"Burning down the House": Defining the Household of Quartier Nu at Malia Using GIS

by Jan Driessen and Hubert Fiasse

> The *pyla* ('tribe') remained politically important and women were therein enumerated. The clan appears to be designated as *startos* and Aristotle tells us that the chief magistrates, the *kosmoi,* were drawn from 'certain clans.' The existence of the oikos (household) presupposes . . . the growth of smaller units within the clan. These units would tend to become more and more independent of the basic tribal structure, with the growth of family institutions based on a private property system.[1]

In some studies concentrating on the size of Neopalatial domestic buildings, an argument has been made in favor of the existence of nuclear families in Minoan urban environments.[2] Nonstandard building sizes call into question the validity of such an interpretation, and the above quote is given here to refer to a situation that is much more common in traditional cultures, namely that which, following Lévi-Strauss, has been called a "House Society" by Chesson in her recent discussion of the Early Bronze Age Levant.[3] Indeed, more attention is given to the archaeological correlates of "residential compounds [which] housed populations; [the] household include[s] extended family groups based on real and fictive kinship, and functioned as the fundamental unit of social, economic and political organization; house membership includes many physical households, and may be reflected generally in neighbourhoods within each community."[4] The gradual evolution on Doric Crete toward a more restricted notion of the household (i.e., toward the nuclear family) seems to imply an earlier situation during which larger social units indeed played a more important part. Some authors, without developing the matter in detail, have argued for the existence of a similar system on Minoan Crete, especially during the Middle Bronze Age, for specific towns or those with a more political role.[5] It may perhaps be easier to call these groups "clans," but more research needs to be done on their precise social role; the specific definition "a non-corporate descent group in which genealogical links to a common ancestor are assumed but are not actually known" is not to the point here.[6] Clans or their localized segments, known as house groups, would be materially expressed by a compound with different clusters in which certain

1. Willetts 1977, p. 184; cf. Willetts 1980, pp. 28–29.
2. Whitelaw 2001, p. 18.
3. Chesson 2003.
4. Chesson 2003, p. 80.
5. Knappett 1999, p. 622. For Palaikastro, see Driessen and MacGillivray 1989, p. 107: "It may therefore be suggested that each of the main blocks originally contained a clan or a family unit the members of which, who did not leave through marriage, constructed houses against their ancestral home, the latter taking up functions which were not repeated again in the same expanded family unit." For a discussion of corporate groups, see Driessen 2002, pp. 11–12; for factions, see Hamilakis 2002.
6. Thornton 2002, p. 167.

Figure 25.1. Reconstructed outline plan of Quartier Nu at Malia showing LM III domestic units and rooms with hearths. H. Fiasse

archaeological assemblages are repeated and others are not; moreover, a number of interrelationships link the different clusters.

There is, at present, a gradually growing body of archaeological material that reflects such larger compounds with interrelated units, especially in recently excavated Dark Age and historical Cretan sites such as Kavousi Vronda, Chalasmenos, Vasiliki Kephala, Azoria, and Smari. Where the earlier Postpalatial Late Minoan (LM) IIIA2–B island is concerned, a series of excavated structures at Amnisos, Gouves, Kephala Chondrou, and even Palaikastro take the form of extensive complexes, and these should probably also best be interpreted as extended family or clan buildings. The best example of such a compound occupied by different families that together formed a larger social unit is Quartier Nu at Malia (Fig. 25.1). Excavated by the French School between 1988 and 1993 under the direction of Alexandre Farnoux and one of the authors,[7] it is here examined for the information it yielded that allows us to reconstruct the social unit that occupied it. Indeed, one of the main questions that has occupied us during post-excavation study is whether the complex acted as a single unit—some kind of "Big Man" house or farm—rather than as a cluster of different households that shared some open spaces and partition walls. The answer, as it so often is, falls somewhere between these two extremes.

Despite the shallowness of soil cover, the plan of the Quartier Nu building is well preserved, and many floor deposits were found intact. The

7. For preliminary reports see Farnoux and Müller 1989; Farnoux 1990a, 1990b, 1997a, 1997b; Farnoux and Driessen 1991a, 1991b, 1995; Driessen and Farnoux 1992, 1993, 1994a, 1994b; Schoep and Knappett 2003.

site on which the LM IIIA2 complex was established had been occupied from at least the Middle Minoan (MM) II phase onward by a building with fine paved floors, plastered walls, and several storerooms, not unlike some of the better apartments of Quartier Mu, located immediately to the south, on which it may have formed a dependency.[8] Evidence for Neopalatial occupation was concentrated in the west part of the compound and included decorated pottery, ashlar walls, and finely painted fresco fragments. Beneath the southeast part there was some limited Monopalatial or LM II–IIIA1 occupation, which included several Ephyraean goblets. Over much of the site we found a gray layer containing ash, sand, and redeposited LM IIIA1–2 material. This stratum served as a leveling layer for the later complex, although, in some places, earlier walls or building blocks were incorporated or reused. Indeed, in several cases, MM wall alignments were maintained throughout the Late Bronze Age, perhaps illustrating a continuity of occupation for 500 years. The later complex, constructed during LM IIIA2, was finally destroyed during LM IIIB, probably in the first half of this phase; its final occupational phase may have spanned only two or three generations.[9]

The structure was arranged as an almost closed complex measuring approximately 25 × 32 m, organized around a small court accessed from the north. To the east was an isolated, almost square construction that served as a kitchen (XIV). At the end of LM IIIA2, an earthquake destroyed large parts of the complex and also claimed at least one victim, whose skeleton was found in the destruction debris of the kitchen. Repairs involved the dismantling of the rooms to the north of the court, the clearance of the rooms of the east wing, and the dumping of the stone debris on and around the kitchen building, leaving a free path flanking the east side of the building (X21). In its last, early LM IIIB phase, the complex had three wings arranged around a large rectangular pebble court (ca. 6 × 12 m) (Fig. 25.1), with a portico along its south side that sheltered in the southeast corner a fine pebble mosaic floor (2.60 × 2.60 m) with a geometric pattern—the finest Bronze Age example yet known (XI1). Strangely enough, this mosaic floor was entirely covered with large sherds that could be restored as a complete pithos, two large basins, and what turned out to be the largest house model hitherto found in the Aegean, complete with windows, a gabled roof, and chimneys (Fig. 25.2). We are at a loss, for the moment, to understand the connection between the mosaic floor, the pottery, and the house model, but some ceremonial or ritual activity may be assumed, especially since a fine triangular stone lamp, seemingly in situ, was found nearby.

At three spots, to the southwest (I), southeast (II), and northwest (III) of the complex, we found large pits filled with ash, broken pottery, and some other objects. Some sherds found in these pits join with fragments found in or immediately beneath the latest floors, suggesting that at least some of the material in the pits derives from cleaning and clearing operations after the LM IIIA2 earthquake. The quality of the mass of the material, as well as the shapes and objects represented, suggest an interpretation of these pits as *favissa*—ritual or ceremonial deposits—rather than as garbage disposal areas, for reasons that will be discussed below. The final deposits in the three wings of the complex differ considerably: those to the east

8. Schoep and Knappett 2003.

9. The walls of the later occupation on the site have entirely different orientations that contrast with the earlier situation. During the 14th century A.D., the site was briefly reoccupied.

Figure 25.2. Terracotta house model found on mosaic court. J. Driessen

were evidently fire destruction deposits, including many complete vases; those to the west were unburnt, but, again, the pottery, though often very much broken, was largely restorable—perhaps suggestive of earthquake destruction. The scarce deposits to the south, in contrast, largely consisted of fragmentary, unburnt pottery more typical of abandonment. Earthquakes can cause localized fires, and the possibility exists that only one part of the building burned, whereas the other part simply collapsed and the third was abandoned because of the misfortune. At the moment we are unable to recognize meaningful stylistic differences between the three destruction deposits, so for this paper it is assumed that all final deposits are contemporaneous.

Our next question, which is related to the essence of the studies presented in this volume, is whether the three wings of the complex acted as a single unit rather than as a cluster of households. There are different ways to approach this problem: one way is to look at the architecture and the repetition of features throughout the complex, the other is to look at the spatial distribution of movable finds.[10] With regard to the architecture, some slight differences exist between the different wings in alignments and wall construction techniques, but these seem largely a result of the occasional reuse of earlier structures. As for the plan, no single entrance gives access to the entire complex (Fig. 25.1). Indeed, outside entrances and internal circulation could imply the existence of at least three or probably four distinct units. Fixed architectural assemblages such as hearths and column halls are also repeated: in the east part, for instance, a doorway with a porch led to a large hall with a column on either side of a central hearth (X22/23). Adjacent to this hall, but accessible via another outside entrance, was a second large room (X11) with a fine clay floor and central column but no hearth. In the west part, a large room (II6) had a central

10. See Glowacki 2004 for a good application of this method at LM IIIC Kavousi Vronda.

hearth with two diagonally placed column bases; and south of the central court there was a large room (IX7), unfortunately very damaged, with traces of burning in the center and a single remaining column base. Both the entrances and the major fixed architectural features suggest four different units. There is, however, only a single central court with a pebble mosaic around which these units are organized, and there is no identical repetition of architectural features.

Next, we can look at the spatial distribution of moveable objects within the architectural complex by using geographic information system (GIS) software[11] and methods more commonly employed in survey archaeology and intersite analyses,[12] and applying them to an intrasite analysis.[13] For the present exercise only more or less complete vases and other objects were included—in all, 2,472 items.[14]

Since all archaeological excavations are supposed to keep detailed records of finds that, at the least, include catalogue number; coordinates for location and absolute elevation; material (e.g., terracotta, metal, stone); type of find (e.g., within terracotta: tile, weight, vase), usually with further entries for shape (e.g., for vase: amphora, stirrup jar, cup); date; and entries for study, drawing, and photography, an ArcView analysis can easily be done on every site. At Malia, we have linked this database to digital images, and we hope eventually to make the entire project available for consultation on the internet. The ArcView program helps to enhance spatial analysis, and it can easily perform searches for distributions and various associations, as well as perform statistical analyses. The example in Figure 25.3 shows the distribution of finds in structure XIV—the kitchen in which the skeleton was found—using some of the capabilities of the ArcView software. In general, we can quickly and easily check for general object distribution (Fig. 25.4) or distribution according to the type of material (e.g., terracotta, stone, metal). Of these, it is probably easier to look at the distribution of different materials first.

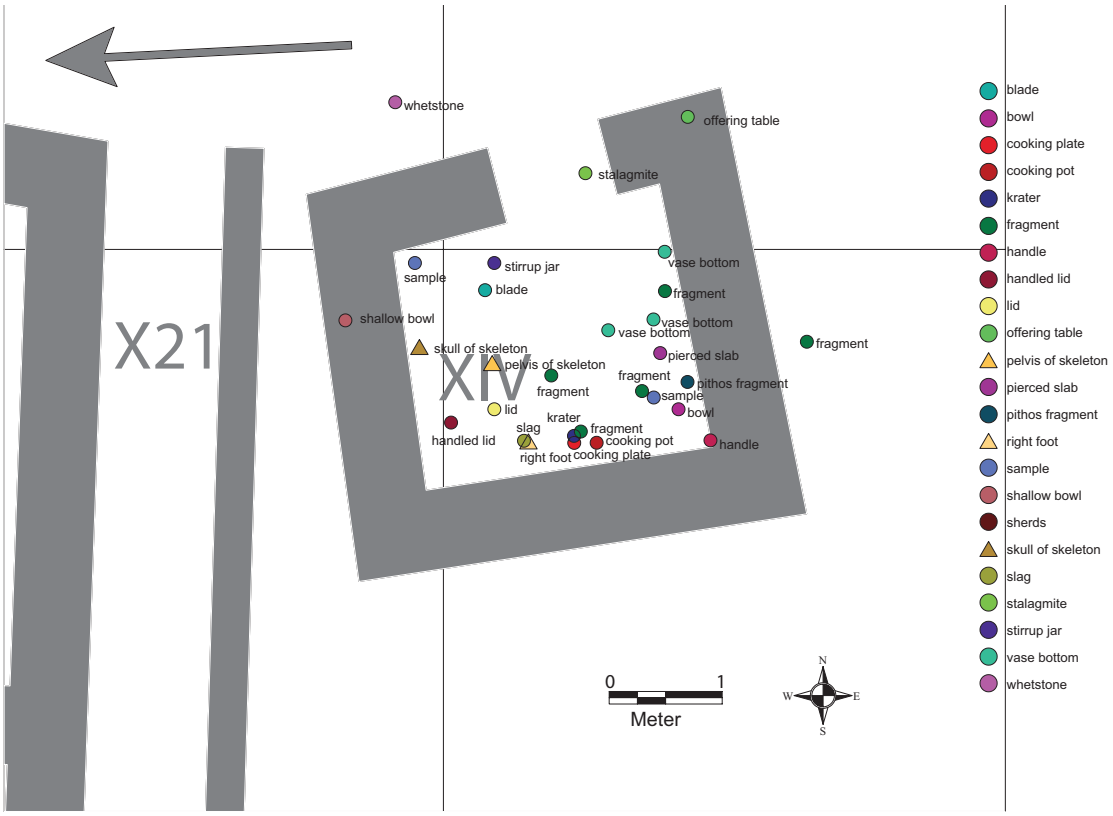
In terms of pottery distribution, both the east wing and an area to the southwest show high densities (Fig. 25.5). The latter is, in fact, pit I, from which more than 550 vases were catalogued. If we use the software

11. The authors thank the members of the Topography of Power (ToP) project at University College-London for their assistance, and especially Alexandre Farnoux, Florence Driessen, and Tim Cunningham. Moreover, we thank the editors for their patience.

12. See, e.g., http://www.ims.forth.gr/technical_support.html for its use in the Lasithi database, a project in which team member S. Soetens of our project participated; Soetens has also used the software to study the distribution of peak sanctuaries. Two other ToP members, K. Vansteenhuyse and P. Tomkins, have applied GIS techniques to the distribution of other types of sites on Crete. See also Pavlidis, Fraser, and Ogleby 2001. Similar research is also done by M. Gkiasta at Leyden, and by A. Bevan for Kythera at University College-London. P. Hacigüzeller at Université catholique de Louvain à Louvain-La-Neuve (UCL-LLN) is using MapInfo on intrasite spatial patterning of Palaikastro material.

13. Both MapInfo and ArcView are full-featured GIS software packages used for visualizing, managing, creating, and analyzing spatial data. They help reveal relationships and identify patterns in new ways and make the creation of publication-quality maps easy. Data can be integrated from almost any source and the program actually helps to point out flaws and inconsistencies in data recording and management.

14. Aside from the earlier and later finds, as well as objects that have not yet been spatially referenced (because they were not identified during excavation and were made up from sherds kept in archaeological units), about 1,750 objects were taken into account. Eventually, we hope to include more data that result from the sherd study of the different archaeological units.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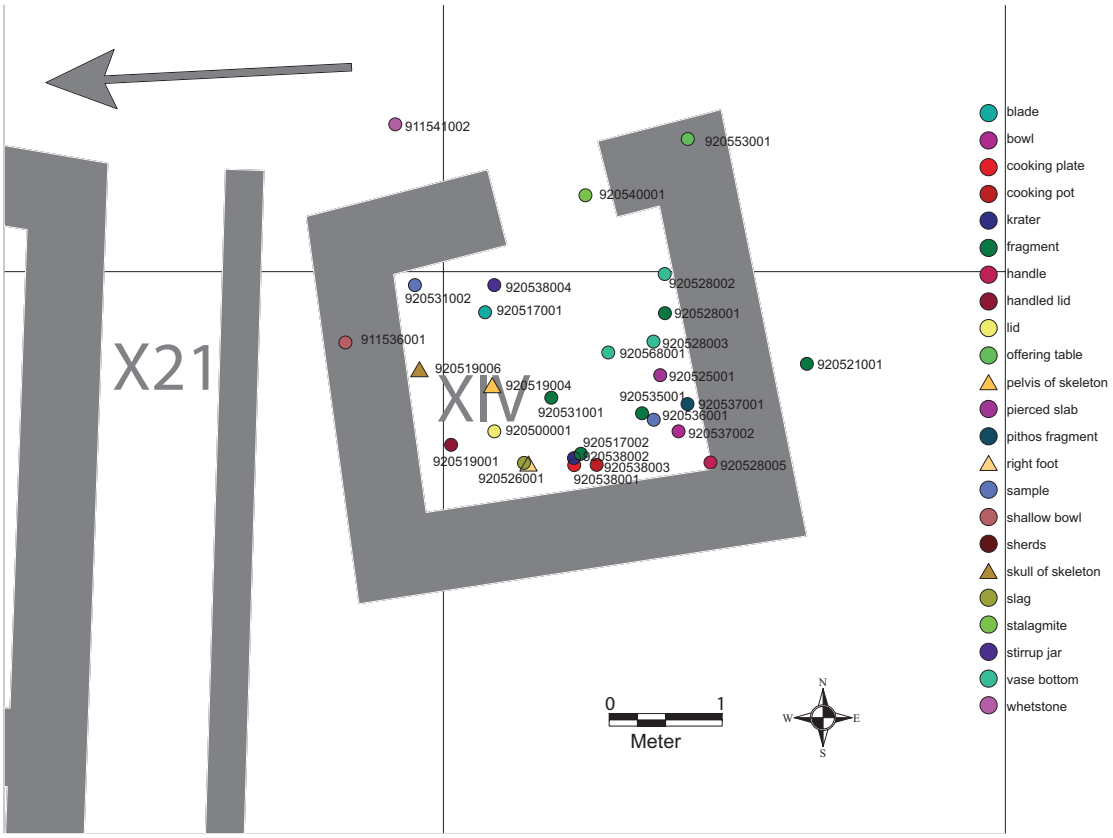
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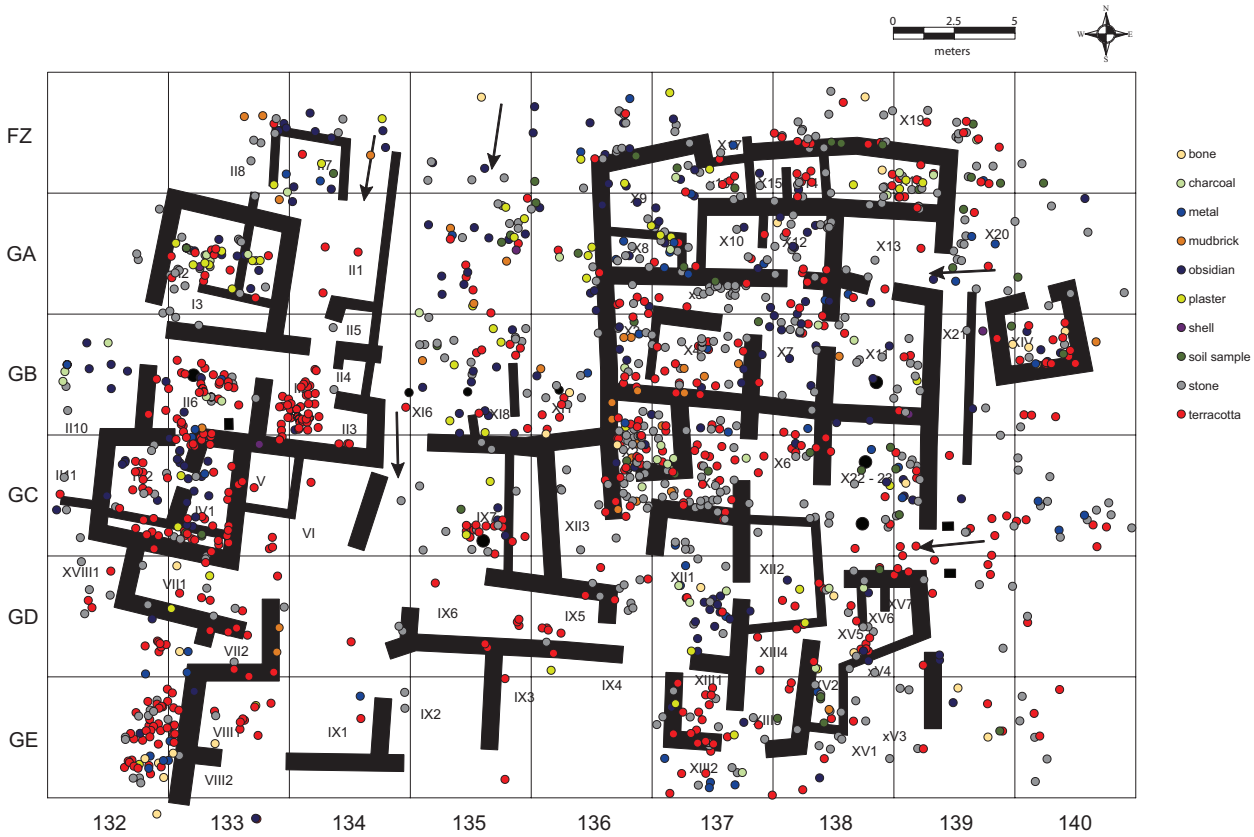


Figure 25.3 *(opposite)*. **Structure XIV in Quartier Nu. Above: distribution of finds according to object identification; below: distribution of finds according to catalogue number.** H. Fiasse

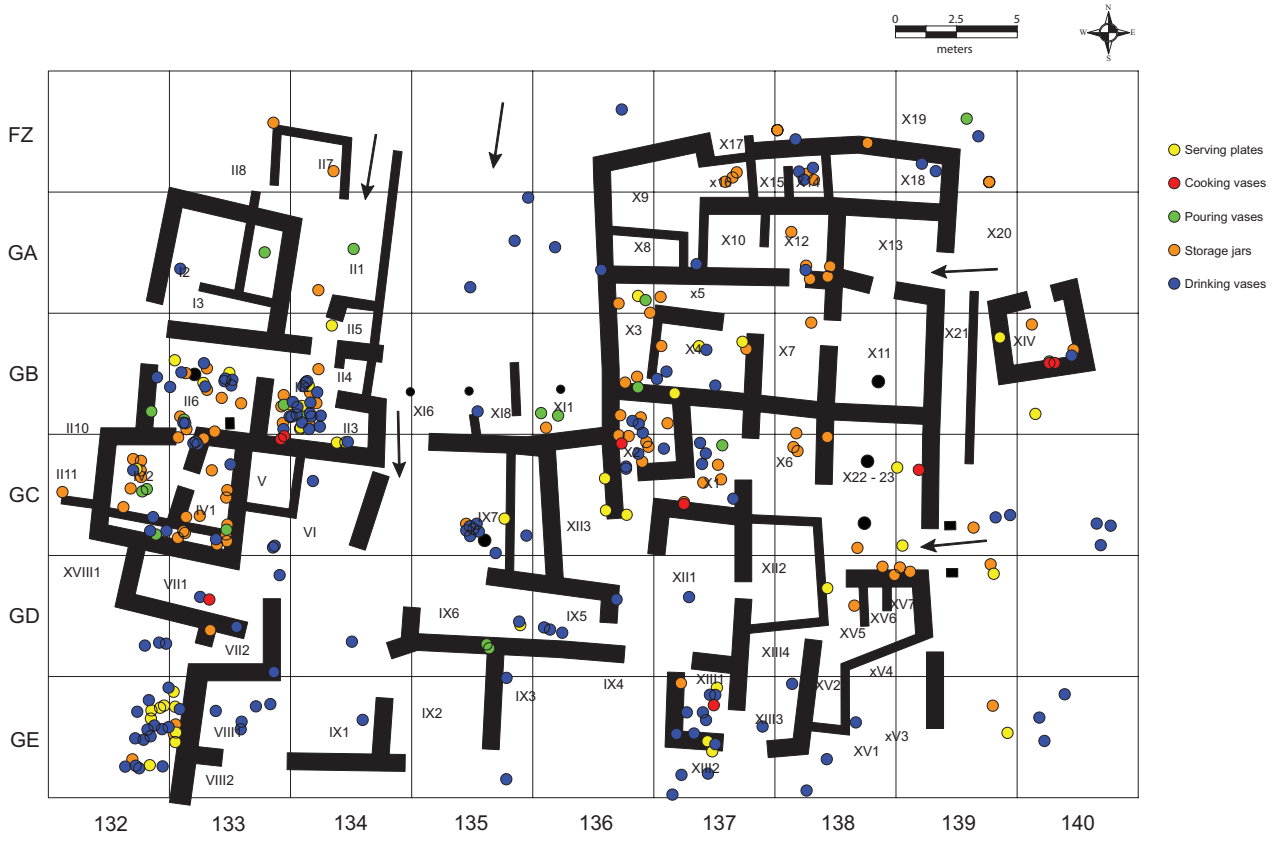
Figure 25.4 *(above)*. **Quartier Nu: general object distribution according to material.** H. Fiasse

to sort the vases according to their major functional categories (i.e., storage, drinking, eating, cooking, lighting, etc.), we can observe that storage containers—particularly large amphoras (31) and stirrup jars (60), but also pithoi (9)—though absent from several areas, again have concentrations in both the east and west wings, as well as in pit I.[15] Incidentally, complete or fragmentary stirrup jars inscribed with Linear B were also found in both the east and west wings, but not in the pits.

Drinking vessels are both common and varied, and they seem to represent an important aspect of the complex. The high number of drinking vessels found in the pits is notable, and more than half of the vases found in pit I were broken kylikes or champagne cups, which is one of the reasons we suggest a special function for these pits. Apart from the pits, kylikes (ca. 50) occur only in the west and south wings of the complex, whereas champagne cups (ca. 85) are well represented in all wings (Fig. 25.6). On the basis of some funerary evidence, it has been suggested that women used champagne cups and the men used kylikes.[16] If this were true, it would perhaps imply a gender difference in the use of the different wings. We

15. Amphoras and stirrup jars are common and present in both wings; pithoi are rare but some are attested in the west wing, where there may also have been one or more larnakes used for storage. In the east wing, on the other hand, an odd box more than a meter long with eight partitions was found in the main hall X22/23. Its use is unknown, but perforations show that it could have been covered with a lid, perhaps of perishable material. C. Knappett and P. Day also analyzed more than 65 storage jars, identifying 12 fabrics, both local and nonlocal. The nonlocal vases mainly had a south coast provenance (which also applies to the house model), with only a few from Chania and North-Central Crete; both wings of the complex had similar distributions.

16. D'Agata 1999, p. 51, no. 34, p. 53, nn. 39–40; 2005, pp. 114–115.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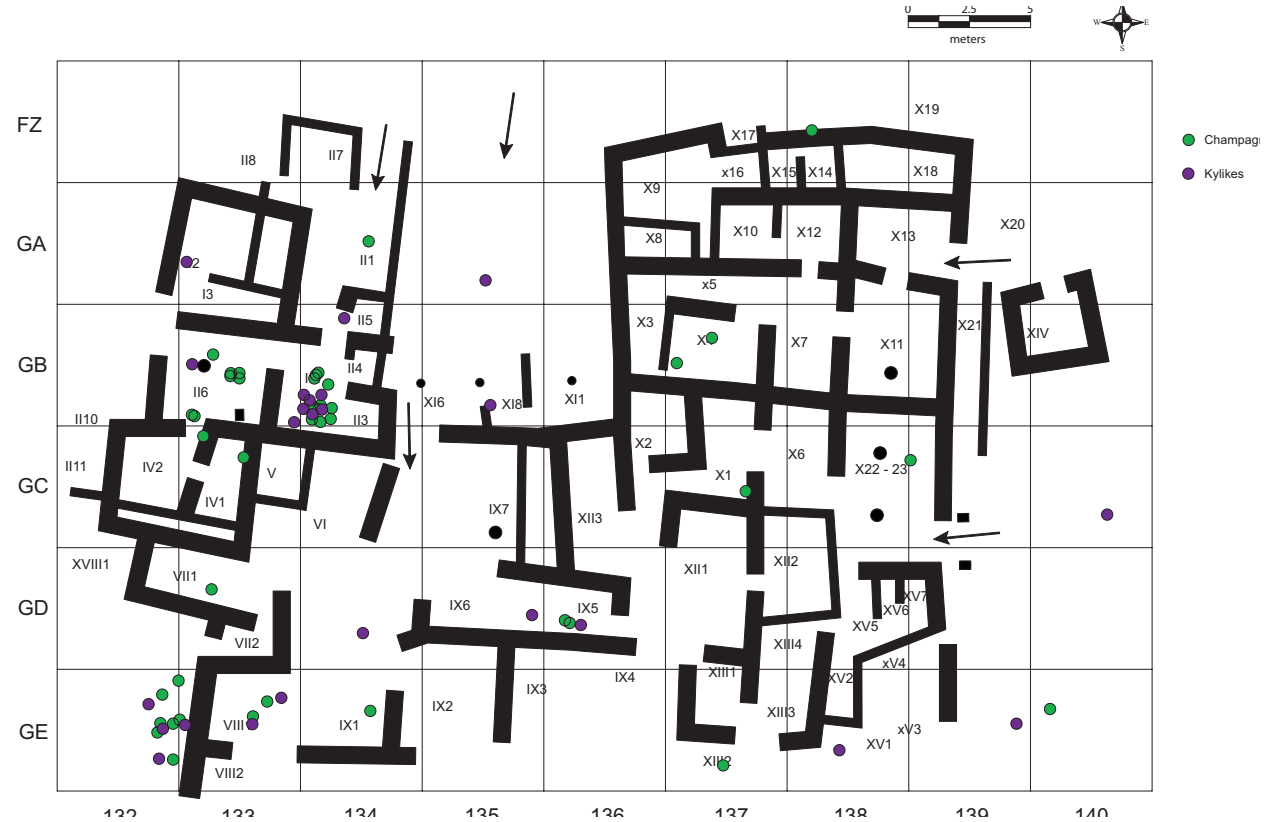
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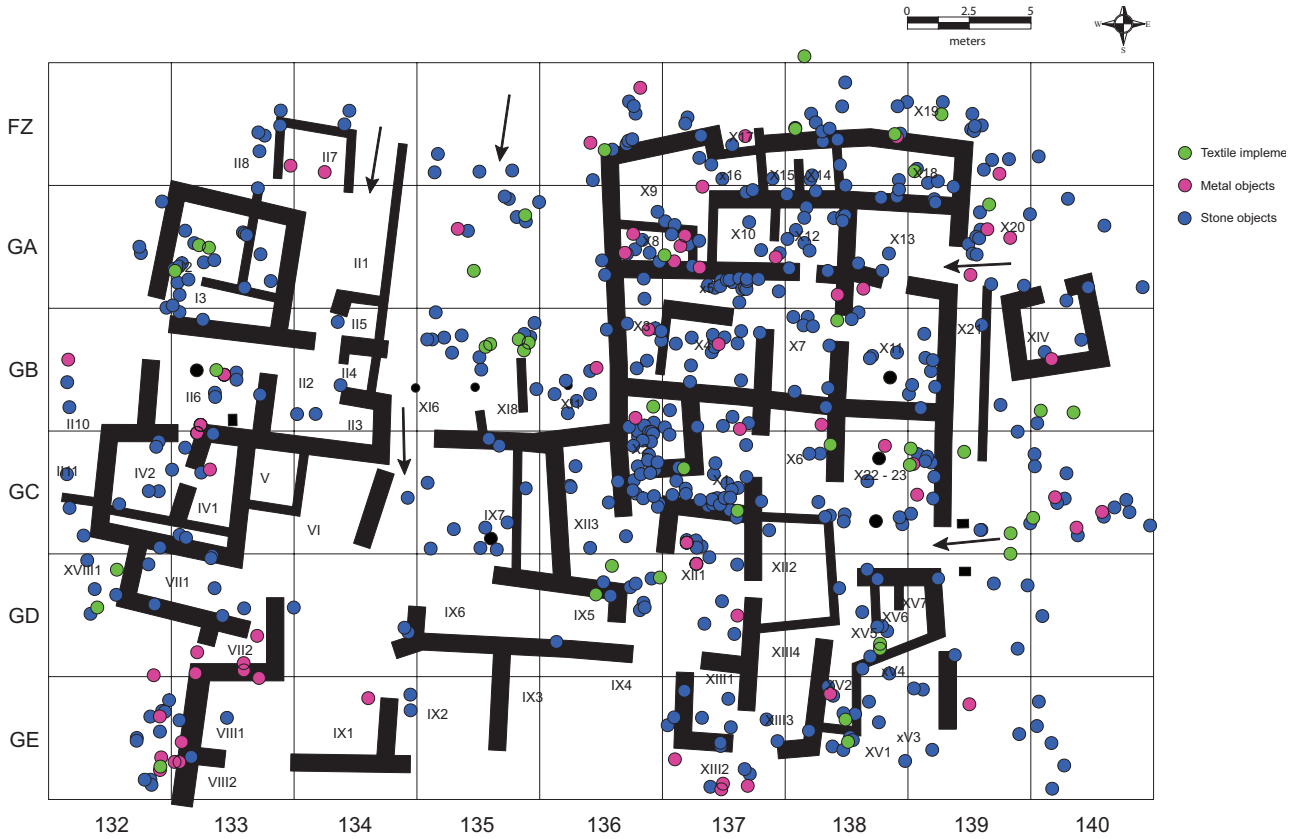

Figure 25.5 *(opposite, top)*. **Quartier Nu: distribution of drinking, eating, cooking, storage, and pouring vases.** H. Fiasse

Figure 25.6 *(opposite, bottom)*. **Quartier Nu: distribution of kylikes and champagne cups.** H. Fiasse

Figure 25.7 *(above)*. **Quartier Nu: distribution of textile implements, metal objects and metallurgy implements, and stone tools.** H. Fiasse

wonder, however, whether it does not suggest that champagne cups could be used both by men of lower status and women, and kylikes were used exclusively by important males.[17]

If we consider plates, kalathoi, and shallow bowls as eating vessels, pit I again has the largest concentration, but both the east and west wings have similar types and quantities (Fig. 25.5). Other vases that may have played a role in the preparation of feasts and banquets, such as kraters, two-handled jars, dippers, funnels, tankards, jugs, juglets, and spouted vases are almost absent from pit I, though they are present in both the east and west wings. Likewise, vessels that relate to cooking, fire, and light—including tripod cooking pots, braziers, ovens, lamps, cooking plates, and incense burners—were scarce in pit I. It was on the basis of the discovery of these vase types that structure XIV was identified as a kitchen, because in it were also found an oven with a tripod cooking pot and a cooking plate in situ (Fig. 25.3).

We can also look for evidence of domestic production by examining the distribution of the stone tools, metal objects, and loomweights throughout the complex (Fig. 25.7). The pits have very few stone tools or obsidian flakes, but the east wing yielded more than the west wing, indicating that

17. See Smith, this volume (Chap. 26), for a discussion of kylikes at LM III Mochlos, where the shape is found in every household and does not seem to be restricted to an elite class. On the other hand, kylikes are associated with elite burials at Mochlos, and Smith suggests that their presence in funerary contexts reflects a specific type of mortuary ritual reflecting high social status. For the association of kylikes with elite drinking rituals in "big houses" at LM IIIC Karphi and Kavousi Vronda, see Day and Snyder 2004; Day, this volume (Chap. 27).

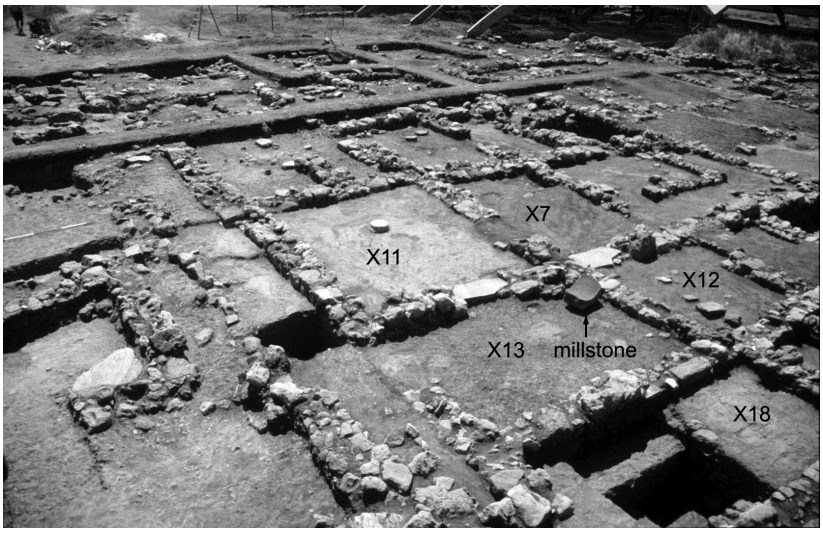

Figure 25.8. Quartier Nu, east wing: large mill stone found upside down in room X13. View from the northeast. Photo J. Driessen

there could be some functional differentiation. Some of the grinding stones are of a large size, and their number and variety suggest that they were an important feature of the complex. They also add to the general picture that urban Malia had now become rural. One entrance room, X13, contained a large millstone (Fig. 25.8), and it may be telling that this room opens onto the kitchen. Not much can be said about the distribution of metal, despite the discovery of a considerable number of small metal objects—mainly pins, rings, a knife, and some scrap material. The best objects, including a complete double axe, a complete bronze sickle, one complete and one fragmentary crucible, as well as a few molds, all come from pit I. That these fine objects were discarded again reinforces the interpretation of a ceremonial function for one or more of the pits.[18]

Quite a few terracotta weights, loomweights, and spools were found, suggesting areas of textile production, but they were rarely concentrated in large quantities; there were more in the east wing than in other areas, however. We have a lot of bone material, but because the study has not yet been completed, we are not yet able to define distinct butchering, kitchen, or refuse areas. It is already clear, however, that more bones are present in outside areas and in the area around the kitchen than in occupation zones. Finally, there is a category of vases that may have served for toiletry and personal care, including a feeding bottle, small alabastra, pyxides, and amphoriskoi. Other objects that may be identified as personal ornaments include some simple silver rings, pendants, beads, pearls, seal stones, buttons, and perhaps a sword pommel. The rooms in which these were found may have had a more private use, but, thus far, no obvious pattern can be discerned. The same is true in general for ritual space. The court with the mosaic floor, associated house model, and stone lamp obviously played a role in some ritual activity, and pit I also contained ritual vases (e.g., rhytons, fenestrated stands). But within the building complex, no obvious cult area can be identified that compares to the archaeological assemblages recently found in the Mirabello area.[19] We found a few human and animal figurines, two snake tubes, a triton and some clay and stone offering tables, but all were dispersed throughout the building, usually in

18. Borgna (2004, p. 133) mentions similar assemblages for a ritual pit at Phaistos.

19. Eliopoulos 1998; Gesell 2001; Tsipopoulou 2001.

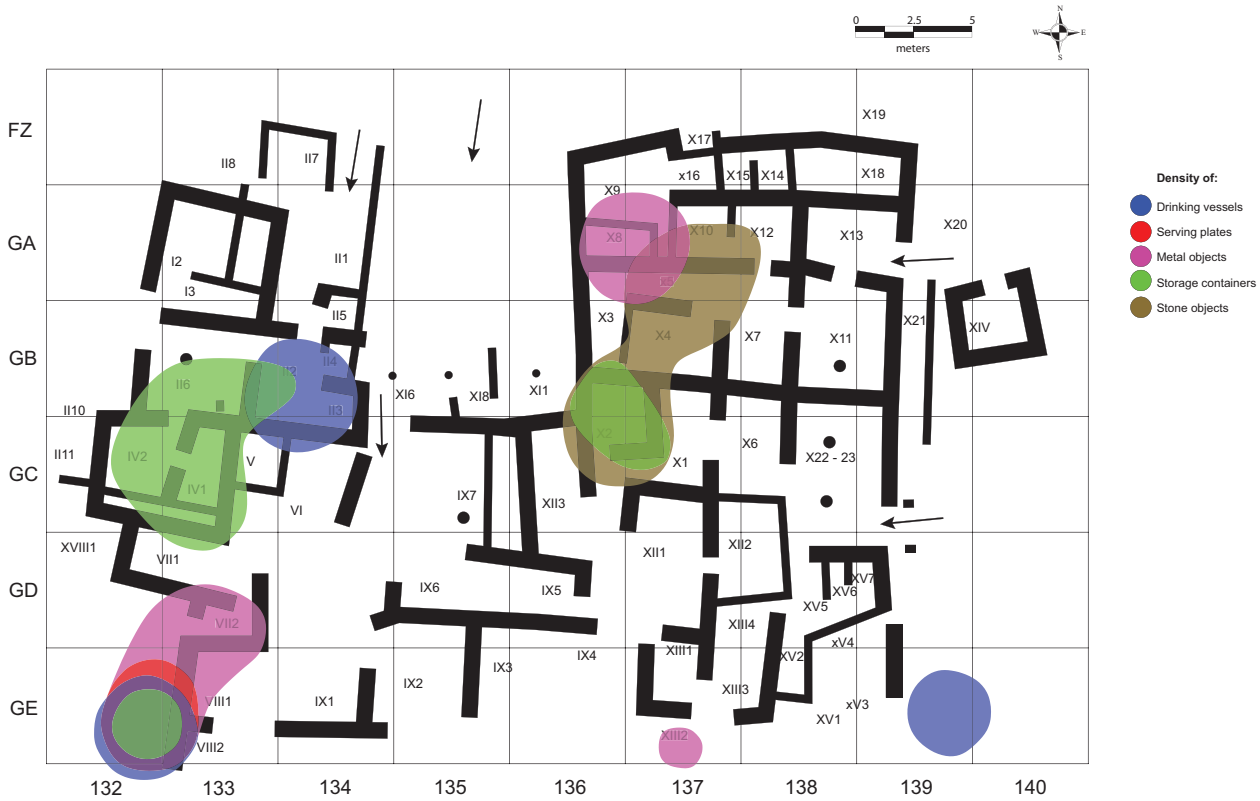

Figure 25.9. Quartier Nu: general density plan of drinking vessels (blue), serving plates (red), metal objects and equipment (purple), storage containers (green), and stone tools (brown). H. Fiasse

rooms that also served as storage areas. Part of a larger female idol—the "Lady of Malia"—originally holding her hands behind her ears, must have belonged to a major cult statue, but, unfortunately, it was found in a mixed context in the west wing.

On the basis of some of these spatial data and taking into account major densities (Fig. 25.9), we can identify areas that were preferentially used for certain activities such as bulk storage, the storage and disposal of drinking and eating paraphernalia, and the production or storage of metal and stone tools. It must be stressed immediately, however, that a real functional differentiation and a monopolistic use of a space for a single function is never the case. The patterns in the spatial distribution as charted by ArcView seem to highlight a repetition (or rather a duplication) of functions in the east and the west wings. The north part of the east wing shows some specialization where grinding activities are concerned, and the east wing, in general, did not contain kylikes. The possibility then remains that the wings were to some extent complementary. This would suggest that the complex was occupied by a single extended household with different family units, perhaps with some gender and/or status differentiation among the members, but with sufficient parental links to share a single complex with a single kitchen and a single court used for ceremonies. The continuity in wall alignments may imply that the ancestors of the household had occupied the place for several generations. If this interpretation is acceptable, we may inquire after the link between the compound and the pits; here recent studies on "the Mycenaean feast" are informative,[20] if we consider it simply as a "large and special meal."[21]

20. Wright 2004a.

21. Borgna (2004, p. 130) also notes the presence of bronze sickles in deposits interpreted as related to the celebration of banquets in LM IIIC Phaistos. The same paper also alludes to ritual celebrations in Quartier Nu (p. 149).

In historic times, Archaic Crete was notorious for a particular communal system in which adult males shared meals in the *andreion* or *hetairos*—and this on a daily basis. Only full citizens took part, and meals were paid for by the citizens, their families, and those of the *perioikoi,* according to a fixed percentage. This sliding scale allowed poorer citizens to participate, and, accordingly, a clientele system developed.[22] Each city is supposed to have had a single *andreion,* but despite some effort, they remain difficult to identify. How this system coexisted with that of the *startoi,* the extended families or clans, is rarely considered: did all male *startos* members participate in *andreion* activities? Or were there *andreia* at different levels, one within a *startos* and another on a community level for the most important members of the different *startoi* that made up a community? It was the clans that, at least according to Willetts, provided the *kosmoi*—the most important officials—and a rotation principle eventually prevented the *startoi* from becoming too strong.[23]

It is suggested here that Quartier Nu is the archaeological reflection of a house group—a *startos* or clan building consisting of two or three *oikoi.* The close relationship between the different units, the sharing of communal space, especially the presence of a single central ritual area and pits that clearly served as *favissae* for the entire complex, as well as a single kitchen linked to a major grinding installation, and a "wing-without-kylikes" also corroborates this hypothesis. Were, at this early a period, communal meals for *startos* members organized within the court, and do these practices announce the later *andreion*? On a symbolic level, then, it may be important that a large model of a *house* was found in the center of this complex, perhaps representing the unity of the family group living under a single roof.

We conclude with a cautionary and somewhat pessimistic note. Identifying the household is never an easy matter, even if preservation conditions are favorable. In the case of Quartier Nu, where many finds were preserved in situ, the nonspecialized use of space complicates straightforward interpretation. Our destruction deposits, in general, represent primary use of most areas, but it is difficult to distinguish between *actual use* of certain objects *on the spot* and the storage of these objects *for use elsewhere.* Moreover, the pits probably represent ritual refuse deposition of objects that also had been used *elsewhere,* probably within the complex or on the court. This, of course, leads to a paradox: the storage and ritual refuse may actually tell us more about the functional use of spaces in which *no* finds were made rather than about the use of the spaces in which the deposition took place.

22. Link 1994, p. 10. For discussions on the *startos* and communal meals, see esp. De Sanctis 1901; Talamo 1987; Lavrencic 1988; Morris 1990; Perlman 1992; Schmitt Pantel 1992.

23. Willetts (1980, pp. 112–113) argues that the *startos* was a subdivision of the tribe and hence a clan of which the *startagetas* was the clan chief; see also Link 1994, pp. 109–110.