

CDA-4-Knossos

From Migrant Camp to Mega-city: Urbanisation at Ancient Knossos

Supervisors

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- Prof. John Bennet (British School at Athens; director@bsa.ac.uk)

All three are experienced supervisors (several of their former students now work in academia or the heritage sector) and offer complementary expertise. Momigliano is an expert in Bronze Age Knossos (co-directing excavations there in 1993); the use of archival materials to publish old excavations; and the history of Minoan research and its reception. In 2013-16 she co-directed excavations at Palaikastro (East Crete), which specifically addressed questions of urbanisation. Whitley is an expert in Early Iron Age-Archaic Crete, and is completing a book on Knossos (for Bloomsbury) from the earliest times to the Roman period. Since 1992 he has directed a project at Praisos (East Crete), which offers illuminating parallels to urban developments at Knossos. Bennet is an expert in archaeological surveys as a means to understand long-term urban change, and co-directed the initial stages of the Knossos Urban Landscape Project (2005-2008). He is also an expert in the Bronze Age Cretan scripts (Cretan Hieroglyphic, Linear A, and Linear B) and has excavated at Knossos. His extensive research on mainland Greece (Pylos region) and Greek islands (Keos, Kythera) brings a valuable comparative perspective.

Subject

The student will investigate aspects of urbanisation at Knossos – one of the most significant ancient Mediterranean cities, and the second most visited archaeological site in Greece today – through research on one area within its urban landscape. How this area developed and functioned within the Knossian urban landscape will be researched through a study of archaeological materials selected from the excavations by Arthur Evans and his successors, which have remained unpublished or have been published in only a summary fashion. The project will focus on one of the following areas (although there is flexibility for the candidate to suggest others):

1. Caravanserai area
2. Hogarth's Houses
(both spanning Bronze and Early Iron Ages) to investigate social life and ritual activities within the city's southern suburbs and their relationship with the elite core;
3. West Court (from Neolithic to Early Iron Age) to investigate how a central authority choreographed space and controlled access to elite areas;
4. Ailias tombs (Bronze Age) to explore the funerary landscape in relation to the wider urban landscape;
5. Gypsades tholos (Bronze Age) to understand the use of an anomalous tomb form within the wider Knossian funerary landscape;

Most unpublished finds from these excavations are curated in the Knossos Stratigraphical Museum (KSM), which is managed by the British School at Athens (BSA) through its Cretan base, the Knossos Research Centre (KRC). Their study will shed significant and substantial light on Knossian urban developments beyond the elite ceremonial core, leading eventually to the publication of peer-reviewed monograph and/or articles.

Research questions and methods

The study of any area suggested above addresses the question of how this enhances our understanding of the urban development, spatial organization, and functional activities of Knossos from a migrant camp at the beginning of the Neolithic period (c. 7000-3000 BCE) to the largest Aegean urban agglomerate in the 2nd millennium (BCE), and one of the most important Greek cities in the Iron Age- Archaic periods (c. 1100-500 BCE). The specific research questions to be addressed will depend on the area chosen by the PhD candidate. Flexibility is therefore built into this project, but broad questions likely to be addressed are:

1. What was the nature of 'domestic space' in Bronze Age Knossos?
2. What was the urban structure of Bronze Age/Early Iron Age Knossos?
3. Does the Knossian urban layout reflect a single central authority (hierarchy) or multiple competing authorities (heterarchy)?
4. How did this hierarchy/heterarchy choreograph urban space?
5. How did ritual practices in suburban areas relate to those in the elite areas?
6. How representative were the Knossian burials of the actual population in the settlement?

The project entails development of solid familiarity with the archaeology of Knossos, ensuring a sound chronological and spatial framework within which the student will work. The specific materials to be studied will then be situated within that framework and their interpretation will be informed by relevant social theory, to understand the development and maintenance of power through manipulation of the built environment (including residential, ceremonial, funerary spaces).

Research context

Since Evans's excavations at Knossos (1900-1931), research has largely focused on the Bronze Age (Minoan) palace and elite core. More recently, attention has shifted to the exploration of non-elite areas, as exemplified by the on-going survey of the Knossos Urban Landscape Project and excavations on the Gypsades hill, south of the palace. This shift, in turn, has been influenced by an interest in urbanism and urbanisation, which, as defining features of contemporary life, have attracted a considerable attention across many disciplines. Yet, the rich potential that lies in the 'deep history' of urbanism/urbanisation has remained largely unexploited, although efforts to create comparative frameworks for ancient and modern cities have recently emerged. The project thus offers insights on one of the most important urban centres in the Old World and contributes to these comparative aims.

Main resources/collections in this area

The BSA holds, besides unpublished archaeological materials in the KSM, originals and/or copies of relevant archival materials (e.g. excavation daybooks) and offers unrivalled library resources in Athens and Knossos. Other important collections are in Crete (Archaeological Museum in Heraklion) and Oxford (Ashmolean Museum), but the KSM hold the most relevant resources.

The BSA will ensure access to all materials to be studied. Archaeological materials are stored in the KSM, which offers suitable study space. Should it be necessary, the student will have the opportunity to take the BSA's dedicated postgraduate training course on 'Prehistoric, Greek and Roman Pottery' taught at Knossos. The student will have access to the expertise available throughout the BSA in the form of the Knossos Curator (an academic who manages the KRC); the BSA Director, Assistant Director and Fitch Laboratory Director, (all academics in relevant fields, based in Athens); the specialist Librarians and Archivist (in Athens); and the BSA Administrative staff (Athens, London). In addition, a steady stream of academics visit Knossos and Athens, on whose expertise the student will be able to draw. The facilities at the KRC include accommodation and a specialist Library on Knossian and Cretan archaeology.

The BSA will offer accommodation for up to one full year at a reduced rate as part of its commitment to this important initiative. It is envisaged that the student would spend significant periods of time at Knossos, but also some shorter periods in Athens, where they will have full access to a 70,000+ volume Library and over 1,300 periodical series. Both Athens and Knossos are equipped with excellent IT facilities. While based at the KRC/BSA, the student will have ready access to Knossos and other archaeological sites in Crete/Greece. The student will be able to attend seminars organised by the Knossos Curator and BSA Director, with the opportunity to organise/co-organise such events and offer presentations about their work. Although primarily a research centre, the KRC sponsors regular outreach events, in which the student will have the opportunity to participate, thus developing valuable organisational and outreach skills. The BSA has developed a significant digital outreach programme (through its website, social media, newsletter, etc.): the student will contribute to this, thus making their research more visible and developing key communication skills.

Skills developed by student and employability enhancement

Specific key skills include: building expertise in material culture of Bronze Age and/or Early Iron Age Crete; engaging with current approaches to issues of urbanism; triangulation between physical remains, archival documentation, and theoretical approaches; developing familiarity with the management and organisation of archaeological materials in a heritage management context (KSM). General key skills include: networking within the BSA and wider community of Cretan/Aegean archaeology; living and working abroad; learning/f/improving another language (modern Greek). All will enhance the student's employability both in academia and the heritage sector.