

The Demise of the Mycenaean Palaces: The Need for an Interpretative Reset

Joseph Maran

The excavations of Agios Vasilios remind us of the reality of extensive destructions in Mycenaean palaces long before the end of the palatial period. Nevertheless, it remains a fact that the end of Late Helladic IIIB is associated with a marked concentration of conflagrations in palatial centers of Central and Southern Greece. It has proved to be difficult to determine the period of time covered by these destructions, the sequence in which they have taken place, and whether they may have been causally linked. But the question remains why, at all of the affected sites, these destructions have had far more long-lasting consequences than those before, after which the palaces had always managed to recover and reestablish their administrative grip on societies.

Previous research has attempted to identify a "prime mover" for the destructions at the end of the palatial period. Until the 1970s, the "Doric migration" or the "Sea Peoples" were considered responsible, whereas from the 1980s, the "earthquake hypothesis" increasingly became the prevalent explanation. As different as these proposed "prime movers" seem to be, they agree to regard the main part of the palatial period as stable and flourishing until, at the very end of that period, catastrophes struck and suddenly destroyed the palatial systems either from the outside (migration) or from the earth's interior (earthquake). At most, it was deemed possible that in the period immediately preceding the final destruction, a crisis, such as the interruption of the East Mediterranean metal trade, could have made the palaces susceptible for collapse.

Recent archaeoseismological research in those sites (Midea and Tiryns), in which the "earthquake hypothesis" was formulated, have not provided any clear evidence supporting this hypothesis, which emphasizes the need to seek alternative interpretative approaches. However, the lecture will deliberately not attempt to name a new "prime mover" and will rather argue for using the doubts surrounding the "earthquake hypothesis" as an opportunity for an interpretative reset that will do justice to the complexity of historical events. For various reasons, the palatial societies were latently fragile and susceptible to disturbances which is why the palatial destructions at the end of Late Helladic IIIB marked the culmination points of processes of long-term social and political transformation within these societies. The lecture will focus on hitherto neglected, potentially antagonistic processes that may have unfolded during the 13th cent. BCE on various socio-political levels and whose interlinkage, possibly accelerated by natural causes, may have formed the background for the particularly serious long-term effects of the destructions.

Finally, the phenomenon of the widely differing repercussions of the destructions in the various former palatial centers will be addressed. It is particularly Tiryns where one cannot speak of a "collapse" since lines of continuity between the palatial and post-palatial period seem to exist that, until fairly recently, were considered to be impossible.

The destruction at the palace of Ayios Vasileios and its synchronisms

Adamantia Vasilogamvrou – Eleftheria Kardamaki – Nektarios Karadimas

The destruction horizons of the Mycenaean palaces reflect events that are crucial turning points in the history of southern Greece. The apparent contemporaneity of many of these events and especially of those dating to the final 13th century BC has been stressed and examined in relation to human action, natural catastrophes or a general crisis. The palace of Ayios Vasileios provides valuable new information that could help to understand some of these aspects. In this respect, our first goal has been to establish the local pottery sequence. While the pottery suggests no hiatus between the 14th and 13th century BC the areas excavated so far provide good evidence especially for one destruction event that seems to have had a major impact on the history of the site. The ongoing excavations reveal an imposing structure, the West Stoa, and part of a central court. Based on the excavation data the collapse of the building was the consequence of a fire destruction, during which an Archive of Linear B documents was also burnt. In the direct vicinity of the collapsed West Stoa some activities took place immediately after the destruction.

In the first part of our presentation, the pottery and stratigraphic data from the area of the West Stoa and the court will be presented and interpreted. In the second part of our presentation, the pottery from Ayios Vasileio used at the time of the destruction and captured under the collapsed building of the West Stoa will be compared to this known from other palatial sites of southern Greece. In this way we would like to place the destruction of Ayios Vasileios and of its Archive in the wider chronological context of Mycenaean palaces.

The Ayios Vasilios North Cemetery in the palatial period

Vasco Hachtmann – Sofia Voutsaki

The aim of this presentation is to reconstruct the development of the North Cemetery area at Ayios Vasilios during the Mycenaean palatial and early post-palatial period, i.e. after the cemetery's main period of use (the early Mycenaean period). This will be achieved by integrating recent stratigraphical and pottery studies with the radiocarbon dates of the burials. Although this is still a preliminary synthesis, as the material from the North Cemetery is still being studied, the data suggest a continuous, but probably fluctuating, use of the area until the so called Transitional LH IIIB2/IIIC Early phase. Our analysis will enable a better understanding of the spatial relation between residential and funerary areas in Ayios Vasilios, as well as changes therein through time. The pottery sequence from the North Cemetery area will also be compared to the one from another major Laconian site, the Menelaion, 12 km to the North. We hope this will allow us to comprehend better the sequence of building horizons, destructions and abandonment in both sites, but also to correlate developments in the two sites through the palatial and post-palatial occupation. This comparison can give important insights to the perhaps shifting significance of these two sites during the establishment and collapse of palatial control in Central Laconia.

Turning points in the history of the northern tip of the Lower Citadel, Tiryns (ceramic study)

Sona Wirghova

During the excavations of the northern tip of the Lower Citadel by Klaus Kilian in 1982 and Joseph Maran in Tiryns (campaigns 2000–2003), late palatial and post-palatial Mycenaean layers and architectural structures were discovered. These are testimonies of a period of several turning points in the history of this location, which, among others, allow us to reconstruct a detailed pottery sequence from the LH III B Early to the early post palatial period: during the early and middle LH III B period, a rest of a wall, probably of a building, one skeleton and a kiln were found. This period was followed by a period of building activities, with a new concept for the whole location. During this phase (LH III B Developed), among others, the Cyclopean wall was built. In the final phase of the palatial period (LH III B Final), Building XI was erected west from the Gateway on top of supporting terrace walls and platforms and to the East Building XV was built. The North Gate became the point to connect the Lower Citadel with the Town. The next turning point was the destruction of the palaces by the end of LH III B period. The first post-palatial phase (LH III C Early) is represented by two pits: the larger one dated immediately after the destruction, the other one is slightly younger. Beginning with the LH III C Phase 2, according to Maran, this period was marked by another building program of the complex 78a-c.2/02 in the western part.

In this paper, the development of the painted Mycenaean ware from LH III B Early/Middle to LH III C Early will be introduced, as we can observe it from the pottery found in the northern tip of the Lower Citadel (in its western part). The focus will be on the local Mycenaean pottery. The results of the study of the ceramics found during the campaigns 2000–2003 will be supplemented by the ceramics found in this area by Kilian. Significant changes in the development of unpainted and cooking pottery will be considered as well.

At the end of this paper I will discuss the results presented here from the perspective of the monocausal und polycasual method, and the possibilities of using these methods in various archaeological contexts.

On Shaky Ground: Petsas House and Destruction at Mycenae in LH IIIA 2

Kim Shelton

This paper presents results of the Archaeological Society's excavation (2000–2013) of the structure known as "Petsas House" in Mycenae's settlement. The building, destroyed late in the LH IIIA 2 period, was used for habitation, ceramic production, and storage, and is one of the few examples of multi-use space in a palatial settlement during this period of expansion and centralization.

In particular, this paper examines the nature of the destruction of Petsas House, and its immediate aftermath, along with a presentation of the extensive ceramic evidence for dating this event. Based on this, evidence for destruction and rebuilding elsewhere at Mycenae during this period, including the palace is critically detailed in order to define a possible destruction horizon at the site and investigate the potential impact and historical implications on the center, its inhabitants, and their socio-political and economic trajectory.

The Destructions of the Palace of Nestor at Pylos and Its Predecessor as a Methodological Case Study

Salvatore Vitale – Sharon Stocker – Jack L. Davis

The aim of this paper is to reassess and refine the chronology of the significant destruction horizons that occurred in the area of the Palace of Nestor at Pylos between the 14th and the early 12th century B.C.E. The bases of our analysis are the contexts brought to light during the old excavations carried out by the University of Cincinnati under the direction of C.W. Blegen. This information is integrated and enhanced by preliminary data from on-going archaeological investigations conducted at Pylos by S.R. Stocker and J.L. Davis, again under the aegis of the University of Cincinnati. Our paper also provides a methodological case study concerning the use of pottery for chronology within its broader archaeological context.

In 1966, Blegen and M. Rawson assigned the final destruction of the Palace of Nestor to “a time when pottery of Mycenaean IIIC was beginning to be made and to displace the wares of IIIB”. In the same volume, Blegen and Rawson also suggested that in another destruction, dating within the Late Helladic (LH) IIIA phase, the structures that existed on the Pylian acropolis before the final Palace was built had burned down.

While the earlier of these two horizons has received relatively little attention in the archaeological literature, the final destruction of the Palace of Nestor has been the subject of much debate. Since Blegen and Rawson wrote, various dates have been proposed for this important event, ranging from the first half of LH IIIB to LH IIIC. In addition, it has also been suggested that some of the vessels with possible LH IIIC characteristics may belong to a reoccupation of the Palace after a LH IIIB destruction.

The occurrence of such conflicting proposals is surprising, if one considers that the Palace of Nestor provides the ideal context for the establishment of a reliable chronology: a destruction layer containing tens of thousands of complete vessels found *in situ* on the floors of a large number of interconnected and fully excavated rooms. We believe that the debate over the date of the final destruction reflects an approach to periodization that overemphasizes the importance of ceramic typology at the expense of the comprehensive analysis of archaeological contexts and their formation processes.

By contrast, our study of Pylian destruction horizons is based on the combined observation of two interrelated factors: (a) The stratigraphic and functional characteristics of the contexts; and (b) The quantitative distribution of diagnostic pottery features and their variations through space and time. By following this methodology, all of the chronological components of a given deposit are integrated within a wider understanding of contextual evidence.

Our results suggest a refined dating for the two destruction horizons originally identified by Blegen and Rawson and imply the existence of possible compositional and functional differences between the assemblages recovered in different areas of the site. Our present understanding of the data indicates that the first of these events occurred around the LH IIIA1 to LH IIIA2 transition, possibly shortly after the start of LH IIIA2. The final destruction, on the other hand, is assigned to the very beginning of LH IIIC. Our refined chronological sequence also allows a reliable synchronization of the Pylian horizons with other relevant deposits from the southern Peloponnese and the wider Greek mainland, which will be fully discussed in this paper.

Pottery and Stratigraphy at Iklaina in the 14th–13th centuries B.C.

Cynthia W. Shelmerdine

Iklaina is fulfilling the prediction that it would be one of the major 2nd order centers of the Pylos state. It has several sectors differentiated by function; there is evidence of a monumental structure, residential buildings, industrial activity, frescoes, an outdoor pit shrine, and roads. It is clearly a larger and more complex site than Nichoria, the other excavated 2nd order center in the region. As excavation continues, our theories have evolved about the town's history and its shifting relationship with the palatial center. This paper will present our current thinking on these topics, based on the interplay of ceramic and stratigraphical evidence.

Kadmeia, Thebes: the Pottery from a Storeroom Destroyed at the End of the Mycenaean Palatial Period

Eleni Andrikou

In 1997, in the plot of the Municipal Conference Centre (MCC) of Thebes at the N–NW part of the Kadmeia hill, part of a Mycenaean storeroom was excavated, at a distance of about 250m N–NW of the Kadmeion. Of the building to which this storeroom belonged only the exterior east wall (wall κβ') has been revealed at a length of 4.50m, extending from N–NE to S–SW. The contents of the storeroom were revealed in an area of nearly 4m² west of wall κβ', probably extending further to the W under the street level. The total preserved height of the wall κβ' is 1.80–1.92m. The lower part, 1.35–1.42m in height, constitutes the foundation of the wall, 1 m wide. The upper 0.50m is the wall itself, 0.50m wide.

The storeroom was filled with red earth, probably from the dissolution of mud bricks. Areas of black earth with charred wood pieces and signs of burning on several of the finds indicate fire as the cause of destruction. The storeroom comprised a bronze corselet, an agate seal depicting a cow suckling her calf, traces of melted lead and pottery. Thirty five vases were complete or nearly complete: 24 of coarse or plain ware (storage vessels, lamps, a small amphora, shallow cups, ladles, kylikes.), 10 decorated closed vessels (stirrup-jars, jugs, hydriae, based askos, a small amphora), one skyphos of Group A. The pottery is dated at the end of the LH IIIB period, when some features of the LH IIIC early pottery have already appeared. The pottery from the storeroom is discussed in connection with pottery groups from the MCC and other plots in Thebes as well as from other Mycenaean palatial centers.

Sacrifices during LM IIIB: Early Destruction of the Mycenaean Palace in Khania-Kydonia, Crete

Maria Andreadaki-Vlazi

Kydonia, the most important ancient city in Western Crete, traditionally one of the three cities founded in Crete by Minos, was erected on the Kastelli Hill in the centre of the Old Town of Khania. Its name appears on the Knossian Linear B tablets.

During the Neopalatial period, Khania had already been a palatial centre with rich Linear A Archives. The same period is characterized by the complexity of the relationship between the Minoan civilization and the newly emerging Mycenaean one that would end in the gradual weakening of Crete in favour of an Achaean element from Mainland Greece.

In the years that followed the destruction by fire of the Minoan palatial centres in 1450 B.C., among them Khania, a Greek speaking administration was established at Knossos and Kydonia.

At the Southwest edge of the palatial building complex of Kydonia, an extensive court was located. Its stucco floor is of exceptional quality, made from pebbled plaster the so-called *tarazza* flooring, usual in the Mycenaean palaces of Mainland Greece. Its surface, rippled by multiple cracks, is evidence of a very powerful earthquake that destroyed and burned the palatial complex in the early 13th c. B.C. (early Late Minoan IIIB phase). The geologists of the Polytechnic School of Crete, who worked in the excavation, have supported the hypothesis of the existence of an active fault-line running through the excavation. The magnitude of the LMIIIB: early earthquake ranges from 6.5 to 7.5 R.

On an intentionally removed section of the destroyed fine floor of the LM IIIB courtyard, a mass of dismembered remains of various animals – 43 ovicaprids and wild goats, 4 pigs and 1 cattle – were mingled with human scattered remains of a young female, with no traces of burning. The deposit was demarcated and sealed by a deposition of stones and slabs; it can only be attributed to a single episode of purposeful human design. The scientific evidence – archaeological, anthropological archeozoological – shows that the young female was processed in a way that parallels of the treatment of the animal species, with which it was associated. All the above evidence was part of a sacrifice, which took part after the main catastrophic seismic shock – followed by fire and raising in pieces the floor – and before a second shock that sealed the entire collapsed structure, up to now. Further pieces of evidence strengthen the hypothesis of a court where ritual acts used to take place before the catastrophic earthquake.

The large number and the wide range of the sacrificial creatures seem to have slaughtered in a public setting as part of an official state ritual of Mycenaean character for such a special occasion. It seems that they are «*θυσίαι ἀγευστοί*», i.e. sacrifices not tasted, but rather performed in chthonic rituals, as offerings to the chthonic gods.

Maiden sacrifices are known from ancient Greek mythology and literature, elicited for exceptional circumstances in an attempt by society to confront an extraordinary disaster and probably go back to the Mycenaean times. They were presented as acts of deep obedience and reverence to the divine, as acts of awe and purification, as a kind of negotiation with the supreme powers and not as ferocious and ruthless slaughters.

Regionalism and Stylistic Stasis in LM IIIA2–B Pottery: Correlations and Comparisons with Mycenaean Palatial Ceramic Sequences

Jeremy B. Rutter

Regionalism is a regular feature of Cretan ceramic assemblages throughout the Late Bronze Age, even during phases when the evidence for interregional exchanges of ceramic containers is plentiful. But the degree of such regionalism can be highly variable through time. For example, much of Crete exhibits an impressive degree of stylistic uniformity during the late 15th and earlier 14th century BCE (LM IIIA1), but this uniformity gradually gives way to ceramic assemblages that appear more restricted and even parochial in character over the ensuing 150 years (LM IIIA2–IIIB early). During this lengthy interval, no particularly striking innovations appear in local repertoires aside from the piecemeal adoption of a limited number of morphological and decorative features from contemporary Mycenaean ceramics. Then quite

suddenly a number of dramatic changes in both settlement patterns and ceramic assemblages take place within a short space of time at the end of the LM IIIB period across much of the island. Although the amount of evidence for correlating this short phase of sudden change with developments on the Greek mainland remains regrettably slim, there are increasingly good grounds for linking what has been dubbed LM IIIB2 (Chania) or LM IIIB late (central Crete, north and south; east-central Crete) with the earliest stage of LH IIIC in Mycenaean regions of the Aegean.

Synchronizing Palace Destructions in the Eastern Mediterranean

Reinhard Jung

The different destructions of the Mycenaean palaces on the Greek mainland and on Crete unfold their historical relevance on two different levels. Firstly and in a very concrete way, they signify the sharpening crisis and subsequently the final and definite demise of the Asiatic Mode of Production (or else the Palace State) in southeastern Europe. Second, these palace destructions fall into a longer period, during which various circum-Mediterranean societies were undergoing profound social and economic changes. Similar to Greece, those changes were marked by violent destructions of political and economic centers in a number of different regions. This impression of a generalized crisis since many decades is provoking the question, if it is possible to uncover causal connections between those events separated by many hundreds of kilometers.

As is well known, the developments of the societies living along the central and the eastern coasts of the Mediterranean Sea were interconnected in stronger or weaker relationships of uneven and combined character, especially so during the 14th and 13th centuries BCE. In order to fully perceive and explain the historical importance of the Mycenaean palace destructions, it is therefore necessary to widen the geographical perspective. As the precondition of any inter-regional historical analysis is the precise localization of specific events in time, this paper explores the timeline of major Mediterranean destruction events with reference to the palace destructions in Greece as well as in terms of absolute chronology (mainly in relation to Egyptian and Near Eastern rulers' reigns). Comparisons of stratified pottery assemblages will form the basis for this endeavor.