

# Imagi(ni)ng 'The Palace of Minos': A view from the Architectural Drawings

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*This paper examines the architectural drawings of 'The Palace of Minos', the final publication of Knossos' excavations conducted by Sir Arthur Evans. The main aim is to investigate the meaning of their use and their incorporation in 'The Palace of Minos'. An examination based upon the study of architecture and architectural drawings in archaeology, as well as the history of archaeological research, proposes that 'The Palace of Minos' contains a very characteristic, radical and exceptional assemblage of architectural drawings in terms of Aegean archaeology. Such special architectural drawings may derive from specific epistemological assumptions made by Evans in order to support his vision for Minoan Civilization. I will argue that Evans based his narrative for the Minoan Civilization not only upon the archaeological discourse, but also upon the archaeological image. More specifically, I will examine the way in which architectural drawings contributed to this direction.*

## Introduction

The 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the transformation of archaeology from an elite pastime into a comprehensively constituted humanities discipline.<sup>1</sup> This transformation went hand-in-hand with systematic field research and with the involvement of architects in archaeological excavations. Key-moments into such an epistemological trajectory were the publications of the excavations at Samothrace<sup>2</sup> and ancient Olympia<sup>3</sup> which integrated architectural drawings drafted by trained architects.<sup>4</sup>

Sir Arthur Evans followed this developing trend when he started excavating the prehistoric site of Knossos in Crete. During the ten years of excavation and almost another two decades of restoration, he employed four architects (Theodore Fyfe, Christian Doll, Francis Newton, Piet de Jong) for the mapping and the “reconstitution,”<sup>5</sup> as Evans himself called it, of the excavated architectural remains, with the result of a very characteristic, radical and exceptional assemblage of architectural drawings in terms of Aegean archaeology. Most of these architectural drawings were published in Evans’ four-volume work titled ‘The Palace of Minos’ (PM). PM is not only a final excavation report, but, mostly, the seminal interpretative synthesis on Bronze Age Crete and its so-called “Minoan Civilization”.

Recent research has established that images published in this magnum opus do not simply record the architectural remains or illustrate Evans’ narrative about Prehistoric Crete but rather they are an integral and structural part of its argument. However, such views have been restricted to the photographs<sup>6</sup> and the reconstruction drawings<sup>7</sup> of PM. A comprehensive assessment of the architectural drawings and the meaning of their incorporation in Evans’ work is still lacking. This paper addresses this research gap and discusses

the architectural drawings of PM, on the one hand in relation to the study of architecture in archaeology and the role of architectural drawings in such a study, and on the other hand with reference to the history of the archaeological research and especially to Evans’ disciplinary background.

## Form – Function – Meaning

The examination of the architectural drawings of PM will be largely based upon the triptych *Form – Function – Meaning*, namely the three focal points of the study of architecture in the frame of archaeology.<sup>8</sup> *Form* deals with the investigation of the structural and constructive issues along with the questioning of the original architectural form of the remains. *Function* is closely related to *Form*, though the former implies a higher degree of interpretation. *Function* is related to the way in which certain architectural parts of a building were used, according to a specific point of view: what potentialities and confinements architecture integrates as a field of human action (movement, visibility, etc.). It can be said that *Function* is an approach to the architectural remains which is not strongly bounded within historical and cultural issues, thus the study of *Function* is more architectural in nature rather than archaeological. The investigation of *Meaning* departs from the strict limits of architectural study into the placement of the building in its historical, social, and cultural milieu. This is because, in order for someone to investigate the possible meaning that a building would have for a special group of people in a relatively limited chronological period and in specific cultural boundaries, they have to consider *Form* and *Function* but, also, has to take into account the archaeological context. That is to say, the broader architectural frame in which the building falls into, the character of its mobile finds (pottery or other artifact categories), and

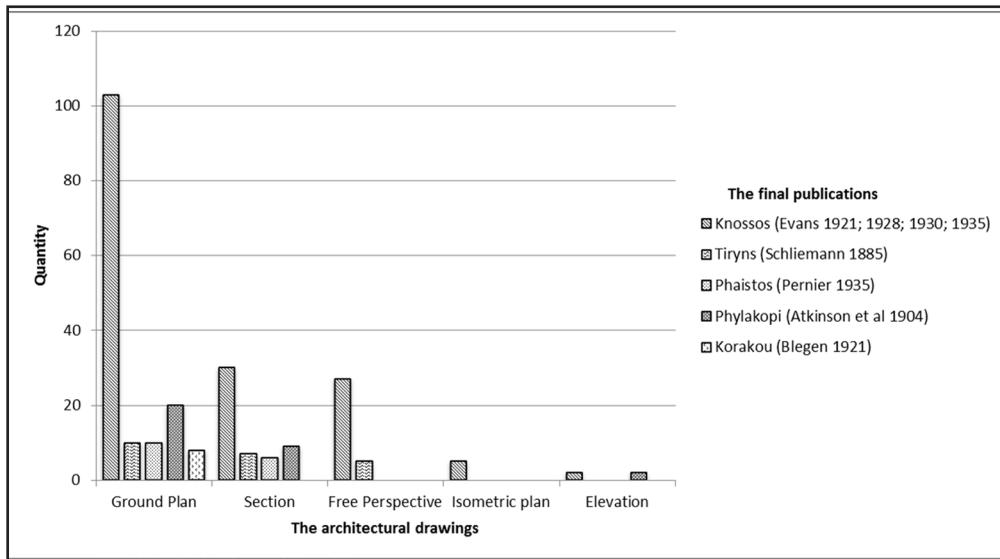


Figure 1: Chart showing both the quantity and the categories of architectural drawings incorporated in 'The Palace of Minos' and its contemporary publications.

other units of excavation recording (bones, charcoal, etc.). Archaeological context plays a significant role in the development of archaeological interpretation, in other words, the definition of *Meaning* of each architectural space.<sup>9</sup>

### The architectural drawings of 'The Palace of Minos'

PM includes five categories of architectural drawings: ground plans, sections, elevations, isometric plans and free perspectives.

#### *Ground plans*

Ground plans constitute the majority of the architectural drawings that are integrated in PM. In comparison to contemporary publications of prehistoric sites in the Aegean, such as the publications of the excavations at Tiryns,<sup>10</sup> Phylakopi,<sup>11</sup> Phaistos,<sup>12</sup> and Korakou,<sup>13</sup> the ground plans in PM are not only of considerably higher number (fig. 1), but also of a different character. Notwithstanding the fact that each excavation program forms a separate case, the excavation programs mentioned above share almost the same approach to

ground plans despite the diverse ethnic and epistemological background of the archaeologists and architects involved. Like Knossos, they all occupied trained architects who drew plans for the needs of their final publications. In contrast, the ground plans of Knossos feature major differences.

A considerable number of PM's ground plans are not small-scale plans<sup>14</sup> including solely architectural features as was usual at the time,<sup>15</sup> but they state mobile finds and other excavation features as well, focusing on limited architectural areas (fig. 2). Such a thing renders these plans more archaeological in character as they place each find or feature into its archaeological context. Thus, PM's ground plans depart from the study of the *Form* and the recording of the architectural remains,<sup>16</sup> which is the original aim of this type of architectural illustration, into the investigation of the *Meaning* of the architecture. Moreover, many of them present both extant and missing parts of the ground level of the edifice. Not only this, but there are plans which present the layout of the first level of the edifice.<sup>17</sup> Dotted lines usually, though not always, denote the largely tentative

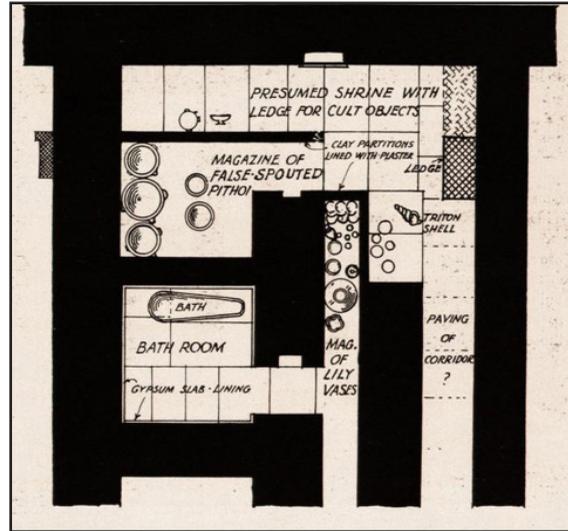


Figure 2: Ground plan of northwest angle of southeastern Insula (Evans 1921, fig. 419).

layout of space.<sup>18</sup> As a result, such plans entail a high degree of interpretation. This contradicts with PM's contemporary publications which are characterized by a significant degree of an empiristic approach to archaeological remains.<sup>19</sup> Empiricism in archaeology considers the material remains of the past as objective scientific–archaeological data independent from the observer–archaeologist and the final archaeological interpretation. As a result, the archaeologists distance themselves from the data to guard the assumed neutrality of the latter and thus to aim for an impartial interpretation. The lack of empiricism is accentuated by the fact that PM's ground plans identify most architectural spaces using descriptive, almost interpretative, labels such as the Queen's Megaron, Hall of the Double Axes, Bedroom, Bathroom and Treasury of Shrine.<sup>20</sup>

### Sections

Fyfe had elaborated small-scale architectural sections for extensive areas which was a frequent architectural choice at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginnings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as demonstrated by the publications

of Tiryns, Phylakopi and Phaestos.<sup>21</sup> However, Evans included only one of them in PM,<sup>22</sup> and did not ask Doll or de Jong for more small-scale sections.<sup>23</sup> He preferred to publish large-scale sections focused on limited architectural areas, instead of small-scale sections covering an extensive area, a tendency which is responsible for the high number of integrated sections in PM.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, many sections are not confined to recording extant architectural remains, but entail a considerable degree of reconstruction of the building's original height and other features (fig. 3). As a result, they diverge from the original aim of this type of architectural illustration, namely the comprehension of the *Form* of each architectural part.<sup>25</sup> Instead, the high degree of archaeological interpretation applied denotes the *Function*, and sometimes the *Meaning*, of architectural spaces.

In the case of the Niche of the Royal Villa, a building close to the Palace of Minos also excavated by Evans, a human figure takes a seat and is also able to see or hear someone at the ground or first level of the building denoting the *Function* (fig. 4).

Furthermore, this image projects Evans' archaeological interpretation for that specific and special architectural part of the building and thus states the *Meaning* that the British archaeologist attributed to the Niche. *Meaning* is derived from several special features of the human figures, such as indicators of social class and rank, which are closely associated with Evans' narrative for the Minoan Civilization. The male figures at the ground level are almost identical to those carved on a Neopalatial stone vessel from Hagia Triada, namely the Chieftain Cup.<sup>26</sup> Evans interpreted the figures depicted on the Chieftain Cup as a 'Young Prince' and a guard based on their paraphernalia (sword, lustral sprinkler, jeweled collar, armlet, bracelets),<sup>27</sup> some of which are denoted in the Niche section. The interpretative character of the Niche section is further accentuated by the large scale, which further underscores that PM does not treat the data as independent from its interpretation, contrary to what Evans' contemporaries accepted.

*Elevations*

Elevations should be examined in connection with the isometric plans which follow. Evans maintained their architectural character in contrast to what he did with ground plans and sections. Considering that among the architectural remains of Bronze Age Knossos not a single edifice was preserved in its full height, PM's elevations entail a high degree of interpretation. Evans employed elevations for architectural areas such as the Grand Staircase, the Northern Entrance System and the Temple-Tomb (fig. 5). It is not by chance that Evans' architects have drafted isometric plans for the same architectural areas and buildings.

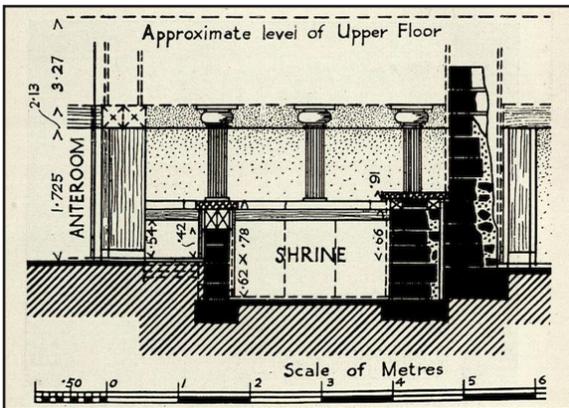


Figure 3: Section showing the Later 'Fetish Shrine' (Evans 1928, fig. 322).

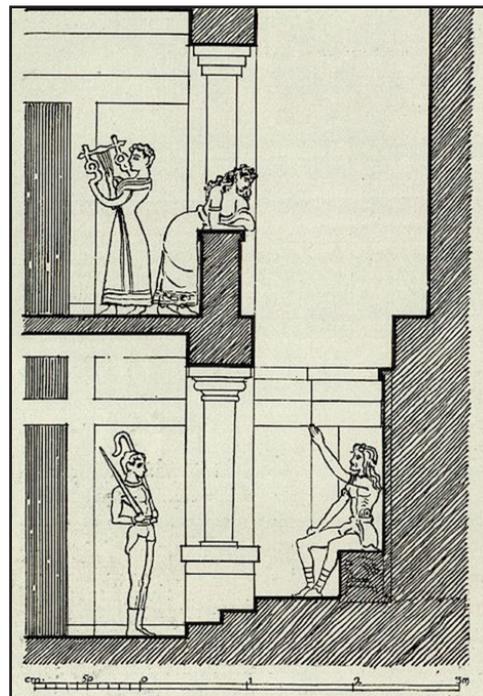


Figure 4: Section of West Light Area of 'Royal Villa' showing Hood above and Niche with Seat of Honour below (Evans 1928, fig. 238).

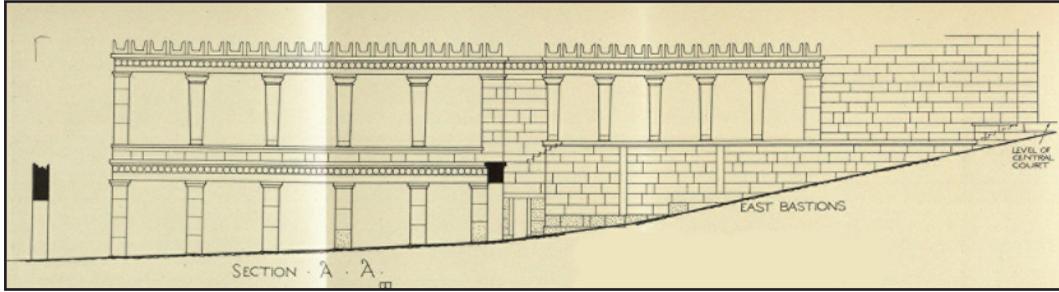


Figure 5: Elevation of Northern Entrance System (Evans 1930, fig. 106).

### *Isometric plans*

Isometric plans are another category of architectural drawings incorporated by Evans in PM. They are three-dimensional technical drawings in contrast to sections and elevations which are two-dimensional plans. Like elevations, they entail a higher degree of interpretation than ground plans and sections because they illustrate the whole edifice including both extant and missing parts. Isometric plans contribute to the study of *Form* and *Function* but they may extend to *Meaning* according to the degree of restoration they entail. At this point it should be noticed that PM's isometric plans are highly detailed. In addition, they constitute, as do the elevations, technical drawings of identical character to the ones architects draft in order to guide new building projects.<sup>28</sup> The architects of Knossos produced isometric plans for the Hall of the Double Axes, the Little Palace, the East Bastion, the Temple-Tomb and other areas; Evans incorporated them in PM. Isometric plans exist only in the final publication of Knossos while elevations are almost absent from its contemporary publications.<sup>29</sup> It has been argued that the drawings under consideration were part of Evans' aim: that of the "reconstitution" of the Knossos architectural remains.<sup>30</sup> These were not simply drawings that illustrated Evans' interpretation of the architectural remains, but working drawings which were meant to practically enable and guide the restoration

works at Knossos.<sup>31</sup> It is not by chance that almost all architectural parts of the Palace and buildings for which the above group of architectural drawings were drawn have been "reconstituted." Evans was led to the restoration mainly by his will for the best possible excavation documentation of the architectural remains. This, combined with the exceptionally well-preserved architectural remains of Bronze Age Palace at Knossos,<sup>32</sup> formed the base upon which the Knossos' restoration program began. So, such a specific group of architectural drawings was of multi-purpose: it aimed to record the architectural remains as best as possible, it interpreted architectural remains by presenting a restored view of the missing parts, and, finally, it guided the restoration work.<sup>33</sup> Thus, in the case of PM, documentation in the field and excavation recording are entangled with archaeological interpretation.

### *Free Perspectives*

We can point to one more category of architectural drawings incorporated in PM, that of free perspectives. Free perspectives are three-dimensional drawings which, contrary to the aforementioned categories, are not technical drawings in the sense it is not possible to measure off dimensions of them. They are usually connected to archaeological interpretation, rather than the recording or the analysis of excavation data. Free perspectives are strongly related to *Meaning* and entail the highest degree

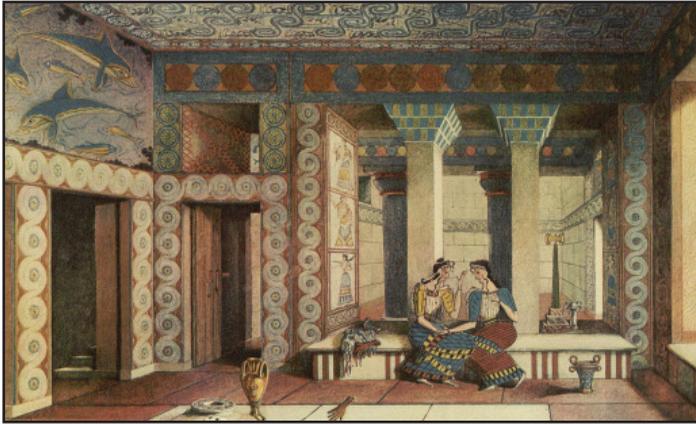


Figure 6: The free perspective of 'Queen's Megaron' (Evans 1930, pl. 26).

of interpretation.<sup>34</sup> In this respect they are representative of PM's overall character as a narrative synthesis, rather than an account of assumingly neutral archaeological data, independent from archaeological interpretation. The final publications of Phylakopi, Phaestos and Korakou lack such free perspectives, which feature only in the publication of Knossos.<sup>35</sup>

PM's free perspectives depict finds from different archaeological contexts together,<sup>36</sup> placing them in specific rooms whose *Function* and *Meaning* were previously determined by Evans. Their ultimate goal is to strengthen Evans' interpretation for such architectural spaces. The free perspective which illustrates the interior of the Queen's Megaron is a characteristic example (fig. 6). It depicts a squat stone *alabastron*, identical to that found in the Room of Throne,<sup>37</sup> and the characteristic two-handed goblets which have been found in a tomb at Isopata, near Knossos.<sup>38</sup> Evans dated the ceramic assemblages of Isopata tombs and the squat *alabastron* to the Late Minoan (LM) II period. If we consider that Evans believed that Minoan Civilization reached its peak during LM II period,<sup>39</sup> then it is not by chance that he integrated LM II finds in a free perspective depicting the Queen's Megaron. Moreover, PM includes free perspective drawings for architectural spaces such as the Hall of the Double Axes, the Room of Throne and

the Bathroom; architectural spaces which Evans correlated, among other things, with the residential areas of Homeric elites.<sup>40</sup>

Evans has incorporated in PM three free perspectives which were drawn by Newton. These three drawings depict, among other things, fluted columns (fig. 7).<sup>41</sup> Such columns are not of Minoan kind and have not been recovered in Minoan contexts. Instead, the depicted columns are typical architectural elements of classical Greek architecture. It has been observed that "Evans saw the Minoans as the source of all future Greek civilization."<sup>42</sup> An interesting point of Evans' statement is that he ignored any original Mycenaean contribution, considering the latter as a provincial variant of Minoan Civilization.<sup>43</sup> It can be argued that Evans incorporated these three free perspectives in PM in order to visualize his above statement. Having integrated fluted columns in Minoan architecture, PM directly bridges the gap between classical and pre-classical (Minoan) Aegean antiquities, thus legitimizing a specific cultural and historic succession: from Minoan to classical Greek Civilization without taking into account Mycenaean Civilization. Visualization legitimizes such a belief and, as a result, transforms it into information. Moreover, someone can argue that Newton's free perspectives are interrelated with Evans' opinion that the historical significance of Minoan

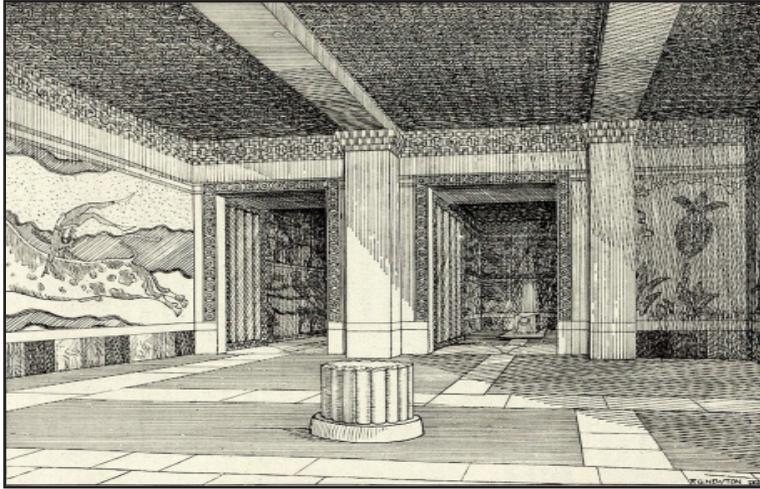


Figure 7: The free perspective of West Porch (Evans 1928, fig. 429).

Crete was the pivotal role it played in the transmission of High Civilization from the ancient Near East to Europe, transforming *Ex Oriente Lux* into the European spirit of Minoans.<sup>44</sup> Minoan Crete as the “cradle of European civilization.”<sup>45</sup> Considering that classical Greek Civilization has been integrated in the narrative of European modernity as the source of European spirit since the beginnings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>46</sup> the integration of elements of classical Greek architecture in Minoan architecture establishes a more ancient civilization, Minoan, as European. One of the main reasons that Evans and modernist European archaeology wanted to demonstrate the Minoan as European civilization is not unrelated to the wider political condition of Crete at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Crete had just become independent from the Ottoman Empire and, as a result, had a considerably diverse population both in ethnic and religious terms, suspended between East and West.<sup>47</sup> Thus, modernist archaeology made an effort to demonstrate that Crete had been ‘European’ since the Bronze Age.<sup>48</sup> It is not by chance that Evans argued that Minoan society was peaceful and flourishing, governed by a stable monarchy and aristocracy,<sup>49</sup> that was based upon its naval superiority. Evans builds his narrative for the Minoan Civilization upon

a “Victorian model”<sup>50</sup> with ‘Edwardian’ elements<sup>51</sup> attributing to it features of the 19<sup>th</sup>–early 20<sup>th</sup> century Great Britain.

### Conclusion

Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Aegean archaeology featured trained architects in charge of the production of architectural drawings of archaeological remains. Evans worked with four architects at Knossos with the majority of the architectural drawings they produced being in the final publication of Evans’ excavations, ‘The Palace of Minos’. This resulted in a considerably higher number of architectural drawings than contemporary Aegean publications.<sup>52</sup> Apart from his illustrative zeal, Evans deviated in the use of standard types of architectural drawings, such as ground plans and sections, from commonly accepted practices of Aegean archaeology at the time. Also, he employed novel types of drawings, such as isometric plans. The examination of PM’s architectural drawings based on the triptych *Form – Function – Meaning* indicates that, on the first level, the architectural drawings, which normally contribute to the excavation record, are imbued with more archaeological interpretation, while, at a second level, examining PM as a whole, we notice a

considerably high number of interpretative drawings (isometric, elevations, free perspectives). PM's architectural drawings are characterized by a distinctive lack of empiricism, constituting more than the recording of excavation data or the documentation of the architectural remains. This can be inscribed in Evans' wider aim, that is to say, his will to compose a narrative for the Minoan Civilization rather than an excavation report about his excavations at Knossos.<sup>53</sup> PM is not based on an empiricist approach in order to examine the finds, via distant observation and description, as neutral scientific data independent from archaeological interpretation.<sup>54</sup> Despite the fact that the annual excavation reports published by Evans<sup>55</sup> in the first six years of fieldwork at Knossos were more empiricist than the subsequent PM, the latter broke away both from the style of the preliminary reports and the wider empiricist tradition that dominated final excavation reports. Instead of descriptive observations and finds catalogues, PM forms a narrative of the Minoan Civilization and the architectural drawings contribute to this direction. This characteristic, radical, and exceptional assemblage of architectural drawings in terms of Aegean archaeology played a significant role in the composition and legitimization of a narrative for the Minoan Civilization composed by Evans; a narrative based on his vision of prehistoric Crete. A significant part of Evans' vision was the correlation between the archaeological remains of Knossos and the narratives of Homer and Herodotus while emphasizing the belief that Minoan Crete played a pivotal role in the transmission of High Civilization from the ancient Near East to Europe, considering it as the "cradle of European civilization". Evans saw the Minoan as the first "European" civilization<sup>56</sup> and the source of classical Greek Civilization, ignoring any original Mycenaean contribution.<sup>57</sup>

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Endnotes:

- 1 See Trigger 1989.
- 2 Conze 1875.
- 3 Curtius und Adler 1892.
- 4 Trigger 1989, 196-7.
- 5 Evans 1927, 258; see also Farnoux 1993, 35-93.
- 6 German 2005.
- 7 Klynne 1998.
- 8 See Preziosi 1983.
- 9 The first two points, *Form* and *Function*, are examined by architecture. Nevertheless, architecture defines *Function* as the final stage and, in other words, as the aim of its study, drawing upon the tryptich Structure – Form – Function (Palyvou 2003). The pivotal difference between an archaeological and an architectural view on a building lies on the point of *Meaning* (see Preziosi 1983).
- 10 Schliemann 1885.
- 11 Atkinson et al. 1904.
- 12 Pernier 1935.
- 13 Blegen 1921.
- 14 A small-scale architectural drawing is that presenting a large architectural area.
- 15 Vavouranakis 2008, 77. Something observed for the final publications of Tiryns, Phaestos, Phylakopi and Korakou.
- 16 Palyvou 2003, 216; Vavouranakis 2008, 76-7.
- 17 Evans 1921, fig. 240.
- 18 Evans 1921, fig. 306.
- 19 MacEnroe 1995, 13-4.
- 20 Evans 1921, fig. 239.
- 21 Schliemann 1885, pl. 3; Atkinson et al. 1904, fig. 59; Pernier 1935, pl. 3.
- 22 Evans 1928, fig. 362.
- 23 Palyvou 2003, 210.
- 24 See figure 1.
- 25 Vavouranakis 2008, 76-7.
- 26 Forsdyke 1952, 13.
- 27 Evans 1928, 790-2.
- 28 Palyvou 2003, 211.
- 29 See figure 1.
- 30 Palyvou 2003.
- 31 Palyvou 2003, 214-6.
- 32 Some architectural elements of the first level have been preserved in situ (Shaw 2011, 383). So, Evans saw restoration as the best way to record such an excavation data (Evans 1927, 258; see also Palyvou 2003, 208; Vavouranakis 2008, 83).
- 33 Palyvou 2003, 216.
- 34 Vavouranakis 2008, 79.
- 35 The only exception is a small number of free perspectives in Tiryns publication; see figure 1.
- 36 Farnoux 1993, 69-71.
- 37 Evans 1935, 939.
- 38 Evans 1914, 27, 51-2.
- 39 Evans 1935, 297.
- 40 Zois 1995, 11-7, 222-6, 286-7.
- 41 Evans 1928, fig. 429; Evans 1928, fig. 532; Evans 1930, fig. 255.
- 42 Bintliff 1984, 36; see also Evans 1912, 278.
- 43 Bintliff 1984, 36; see also Evans 1912, 282.
- 44 Hamilakis and Momigliano 2006, 27.
- 45 MacEnroe 1995, 8; see also Evans 1921, 24.
- 46 Shanks 1996, 55, 80.
- 47 Carabott 2006.
- 48 Hamilakis and Momigliano 2006, 27.
- 49 Bintliff 1984, 35.
- 50 Zois 1995, 36.
- 51 MacEnroe 1995.
- 52 See figure 1. The number — and sometimes the types — of the architectural drawings in a final publication are also interrelated with the extent of the excavated site and the nature of its architectural remains. Nevertheless, this is not enough to explain the case of Knossos excavations conducted by Evans and their final publication, ‘The Palace of Minos’.
- 53 MacGillivray 2000, 271.
- 54 MacEnroe 1995, 14.
- 55 Evans 1900; Evans 1901; Evans 1902; Evans 1903; Evans 1904.
- 56 MacEnroe 1995, 8; see also Evans 1921, 24.
- 57 Bintliff 1984, 36; see also Evans 1912, 278, 282.

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