

LARS

LEUVEN

THURSDAY

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

29 SEPTEMBER 2011

RESEARCH

16.00-17.00

SEMINAR

MSI 01.16

From Court to Court Complex

*New light on the origins of
the Minoan Palaces*

Dr. Peter Tomkins
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

For more than a century our understanding of prehistoric social complexity on Crete has been inextricably linked to what knew (or thought we knew) about the emergence of the monumental complexes known as the Minoan palaces. Conventionally the Minoan palaces are understood to have functioned as the residences of royal central authority and to have first emerged, seemingly fully-formed and unitary in conception, at the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age (Middle Minoan I [MM I], c.2000 BC). While some have argued that we should push back the origins of the Palaces at Knossos and Malia into Early Minoan, the consensus remains in favour of MM I, most obviously because the pre-MM I evidence for large central buildings and courts is generally perceived to be absent, equivocal or else inaccessible to scrutiny. In the case of the site of Knossos, it has always been presumed that the summit of the Palace Hill was cut back and levelled for the construction of the palace in MM I and thus that all trace of prior activity there had been removed. In recent years, however, a fragmentary picture of this prior activity on the hilltop has begun to emerge from the work of the Knossos Kephala Project (KKP), which aims to collect and integrate all artefactual, stratigraphical, architectural, archival and geophysical data relevant to the interpretation of the subsurface Neolithic-Bronze Age remains. When these fragments are combined with existing data a new picture of the genesis and function of the 'First Palace' emerges, one that seemingly begins almost a millennium before the conventional emergence date for the palace and, moreover, develops from a still deeper history of court-based ritual on the hill that stretches back to the end of the Neolithic (c.3300 BC). Inevitably this has radical and far-reaching implications not only for our understanding of the emergence and function of the Minoan 'palaces', but also for our understanding of the emergence of what is popularly known as 'Europe's first civilisation'.