

The Minoan Palatial Centers as a Future Nomination to the World Heritage List: Challenges and Perspectives

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Abstract The Minoan palatial centers constitute a unique group of monuments with renowned importance for the world cultural heritage. They are complex structures of a monumental character, reflecting the evolution of the Minoan civilization which was the first one to achieve such advanced level of social organization on the European continent. In the framework of the nomination for inclusion into the UNESCO's World Heritage List, Greek authorities have selected six palatial centers: Knossos, Phaistos, Malia, Zakros, Kydonia, and Zominthos representing all the different phases of the Minoan civilization and geographical regions all over the island of Crete.

In this paper, we concisely refer to the preparation of this nomination, a difficult and multi-faceted task, which requires an in-depth knowledge of the procedures, principles and methodology established in the context of the UNESCO's World Heritage Convention, as well as systematic cooperation among all competent authorities and other stakeholders.

We consider that the nomination of these emblematic monuments fully complies with the current considerations for the establishment of a representative, balanced and credible World Heritage List. Furthermore, the preparation of this nomination will indisputably benefit the monuments themselves, since a series of relevant challenges will be recognized and addressed, and a comprehensive framework for the monuments' management will be designed, ensuring the preservation, enhancement, and communication of their value to the public worldwide.

The Minoan palatial centers stand out as a characteristic group of monuments of the prehistoric period with a particular importance for the archaeology of Greece and the cultural heritage of the Mediterranean and Europe in general. Therefore, we consider that the Mi-

noan palaces merit to be inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List (hereafter WH List) and that their inclusion will further enrich this eminent UNESCO initiative.

The Minoan palatial centers are distinguished, in all their diversity, for their unique monumental architecture and complex internal organization.¹ They constituted the administrative, economic and religious centers of broad geographical regions and housed a wide array of activities. They do not only contain the residences of the rulers and the priesthood, but were homes to a multitude of people: artisans (metalworkers, potters, weavers, etc.), merchants, and scribes. Various communal events and contests were also held in and around these impressive building complexes.²

The proposed nomination, which encompasses the palatial centers of Knossos, Phaistos, Malia, Zakros, Kydonia, and Zominthos, reflects both the geographical and chronological breadth of these monuments, which, as a whole, effectively represent the full range of geographical areas from the eastern to the western end of Crete, and time span from the Proto- to the Neopalatial period (c. 1950–1450 BCE).

The Palatial Centers³

The palace of Knossos, the most important center of the Minoan civilisation, is located in the Regional Unit of Heraklion and covers an area of approximately 20,000 m². The palace was founded c. 1950 BCE (Protopalatial period) and, following many destructions, was rebuilt on the same site and flourished during the Neopalatial period (1750–1450 BCE).⁴ In the Postpalatial period (1450–1200 BCE), it was the only Minoan palace in the central and eastern part of Crete that was still partly inhabited. It even preserved its administrative character, as the discovery of an archive of Linear B documents indicates.

The palace of Phaistos, one of the largest palaces in Crete, is also located in the Regional Unit of Heraklion. It was built at the western end of the Mesara plain and during the Bronze Age was the center of political authority in the south coast of Crete. The first palace was built in the Protopalatial period (1900 BCE), covered an area of approximately 8000 m² and

1 The word “palace” on Minoan Crete is, as so many other terms, a matter of convention, partly owed to Evans’ legacy, who was the first to refer to “palaces” in this context. In the frame of the nomination, we retain the aforementioned term, since it is still largely used in the international bibliography. However, some scholars propose alternative terms, such as “court-centered building,” see Vavouranakis 2013, 223; Driessen et al. 2002.

2 See Gadogan 1976; Hägg and Marinatos 1987.

3 UNESCO, “Minoan Palatial Centres”, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5860/>.

4 See Evans 1921–1935. We note that for the purpose of this article we refer to the basic bibliography about Knossos and the other palatial centers. Needless to mention the existence of an extensive literature about these monuments, that reflects, among others, the more recent outcomes of the research.

extended over the three terraces of the hill. It was destroyed by an earthquake c. 1750 BCE. On the ruins of the Old Palace was constructed the New Palace, which survived until the end of the Neopalatial period (1450 BCE), when it was destroyed and never rebuilt.⁵

The palace of Malia is located on the north coast of Crete, in the Regional Unit of Heraklion. It is the third largest Minoan palace and was, according to tradition, the seat of Sarpedon, the youngest brother of Minos. The palace was originally built c. 2000–1900 BCE. It was destroyed at the end of the Protopalatial period (1750 BCE) and rebuilt c. 1650 BCE on the same spot, following the basic layout of the old building. In Late Minoan IB, around 1450 BCE, the palace was totally destroyed, at the same time as the other palatial centers. A brief period of re-occupation is testified in the 14th to 13th centuries BCE.⁶ The palace of Malia covers an area of approximately 7500 m² and its layout is similar to that of the palace of Knossos.

Zakros is located at the southeast end of the Regional Unit of Lassithi, in a natural bay. The palace of Zakros, as it is preserved today, was founded in the Neopalatial period (c. 1600 BCE). Like all the palaces known to date, it consists of four wings set around a rectangular central court. The palace and the town were suddenly destroyed around 1450 BCE, at the same time as most of the settlements of Crete, marking the end of the Neopalatial period.⁷

The Minoan palace of Kydonia is located in the modern city of Chania in northwest Crete. The low Kastelli hill, rising above the natural harbour and the plain of Chania, was selected during the Prepalatial period (c. 3500–2000 BCE) as the most convenient site for the establishment of the first organized Minoan settlement in the Chania area.⁸ The large number of tablets inscribed in Linear A and B,⁹ and of seals which have come to light, testify for the existence of a centralized authority and bureaucratic organization during the Neopalatial (c. 1750–1450 BCE) and the Postpalatial/Mycenaean era (1450–1200 BCE).

The archaeological site of Zominthos lies on the northern slope of mount Idi (Psiloritis), at an altitude of 1187m. The excavations revealed a huge building of the Minoan era surrounded by a not well preserved settlement as well as a cemetery. This building was founded around 1900 BCE and was in use over an extended period of time, with a period of the biggest growth and expansion occurring between 1700 and 1550 BCE. The excavations have revealed a large archaeological site that has been systematically excavated over the last years.¹⁰

5 See Levi 1976.

6 See van Effenterre 1980.

7 See Platon 1974; Platon 2004; Platon 2011.

8 See Hallager and Hallager 2000.

9 Hallager et al. 1992.

10 See excavation reports in *Praktika*, from 2004 onwards; Sakellarakis and Panagiotopoulos 2006.

Preparing the nomination file

The preparation of the nomination file is a complex and multi-level procedure which is labor-intensive and requires an integrated approach. The Directorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, which coordinates the compilation of the nomination file, works in close cooperation with the central (Directorates of Restoration and Conservation) and regional (Ephorates of Antiquities) services and local authorities, as well as with scientific organizations and universities in order to include updated protection, enhancement planning, and, last but not least, the most recent research outcomes and documentation concerning the monuments. Before discussing the individual features of this nomination, it would be helpful to summarize the overall context, the steps, and the requirements of the entire process.

The UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (Paris, 1972, hereafter the WH Convention)¹¹ provides for the inclusion of natural, cultural, or mixed (both cultural and natural) monuments and sites in the WH List, provided that their outstanding universal value can be demonstrated and substantially documented. The decision for the inclusion of a proposed site in the WH List is made and formally announced during the annual session of the World Heritage Committee, which is composed of 21 experts representing the member-states of the Convention. The role of the Advisory Bodies to the Committee, especially of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)¹² and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN),¹³ which evaluate cultural and natural properties respectively, is particularly crucial for the evaluation procedure.

The nominated properties should meet the following strict and predefined criteria and conditions based on a thoroughly documented assessment provided by the nominating member-state:¹⁴

- a. Justification of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). The Committee considers a property as having OUV, if it meets one or more of the ten criteria set in the Operational Guidelines of the WH Convention.
- b. A property must meet the conditions of authenticity and integrity. The former depends on the degree of preservation of the cultural value of the property, whereas the latter is related to the measure of its wholeness and intactness.

11 UNESCO, "The World Heritage Convention", <https://whc.unesco.org/en/convention/>.

12 ICOMOS, "Introducing ICOMOS", <https://www.icomos.org/en/about-icomos/mission-and-vision/mission-and-vision>.

13 IUCN, "World Heritage", <https://www.iucn.org/theme/world-heritage>.

14 For the requirements for inscription in the WH List see the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/>.

- c. A comparative analysis of the property in relation to similar properties, whether or not on the World Heritage List, both at the national and international level, must be provided. The comparative analysis shall therefore explain the importance of the nominated property in its national and world-wide context.
- d. Precise information about the boundaries and the buffer zone (if any) of the nominated property needs to be supplied. The buffer zone is an area surrounding the nominated property or any other area vital for its protection, which has complementary legal and/or customary protection. It should be noted that the buffer zone does not necessarily coincide with the Zones of Protection A and B, which are designated according to the Greek legislation.
- e. An essential element for every nomination file is the existence of an appropriate management plan as well as guarantees for its effective implementation. The management plan constitutes an integrated system for the protection, use, and promotion of the site, which involves multiple actors; it recognizes the different levels of responsibility (central, decentralized, and local) and the degree of involvement of the various stakeholders. It also investigates possible resources for the implementation of the plan, both human and financial. All factors that may have an impact on the property, positive or negative, must be assessed and included in the management plan, accompanied by risk preparedness plans for the protection of the property in case of an emergency.

The role of local communities in assessing, preserving, and communicating the values of the World Heritage properties must be emphasized, since they contribute significantly not only to the successful outcome of the nomination but also, and more importantly, to the sustainable development of the property. Recent policy and conceptual developments in the WH Convention set the stage for new approaches that engage local communities during all steps for selecting and promoting a property for inscription in the World Heritage List.

The case of the Minoan palatial centers' nomination

The Minoan palatial centers are currently inscribed in the Tentative List of Greece, an inventory of the properties that each state-party considers suitable for inscription in the WH List and intends to nominate in the future. Nominations to the WH List are not considered by the World Heritage Committee, unless the nominated property has already been included on the State Party's Tentative List.¹⁵ When it comes to the Minoan palaces, the national Tentative List in 2003 included only the palace of Knossos. However, during its revision

15 UNESCO, "Tentative Lists", <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/>.

in 2014,¹⁶ it was decided to extend the nomination in order to also include Malia, Phaistos, Zakros, and Kydonia. Meanwhile, due to the progress of the excavation at Zominthos, which yielded impressive finds that testify for the existence of another significant palatial center with special features, it has been decided for this new site to be also included.

The main characteristics of the Minoan palatial centers' nomination, as presented in the submitted Tentative List, aim to highlight the unique Minoan civilization. In the framework of the preparation of the nomination file, these characteristics will be further elaborated and the OUV of the property will be documented in greater depth. In the current Tentative List the Minoan palatial centers are associated, on a preliminary basis, with the following three of the six cultural criteria of the Convention:¹⁷

Criterion (ii): The Minoan palaces bear witness to a very early form of complex urban society and application of complex economic systems, which arose in Crete during the Middle and Late Bronze Age. They constitute an important archaeological testimony to the organization of towns and cities, and to the development of the monumental architecture, technology, and high level of art attained by the Minoan civilization.

Criterion (iii): The Minoan palaces are the most characteristic and impressive testimonies of the Minoan civilization, that flourished during the Bronze Age (1950–1450 BCE). These complex monuments, constructed to serve the various needs and functions of the Minoan cities, constitute the most important archaeological evidence for the understanding of the Minoan civilization, its social organization and its high level of intellectual and artistic development (frescoes, vase-painting, etc.). This complex socio-economic system led to the creation of two protohistoric writing systems, the “Cretan Hieroglyphic” script and Linear A, which played an important part in the context of the Aegean civilizations, in both the Middle and the Late Bronze Age. It was from Linear A that Linear B was consequently developed for recording the earliest known, Mycenaean, form of the Greek language.¹⁸

Criterion (vi): The myths connected to the Minoan palaces (the Minotaur and the Labyrinth, Daedalus and Icarus, Theseus and Ariadne, etc.) exercised a great influence on my-

16 In addition to the Minoan Palatial Centers, the current Tentative List includes 13 more properties: the archaeological site of Nikopolis (Cultural), the ancient Greek Theaters (Cultural), the national park of Samaria Gorge (Natural), the national Park of Dadia-Lefkimi-Soufion (Natural), the area of the Prespes Lake (Megali and Mikri Prespa) that includes Byzantine and post-Byzantine monuments (Mixed), the broader region of Mount Olympos (Natural), the ancient Lavrion (Cultural), the Petrified Forest of Lesvos (Natural), the late Medieval Bastioned Fortification in Greece (Cultural), the Fortress of Spinaloga (Cultural), the archaeological site of ancient Messene (Cultural), the ancient towers of the Aegean Sea (Cultural), and the Zagorochoria-North Pindos National Park (Mixed).

17 UNESCO, WHC, “The Criteria for selection”, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/criteria>

18 For the latest research approaches to the phenomenon of the Minoan palaces, see Driessen et al. 2002.

thology and arts throughout the ancient world,¹⁹ and remain a source of inspiration for world art, music and literature today.²⁰

However, given the unique character of the Minoan civilization and the preeminent achievements which have been reached at the spiritual, social, technical, and artistic levels, the OUV of the nomination can be further justified using more criteria, such as (i) and (iv).

In terms of assessing the integrity of the Minoan Palatial Centers, it is essential to determine whether the placement of the monuments within their wider environment (natural, rural, etc.) can secure the preservation of the properties' qualities that define their particular character against the negative effects of development. This means that the integrity as a measure of the wholeness and intactness does not concern only the monument itself but refers to the maintenance of its spatial unity as well.

The degree of authenticity and integrity of the palatial centers allows the reconstruction of their form and function, elements attesting their OUV. These monuments are subject to a special protection framework (designations and protection zones), while they are also under the constant care and monitoring of the relevant Services of the General Directorate of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, in order to mitigate any risks.

Although the early reconstruction work on the palace of Knossos, before the Second World War, involved the addition of modern materials and insufficiently documented modifications, it does largely conform to the original form of the palatial monument at the peak of its development. It is important to point out that the problematic points of the old reconstructions have been identified and recorded, and the matter of dealing with the older mistaken restorations is handled by a special Committee for the "Conservation, Consolidation and Promotion of the Palace and Archaeological Site of Knossos." Conservation and promotion work is being carried out on the peripheral monuments of Knossos (Royal Villa, House of the High Priest, and Royal Tomb), with co-funding by the EU through the National Strategic Reference Framework program. Furthermore, a study on the unification of the peripheral monuments with the core of the palace is in preparation.²¹

19 Minos is first mentioned in Homer's *Iliad* as merely being the man from whom Zeus "established [a] line" (Hom. *Il.* 13.440–516) of Cretan Kings. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus simply meets the father (Minos) of Ariadne, who was "[spirited] [...] off from Crete to Athens" (Hom. *Od.* 11.365–70). During the Augustan era (63 BCE–14 CE), Virgil talks of Minos, but also of the Minotaur, the labyrinth and Theseus (Verg. *Aen.* 6.1–40). In Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Minos is described as "the first person [...] as having established a navy" (Thuc. 1.4) who colonized the Cycladic islands and, after instigating a trade network, would enable the Cretans to join the Trojan War (Thuc. 1.8). For the influence of Minoan mythology on contemporary art, see Ziolkowski 2008.

20 UNESCO, "The List", "Minoan Palatial Centers Knossos, Phaistos, Malia, Kydonia", <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5860/>.

21 See Minos and Kavoulaki 2010, 108–20.

Following the main principles set on the Nara Document on Authenticity,²² the features that demonstrate the authentic character of a property are not solely restricted to the plan, structural material, or technical excellence but also include the surrounding environment as well as the spiritual and aesthetic substance of the monument. In this context, another aspect to be taken into account is the fact that Evans' reconstructions have contributed significantly to the recognition of the Minoan civilization worldwide and that they reflect the general restoration strategy and methodology implemented during that period. Therefore, they constitute part of the site's history.

As for Zakros, the mild stabilizations of the building remnants secure the authenticity of the archaeological site. The good preservation of the surroundings of the Minoan settlement is also noteworthy. Palace and settlement are embedded in a natural landscape which is not intensively occupied by modern buildings and remains almost intact since the Minoan era. The same is also applicable for the palatial centers of Phaistos and Malia. In Kydonia, the architectural remains of the Minoan palatial center, the research of which is ongoing, are preserved in their original form without rebuilding or additions. Finally in Zominthos, the architectural elements of the palatial center are preserved in an excellent state, thus permitting their detailed and documented restoration.

The Nomination: Challenges and Perspectives

The nomination of the Minoan Palatial Centers is, in our opinion, a candidacy with a large potential. This is owed both to the renowned and important monuments it contains as well as to the fact of its relation to an important culture of antiquity, which is not yet represented in the List.

Such nominations are particularly encouraged and promoted within the framework of the Convention and in the current point of evolution of the World Heritage List, some 50 years after the first inscriptions. Nowadays,²³ the List includes 1121 properties, 869 cultural, 213 natural, and 39 mixed,²⁴ the latter combining cultural and natural values. Therefore, over the last couple of years, there is a deep concern about the increasing number of the inscribed properties on the one hand, and the overall composition of the list on the other.²⁵

22 Icomos, "The Nara Document on Authenticity (1994)", <https://www.icomos.org/charters/nara-e.pdf>.

23 After the last inscriptions in the 43rd World Heritage Committee (Baku, 2019).

24 <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/>.

25 A global study carried out by ICOMOS from 1987 to 1993 revealed that Europe, historic towns and religious monuments, Christianity, historical periods, and 'elitist' architecture (in relation to vernacular) were all over-represented on the World Heritage List; whereas, all living cultures, and especially "traditional cultures," were underrepresented. See <https://whc.unesco.org/en/globalstrategy/>.

Within this context, a discussion has begun within the framework of the Convention in order to create a more balanced, representative, and credible List and to ensure that the member states are provided with respective directions concerning their new nominations.

The nomination of the Minoan Palatial Centers fully reflects this spirit. In particular, the inscription of the Minoan palaces will definitely enrich the List, since the nominated property is related to a unique and worldwide-known civilization, inextricably linked with the cultural origins of Europe at large. The historical and scientific importance of the archaeological sites that are included in the nomination is further highlighted by the systematic work of many scientific institutions, among which are archaeological schools from several countries, which span over decades.

However, the nomination of the Minoan Palatial Centers, which enhances their prestige and visibility, also constitutes a great challenge from a managerial point of view, since it comprises six archaeological sites. Therefore, apart from assessing and addressing the particular difficulties and needs of each separate case, all sites must be handled as a single and unified nomination with common requirements and joint actions.

Issues concerning the management of the sites and of their immediate surroundings must be identified and treated as effectively as possible or at least preparatory measures should be taken with the aim of resolving them in due time. Besides, an essential part of the nomination dossier is the compilation of an integrated Management Plan, which relates to every aspect of the monuments, including function, aesthetics, activities in the immediate environment, tourist services, access, etc.²⁶

For this reason, the whole framework of compiling a nomination file for the WH List, according to our experience so far, constitutes a unique opportunity to assess the current situation and to implement strategic planning for the future of the monuments within their broader natural, social, and economic environment. In other terms, it constitutes an opportunity to rethink the future of the monuments and reconsider our own mission, i.e. the planning and actions needed in order for the monuments to be preserved intact and passed down to the future generations.

Another important opportunity that the creation of the nomination file offers is the collaboration of all interested parties on the basis of a common plan and objective. In the case of the Minoan palaces nomination, we can identify a wide range of stakeholders who could contribute to the compilation and realization of a sustainable Management Plan: public authorities such as the Ministries of Tourism and Environment, the local authorities, uni-

26 According to the “Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention,” every site inscribed on the World Heritage List must have a management plan explaining how the outstanding universal value of the site can be preserved. Management plans are the central planning instrument for the protection, use, conservation, and successful development of World Heritage sites.

versities, foreign archaeological schools, trade and professional associations, business and cultural industries, non-governmental organizations, citizens' associations, etc.

The preparation of the file comes in a period, in which there is a broad consensus for its promotion among the stakeholders as well as actual support from the local authorities. The planning, therefore, of complete and long-term actions on this occasion, in combination with the possibilities opened within the framework of co-financed programs by the EU, makes us especially optimistic as for the outcome of the Minoan Palatial Centers nomination.

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