

## Checking Out Minos' Neighbors: Investigating the Area South of the Palace of Knossos

The Bronze Age (3000-1200 BCE) site of Knossos, in Crete, is known especially for its monumental Palace, seat of the mythological king Minos, the father of the Minotaur lost in its labyrinth. Excavated in the early 1900s by Sir Arthur Evans, the site of Knossos has yielded much more than one monumental structure. Scattered all around the Palace of Minos and beyond it, several smaller buildings—known as *houses*—have been excavated both during Evans' times and until the late 1990s, revealing a large and complex town with substantial residential neighborhoods. Perhaps the neighborhood with the highest concentration of *houses* can be found clustered south of the Palace, where building activities span from the Neolithic (6000-3000 BCE) to the Mycenaean period (1400-1200 BCE). These lavish mansions with prestige artefacts represented a key area for community interaction at the site. Yet, despite the rich assemblages and architectural remains of the Area South of the Palace and its potential significance for the interpretation of the social interactions in Knossos, this area lacks adequate research. Besides short reports and one full publication (that of the South House), scholarship has not focused on a general study of this area, particularly for the Middle (2000-1700 BCE) and early Late Bronze Age (1700-1500 BCE), the peak phases in the site's development, leaving us without a clear understanding of the history and activities of Minos' neighbors.

In this paper, I propose a holistic overview of the Area South of the Palace, comparing and contrasting the data from all of the excavated buildings, both the published ones and the ones in course of publication. By considering stratigraphy, architecture, finds, and chronology from these buildings, I aim to present an integrated history of this part of Knossos, reflecting diachronically on the multifaceted relations among the various houses and between them and the Palace. As we shall see, the role (and functions?) of the buildings south of the Palace changed

over time, particularly between the Middle and the early Late Bronze Age, when they shifted from modest to elite architecture, and possibly included more than just domestic functions. Indeed, in the Middle Bronze Age, this southern area may have marked the beginning of Knossos' town, while in the early Late Bronze Age it gained more exclusivity and elite status, as evidenced by palatial-like architecture and material culture including fine decorated pottery, bronze vessels and tools, frescoes, ivory, and seal stones. In conclusion, while offering a deeper understanding of the Area South of the Palace, this paper advocates for a comprehensive analysis of the archaeological remains, beyond the spatial and chronological limits of a single building and considering, instead, the buildings in relationship to each other, as well as their cultural landscape.