factions to display their prowess, strength and wealth. As the political structure of the island changed, so too did both the enactment and representation of performance. Elements of competition and negotiation which, arguably, are emphasized under conditions of factional struggle or heterarchy, played out

through new developments and interpretations of performance in the iconography. The visibility of performances to spectators allowed participants to show off their prowess, while at the same time being under constant review by peers and subjects (Inomata 2006a, 211). The settings for these performances suggest that they were acts meant to be witnessed, and that performers, members of the ruling and competing factions, would have been bound by the prevalent cultural and aesthetic values of performance (Inomata 2006b: 819). A poor performance meant the loss of power or status. Visibility was highly important in a political order inhabited by ranked and competing factions who utilised such performances as a means of gathering prestige. Visible prowess and successful performance therefore went hand in hand with status; not only did the public performance emphasise individual and group prestige, but the labour group to which the faction now had access would allow even more ostentatious display at future performances. Representations of these actions in art further displayed these actions to the public, materializing them for perpetuity and to shape the social realities of their viewers. In this sense, performance was more than just its religious components – it was one of the mechanisms through which Minoan society was created and sustained.

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