

The Social Dynamics of Argos in a Constantly Changing Landscape (MH II–LH II)

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To Jim Wright for his innovative thinking

Abstract: The present paper focuses on the life cycle of Argos during the early Mycenaean period (MH III/LH I–LH II), also taking into consideration the back-history of the settlement from the beginning of the MH period. On the basis of new evidence from the Aspis MH settlement, and using the Adaptive Cycle model for Argos and for nearby settlements (Lerna, Mycenae), we propose the existence not only of varied life paths for the different sites, but also of important potentials in the MH period that led Argos to great prosperity during the MH II phase, completing a whole AC by the end of the MH period. During the transitional phase (MH III/LH I), and despite a rather illusory image of continuous growth, as reflected in new buildings in the fortified acropolis of the Aspis, Argos enters a critical phase that then becomes apparent through the abandonment of certain residential areas and the relocation of some population groups within and probably beyond its borders. According to one possible scenario, a group of people moved, at the very beginning of MH III, from the Aspis acropolis probably to Mycenae, thus participating in its spectacular rise from the late MH period and onwards. In LH I–IIA Argos is still in a phase of reorganisation, marked by the definite abandonment of the acropolis and changes in the social and economic domains. Only in LH IIB does Argos enter a phase of substantial renewal, as reflected in both the burial/ideological and the residential spheres through the respective establishment of a new burial ground at the Deiras and the rapid expansion of the settlement in the Lower Town upon the vestiges of the old cemetery. However, the critical phase in the transition to the LH period and the restraint of Argos' dynamic course irreversibly transformed it from a leader and a prime agent of the plain (in MH) into a secondary political power throughout the Mycenaean period.

Keywords: Argos, Middle Helladic, early Late Helladic, Adaptive Cycle, social change, migration, Lerna, Mycenae

Introduction

During the MH and LH periods, several important settlements developed in the Argolid, exhibiting dynamic life cycles, diverse but interconnected. It is very thought-provoking to observe how different the trajectories of these communities seem to have been, despite the small distances between them in space and time. It is even more intriguing to investigate the variety of causes underlying this phenomenon, including internal developments (e.g. communal traditions, social coherence, dynamics, receptivity), external stimuli (e.g. exchange, contacts with foreign traditions, practices and ideologies) and interactions between and within communities (e.g. relations of cooperation and/or competition).

The main objective here is to review the history of Argos in the early LH period, focusing on the transitional phase from the MH to the LH period. For Argos, as for most MH/LH sites, this transitional phase was a period with major socio-political, economic and ideological changes, already discussed by many researchers, mainly due to the wide-ranging novelties inaugurated at Mycenae.⁴ This phase is characterised by great variation in the social landscape.⁵ While in

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⁴ E.g. Dickinson 1977; Maran 1995; Voutsaki 1999.

⁵ Wright 2008a, 230–231.

some cases it shows clear evidence of economic and cultural growth, extroversion and inventiveness (Mycenae), for other sites it is a period of reduced potential (Argos, Lerna).

In the belief that changes in the life of a community are directly related to what went before, we argue that the transitional late MH/early LH period in Argos is an integral part of a fluctuating life cycle, involving both old and new societal features and composing a complex and potentially coherent narrative. A profitable way to attempt some further insights into this narrative, as far as the existing data allow it, is to apply in a cautious way the model of the 'Adaptive Cycle' (hereafter AC) (Fig. 1), first introduced into Aegean Prehistory by the pioneering studies of Erika Weiberg.⁶ The model was derived from the comparative study of the dynamics of ecosystems,⁷ and, together with the resilience theory, is a useful tool in anthropology and archaeology in order to understand the source and role of change and to provide a richer perspective on social change, collapse, recovery and stability.⁸ The AC is made up of two major phases: the one, referred to as the front loop, is the slow period of growth and accumulation, during which the system becomes more and more effective and connected; this period includes the subphases of exploitation⁹ and conservation.¹⁰ The other, referred to as the back loop, is a rapid period of collapse and reconstitution leading to renewal; this period includes the subphases of release¹¹ and reorganisation.¹² We consider here that the adaptation of a cycle starts at the phase of reorganisation (α) and ends at the phase of release (Ω), while other scholars may place the start of the AC at the phase of release and the end at the phase of conservation.

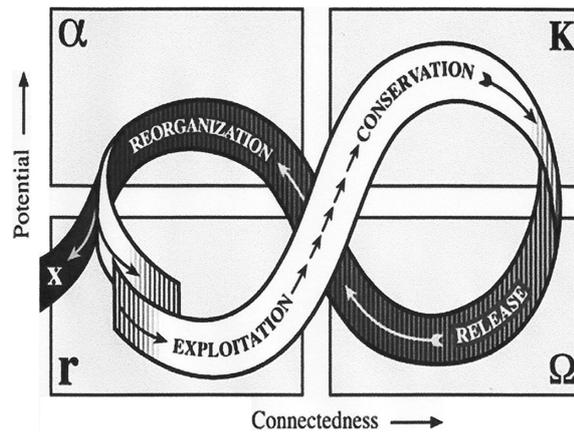
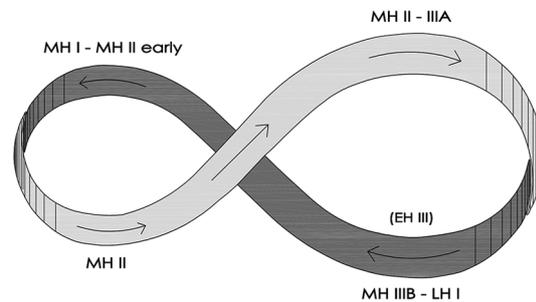
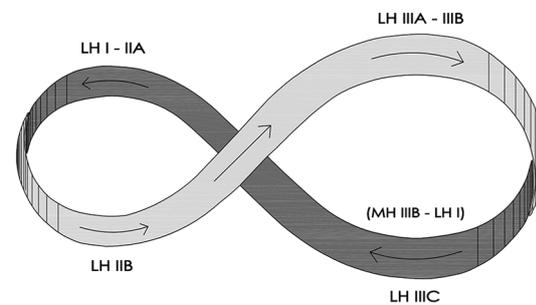


Fig. 1: The cyclical model of the Adaptive Cycle

ARGOS



2a. MH Adaptive Cycle



2b. LH Adaptive Cycle

Fig. 2: The proposed Adaptive Cycles for Argos in the MH (2a) and the LH (2b) periods respectively (drawings: V. Philippa)

⁶ Weiberg 2012; Weiberg 2017; Weiberg – Finné 2013.

⁷ E.g. Holling 2001; Holling et al. 2002.

⁸ E.g. Redman 2005; Redman – Kinzig 2003; Weiberg 2017.

⁹ Characterised by low connectedness (though starting to increase), the system's potential is relatively low: the new structure is evolving, exhibiting high diversity, exploiting resources and opportunities, and enjoying high resilience (but weakening).

¹⁰ Characterised by high connectedness, the system's potential is high: effective in resource exploitation, specialisation is increasing, diversity is low, homogeneity is high, and resilience is low (and decreasing).

¹¹ Disintegration of the system: dependencies are high, the potential rapidly decreasing, low functionality of the system, most connections and resources are lost, heterogeneity.

¹² Potential is increased: a new stable regime can appear, exhibiting experimentation and invention; rules can be readily altered, so that the collapse turns into a new order with high resilience.

Using the AC model and relying on data from recent studies, we outline the social dynamics and changes at Argos, as reflected in social space, beginning with the MH period, a large part of which (MH II–III A) we consider the front loop in the life-cycle of the settlement (Fig. 2a). In the transitional phase (MH III B–LH I), we propose that Argos completes a cycle entering a critical phase (Fig. 2b), unlike Mycenae, where the transitional period marks the start of the front loop of the AC – after possibly a long stay in the back loop (Fig. 3). Therefore, in order to evaluate as reliably as possible the nature of the phase at the heart of our study, i.e. the MH/LH transitional phase of Argos, we should start our narrative looking backwards to the beginning of the cycle, namely to the early MH period. Moreover, we believe that it is imperative to sketch the ACs of the closest neighbours of Argos, i.e. Mycenae and Lerna, in order to highlight not only the dynamics, but also the correlations of power at a regional level in the best possible way. These correlations during the MH/LH transition are particularly decisive for the later development of each community in the early and even later Mycenaean period.

Even though this is not the first time that we have attempted to gain a better understanding of LH Argos by looking back to its MH past,¹³ the difference to our previous attempt lies in the availability of new evidence from MH Aspis, with a focus on a more limited period, and the application of a specific model. Sofia Voutsaki has often emphasised the need to examine early MH social processes for a better understanding of change in the transitional and LH period.¹⁴ However, her studies do not specifically concern Argos, and her view of the MH period differs somewhat from ours. Based on evidence from Argos, we believe that the existence of kin-based social relations does not exclude the aspirations and claims of social distinction, and that competitive dispositions may have developed accordingly to play a rather vital role much earlier than the mature phase of the MH period.¹⁵

MH I – early MH II: Reorganisation and Growth

After a potential phase of ‘release’ in EH III,¹⁶ Argos experienced an impressive development during the MH I – early MH II timespan. Architectural evidence from this early phase is actually very scarce on the Aspis hilltop,¹⁷ due first to the fire destruction¹⁸ and then to the subsequent and continuous building activity throughout the Middle Bronze Age. Therefore, it is impossible to get

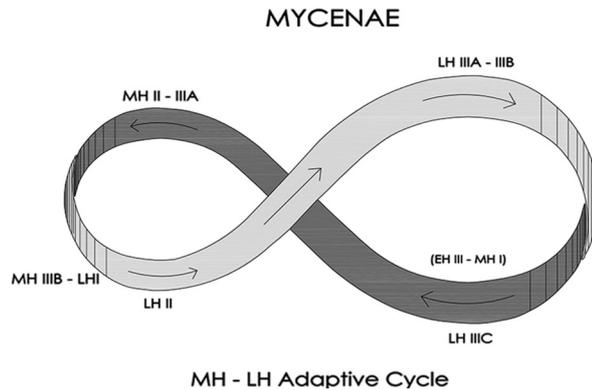


Fig. 3: The proposed Adaptive Cycle for Mycenae in the MH and the LH periods (drawing: V. Philippa)

¹³ Papadimitriou et al. 2015.

¹⁴ Voutsaki 2005; Voutsaki 2010; Voutsaki, this volume.

¹⁵ Kilian-Dirlmeier 1997; Parkinson – Galaty 2007; Maran 2011; Philippa-Touchais – Touchais 2011; Philippa-Touchais – Touchais 2016a.

¹⁶ In Argos there is little evidence for this phase, i.e. some sherds on the Aspis (see Balitsari – Philippa-Touchais 2015, 808 and fig. 11) and three bothroi with EH III pottery in the South Quarter (Katerina Barakari-Gleni, personal communication). On release and reorganisation processes in EH III, see Weiberg – Finné 2013.

¹⁷ On the contrary, clear architectural remains from this phase have been distinguished in the South Quarter of Argos, ‘Pithoi House’ (Balitsari 2017; Balitsari 2020; see also Balitsari in Philippa-Touchais – Touchais 2018, 804). This evidence suggests that the settlement of Argos was organised in several nuclei (Touchais – Divari-Valakou 1998, 11; Touchais 1998).

¹⁸ Philippa-Touchais – Touchais 2011, 214.

a clear picture of its spatial organisation in this early phase.¹⁹ However, the detailed study of the pottery revealed important elements that urge us to rethink the nature of the first MH habitation on the hill. All the new evidence comes from the ceramic assemblages of at least two burnt ‘households’ dating back to MH I – early MH II:

1. A closed pottery deposit was found in the eastern sector of the settlement (Fig. 4). According to the recent publication of the material, it might represent part of the equipment of one or more early MH households.²⁰ The deposit comprises a wide range of ceramic classes, including five or six very large storage jars, which are rare in the settlement of the Aspis. Since the presence of agricultural production and surplus (embodied by the large storage jars) may be linked with the emergence, development and reproduction of socio-economic inequality, we formulated the hypothesis that this equipment might be an indication that such social inequality and asymmetry existed as early as the MH I – early MH II phase of the settlement.²¹ This suggestion is reinforced by the existence of a large set of imported pottery within the deposit, which may have been acquired through the agricultural surplus, as in the case of Lerna (House 98A).²²

2. The second assemblage is also related to the burnt equipment of a house in the southeastern sector (Fig. 4), the so-called ‘Ghost-House’, the exact location of which is only recognised by the concentration of its pottery.²³ The assemblage contained both locally produced and imported pots (Fig. 5), among which are Aiginetan (Fig. 5.12–19) and Minoanising (Fig. 5.20–24) vessels. Their large size, specific use (serving and storage), elaborate decoration, and the specialised technology of their manufacture suggest a household out of the ordinary, involved in distant exchange networks. We argue that the repertoire of the vessels may indicate practices of formal ceremonies involving communal eating and drinking. The ‘Ghost-House’ assemblage therefore provides evidence for feasting activities as early as the MH I – early MH II, as was apparently also the case in the settlement of Lerna.²⁴ Feasting is a significant activity that not only promotes communal cohesion, but also leads to social change, the construction of inequality and the formation of distinctive identities.²⁵ We had already surmised the existence of feasting practices at the Aspis during the final MH phase.²⁶ It is of particular interest that similar ceremonies, possibly on a different scale but nonetheless of analogous meaning, were rooted in the earlier MH period.

Concerning the burial practices, the evidence is scanty. Among the 18 graves excavated within the Aspis settlement,²⁷ five, all unfurnished and individual (adults, children and neonates), are dated to MH I according to radiocarbon analysis.²⁸ At least three more were found within the ‘Pithoi House’ in the South Quarter of Argos.²⁹ In the eastern/southeastern foothills of the Aspis, in the area of the prehistoric tumuli, at least seven graves with grave goods are also dated to MH I–II.³⁰ The latter graves may have belonged to groups of residents that lived on the Aspis hill,

¹⁹ Philippa-Touchais 2010, 792.

²⁰ Philippa-Touchais – Touchais 2011. According to the radiocarbon dating of a carbonised grain from the same deposit, the absolute date (2036–1877 cal. BC) concurs with the relative dating proposed for the ceramic assemblage, i.e. MH I–II early (Philippa-Touchais – Touchais 2016b, 746).

²¹ Philippa-Touchais – Touchais 2011, 214–215.

²² Voutsaki et al. 2013, 140, 144.

²³ This concentration was found under the east part of the apsidal House MA (Philippa-Touchais – Balitsari, forthcoming).

²⁴ Wright 2004b, 138, especially n. 30.

²⁵ Dietler – Hayden 2001; Wright 2004b.

²⁶ Philippa-Touchais 2010, 794.

²⁷ Philippa-Touchais 2013.

²⁸ Voutsaki et al. 2008; Philippa-Touchais 2013; Triantaphyllou 2015; Triantaphyllou 2016.

²⁹ Balitsari in Philippa-Touchais – Touchais 2018, 804; Balitsari 2020.

³⁰ One burial jar (no. 121) in ‘Tumulus A’ containing at least two individuals (Protonotariou-Deilaki 2009, 43–45, 391 pl. A1, 475 pl. A3.5–6), two individual pit graves (nos. 137, 138) in ‘Tumulus B’ (Protonotariou-Deilaki 2009, 52–53, 395 pl. B1, 482–483 pls. B2:5–6, B3:1–4), two burial jars (no. 69 with at least two individuals, and no. 70 with no bones preserved) in ‘Tumulus Γ’ (Protonotariou-Deilaki 2009, 110–117, 418 pl. Γ46, 507 pl. Γ21), and two



Fig. 4: Aspis, Argos, topographic plan with vestiges of all periods. Sectors I–III excavated by W. Vollgraff (1902–1903). Sectors IV (southeast) and V (north) excavated under the direction of G. Touchais, French School at Athens (1974–1990, 2011). Cleaning took place in Sector II (east) in 2006–2007. The two stars in the southeast sector (IV) and the east sector (II) indicate the location of the MH I–II early pottery deposits (plan: L. Fadin; École française d’Athènes)

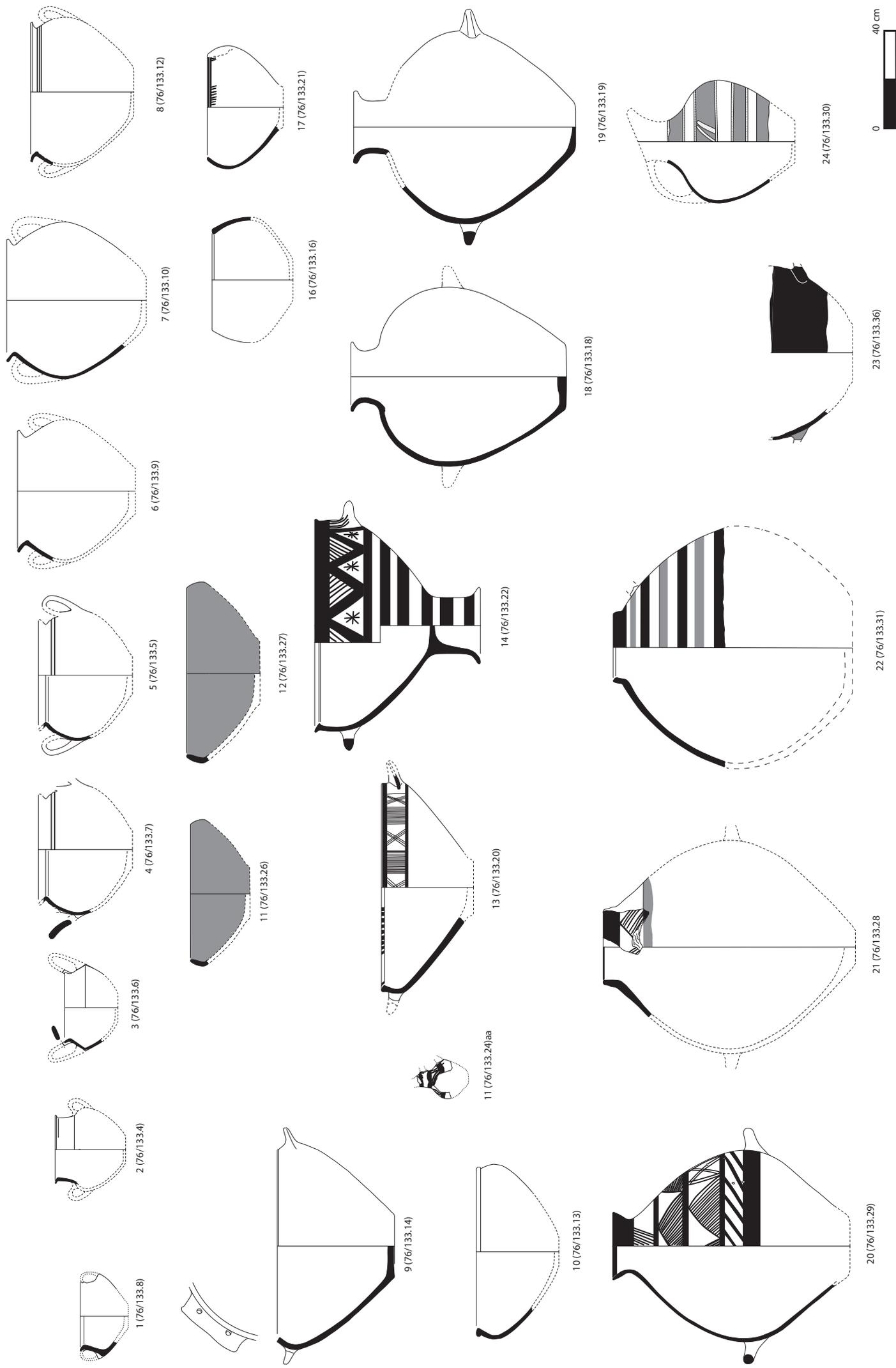


Fig. 5: Pottery from the 'Ghost House', southeast sector (drawings: Y. Nakas; École française d'Athènes)

since, as far as we know, no traces of early MH habitation were found in this area.³¹ It is worth noting that in contrast to the graves in the Aspis settlement, most of those located within or around the tumuli contained more than two individuals and grave goods of some importance.³² We may therefore observe a clear diversity concerning funerary space and practices in this phase.³³ Thus, in regard to Argos, it is difficult to support the idea that in mortuary practices differences within communities are not really marked.³⁴

The Regional Socio-Political Landscape and the AC in MH I – early MH II

In a regional context, secure and trustworthy data of the same phase come from Lerna, where signs of differentiation have been detected in terms of storage capacity, agricultural surplus and the acquisition of imports.³⁵ Imported pottery indicates that Lerna, like Argos, was already in contact with important centres of the Aegean.³⁶ As far as burial data are concerned, graves were apparently related to households, as is the case on the Aspis,³⁷ while a subtle ‘scaling up’ can be observed in the number (demographic growth), the architecture and the furnishing of the graves.³⁸ Concerning Mycenae, because of their poor preservation, little is known about MH architectural remains, and even less for MH I – early MH II;³⁹ we know, however, on the basis of pottery from this phase, that the area of the acropolis was already inhabited.⁴⁰ With regard to burials, more than 150 MH graves were found in the Prehistoric Cemetery (lower west slope of the acropolis),⁴¹ but their exact chronology cannot be determined. Some of them were dug inside or next to houses when the latter were still in use.⁴² It is possible that most of the latter burials should be dated to MH I–II.

Looking at this through the AC prism, we cannot make any serious suggestions about social structure and potential for Mycenae, apart from the fact that it was not excluded from the exchange networks operating in the Argolid at that time. For both Argos and Lerna, it is clear that they experienced a period of intense reorganisation (back loop). It is noteworthy that although these early MH communities are considered to be kin-based, and thus rather corporate and not highly differentiated,⁴³ new evidence points to important signs of both social asymmetries and an increase in the potential of the system, which are reflected in the accumulation of surpluses, the social practices of feasting and the acquisition of large quantities of imported vessels. In addition, the openness of these communities and their contact with foreign traditions must have caused considerable renewal in their material culture and their ideologies. Finally, their active participation in the operating exchange networks demonstrates their ability to exploit resources

more burial jars with multiple burials in the Thanos plot (Pappi 2012). See also Voutsaki et al. 2009; Papadimitriou et al. 2015, 170–171.

³¹ Papadimitriou et al. 2015, 165, tab. 1.

³² The large burial jars no. 70 (2.20 × 1.24 m) in ‘Tumulus Γ’, and no. 2 (2 × 1.10 m) in the Thanos plot (see n. 30), were accompanied by fifteen and nine vessels respectively. Among the vessels, several were imported (Aiginetan and Lustrous Decorated), very similar to vases found on the Aspis hilltop.

³³ On the diversity and meaning of the early MH funerary landscape, see Philippa-Touchais 2019.

³⁴ Voutsaki 2010, 90.

³⁵ Voutsaki et al. 2013; Voutsaki – Milka 2017, 115; for a review of the architectural and settlement organisation evidence of MH I Lerna (VA), see Wiersma 2014, 139–141.

³⁶ Zerner 1988; Zerner 1993.

³⁷ Milka 2010; Voutsaki et al. 2013; Philippa-Touchais 2013.

³⁸ Voutsaki – Milka 2017.

³⁹ Shelton 2010; Wiersma 2014, 145–146.

⁴⁰ Namely several sherds deriving from MH I–II Lustrous Decorated (Minoanising) jars, and coarse vessels with incised decoration. In 2009, on the occasion of a workshop organised by Prof. David French and the Greek Archaeological Service represented by Dr Eleni Palaiologou, Anna Philippa-Touchais had the opportunity to see the MH pottery from the excavations of the British School on the acropolis in the Museum of Mycenae.

⁴¹ Dickinson 1994, 221; Alden 2000; French – Shelton 2005, 178.

⁴² Alden 2000, 17, 19; Shelton 2010, 61.

⁴³ Voutsaki 2005; Voutsaki 2010; Voutsaki et al. 2013; Philippa-Touchais 2011.

and opportunities. These features together with the lack of standardisation in their pottery production and consumption⁴⁴ as well as in their burial practices⁴⁵ are typical in phases of intense reorganisation.

MH II–III A: Exploitation and Conservation

In MH II, the social developments observed in the previous phase continued unabated. After the devastating fire of early MH II on the Aspis, the settlement was reconstructed, expanding in all four excavated sectors, and organised in successive terraces retained by two interior circuit walls (Fig. 6).⁴⁶ Houses do not differ significantly in the ground plan but vary in size. A fortification wall of ‘proto-Cyclopean’ masonry (Fig. 7) was constructed to enclose the settlement.⁴⁷ The wall was identified in three excavated sectors, but is best preserved in the northern sector, where it was possible to date it more accurately to the late MH II or MH III A at the latest.⁴⁸ The exterior circuit wall, together with two interior ones, gave the settlement a concentric organisation, earlier than previously thought.⁴⁹ We believe that the concentric and fortified planning of the settlement on the Aspis reflects not only spatial hierarchy and the inception of differentiation within the community,⁵⁰ but also aspirations to claim or maximise its leading position as early as MH II.⁵¹ In other words, the fortification wall could be considered as the physical embodiment, in building terms, of the leading role of the Aspis in the wider region. It is worth considering, though, a provoking observation on this symbol of protection par excellence: “is the attention to defence [...] an indicator only of impending outside threat or perhaps itself a root cause?”⁵²

Apart from the settlement’s reorganisation, a large amount of pottery of the same period, both of local production and imported, was found in all excavated sectors, even in the central (I) and eastern (II) sectors excavated by Wilhelm Vollgraff (Fig. 4).⁵³ In addition, the discovery of a quite exceptional piece of ornamentation⁵⁴ seems to support the existence of a prosperous community. A gold pendant suspended from a gold chain (Fig. 8) came to light in House ML in the northern sector dating to MH II.⁵⁵ The triangular sheet and the elaborate chain show clear similarities to gold jewellery found in burial contexts of EM II–III and early MM (Mochlos, the Mesara, Archanes, Mallia).⁵⁶ Taking into consideration the meagre evidence for EH and early MH gold-working skills and the proof for the exchange of material goods and technological expertise between Crete and the Argolid,⁵⁷ we could assume that the pendant was imported from Crete. However, its manufacture in a mainland workshop – possibly in the Argolid – cannot be excluded on the basis of any certain techno-morphological features.⁵⁸ Therefore, the manufacture of valuables in the Argolid or in a wider area⁵⁹ may have started earlier than previously thought,⁶⁰ even if still

⁴⁴ In contrast to the communities of central Greece, Spencer 2010.

⁴⁵ Cavanagh – Mee 1998, 34.

⁴⁶ Philippa-Touchais 2016, 649–651.

⁴⁷ Philippa-Touchais 2016.

⁴⁸ On the dating of House MI, which is contemporary to the fortification wall, in the northern sector, see Philippa-Touchais – Balitsari 2016, 738–739.

⁴⁹ Philippa-Touchais 2010.

⁵⁰ Wright 1994, 45–46; Wright 2008a, 237.

⁵¹ Philippa-Touchais 2016, 657.

⁵² Cunningham 2017, 18.

⁵³ Balitsari – Philippa-Touchais 2015, 805–807; Balitsari – Philippa-Touchais, forthcoming.

⁵⁴ Philippa-Touchais – Touchais 2016a; see also Dickinson 1994, 184.

⁵⁵ House ML is beneath the large House MI, Philippa-Touchais – Balitsari 2016, 738–742.

⁵⁶ Philippa-Touchais – Touchais 2016a.

⁵⁷ Rutter – Zerner 1984; Zerner 1993, 50.

⁵⁸ Philippa-Touchais – Touchais 2016a, 288.

⁵⁹ Kilian-Dirlmeier 1997.

⁶⁰ Dickinson 1977, 72; Dickinson 1994, 184; Laffineur 2010, 444.



Fig. 6: Aspis, Argos. Reconstruction of Aspis Phase III (MH II late – MH IIIA). In Sectors I and II (excavated in 1903) the presence of houses of this phase is suggested by Vollgraf’s plan and the dating of the pottery preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Argos and the NMA (drawing: V. Philippa)



Fig. 7: Aspis, northern sector. The inner face of the ‘proto-Cyclopean’ MH II late fortification wall

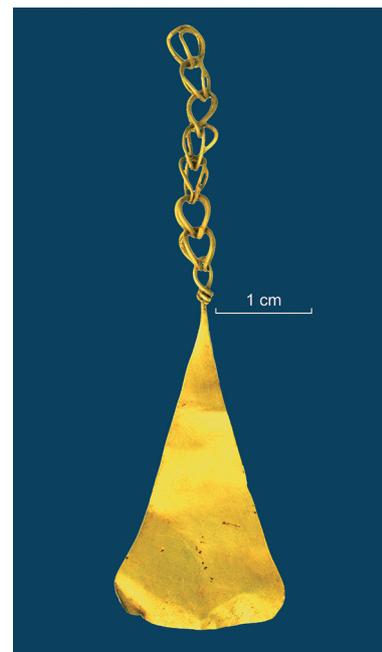


Fig. 8: The gold pendant from the Aspis settlement (photo: R. Prévalet; École française d’Athènes)

under the influence of Crete. In addition, the acquisition of such an exceptional ornament, either as part of an early MH acquisitive ethos,⁶¹ or as an act of masked aggrandisement,⁶² was possibly intended to claim or emphasise personal prestige.⁶³

In the burial sphere, we observe that during MH II–MH IIIA the diversity in burial practices continued: among the 18 graves excavated within the Aspis settlement, 13 were dated to this period,⁶⁴ with grave goods being quite rare. At the same time, the eastern/southeastern foothills of the Aspis continued to be used as burial ground, where several of those graves without grave goods probably belong to the same phase.⁶⁵ Concerning the South Quarter, several burials were excavated among the vestiges of early MH houses.⁶⁶ A very interesting element that emerged from the detailed study of the stratigraphy of this quarter is the possibility that the grave with the earliest known cremation from Argos can be dated to the MH II late – MH IIIA, i.e. earlier than originally proposed (transitional phase).⁶⁷ We hope that this issue will be further clarified by the study in progress of this exceptional grave.

The Regional Socio-Political Landscape and the AC in MH II–IIIA

In a regional context, Lerna continues to be the most important port in the Argolid and presumably the gateway community for the imported products. In terms of settlement organisation and burial practices, the pattern does not appear to change significantly from the previous phase.⁶⁸ However, some differentiated graves/burials with more complex treatment (collective, on two levels, removed/disarticulated) and richer furnishing (i.e. MH II grave J 4B) suggest new ideas, where status is claimed and performed by practices diverging from the MH norm.⁶⁹ For Mycenae, we still have little evidence: there exists no more information than that described for MH I – early II (see above).

In terms of the AC, during MH II, Argos would pass into the front loop phase, i.e. one of exploitation and conservation. Several features indicate that the community on the Aspis hilltop was going through a period of growth and development. There is evidence of settlement organisation and expansion in all four excavated sectors, mighty circuit walls, streets parallel to them and a fortification wall. These large-scale architectural developments indicate increased population, some asymmetry between households, and claims for the rise of the Aspis in the regional settlement hierarchy; at the same time they also imply communal decision-making, cooperative efforts and emergent control. In fact it seems that there is no shift from the focus on the household to a communal one (i.e. a kind of dichotomy) but rather a successful interplay between personal/family and community growth. Exchange was still quite active, as reflected in the continuing import of pottery. At the same time, the production of local ceramics increased significantly, either through the devising of clear preferences for standardised types (namely Grey Minyan and Dark Burnished bowls with shoulder grooves)⁷⁰ or through the interaction with pottery traditions from

⁶¹ Spencer 2010, 678–679.

⁶² Maran 2011, 286.

⁶³ Philippa-Touchais – Touchais 2016a, 289.

⁶⁴ Philippa-Touchais 2013, 90, tab. 1.

⁶⁵ A large burial pithos covered with a hydria (both of Aiginetan production) can be dated with certainty to MH II: Protonotariou-Deilaki 2009, 266 ('Tumulus ΣΤ', Hospital area).

⁶⁶ Papadimitriou et al. 2015, 169; Balitsari 2017; Balitsari 2020.

⁶⁷ Balitsari 2017; Balitsari 2020.

⁶⁸ Wiersma 2014, 141–143; Eleni Milka (2010) has proposed an interesting sequence of successive shifts between the residential and the funerary use of some areas, but her arguments cannot be fully appreciated before the final publication of Lerna V.

⁶⁹ Voutsaki – Milka 2017, esp. 108–110, 112.

⁷⁰ Philippa-Touchais – Balitsari 2016, 740–741, figs. 10.7, 11; 11.3–4, 9–10. For an overview of the system of pottery production typically found at many Argive sites in EH III–MH II, see Spencer 2010, 678–679.

the central mainland and from the islands (mainly Aigina).⁷¹ Therefore, while there is still a clear diversity in settlement architecture, burial practices and pottery production (and consumption), we can also discern an emergent standardisation, which is a typical feature of the exploitation or expansion phase. In addition, increasing internal and regional connectedness and the system's potential in exploiting resources and opportunities go in the same direction. Lerna seems to follow a similar course of growth in the fore loop, while Mycenae might still be in a phase of reorganisation (back loop).

MH III–LH I: A Society in Movement or a Phase of Release

As Joseph Maran has very perceptively observed, “if we had to predict, solely on the basis of the social and political circumstances during the MH I and II phases, which sites would ‘evolve’ into the most important LH centres of the Argolid, the choice would undoubtedly be Argos, with Lerna serving as its harbour. That things didn’t develop this way and instead the centre of power shifted from Argos and Lerna... to Mycenae and Tiryns..., is one of those unexpected ruptures which deserve more attention.”⁷² We also support the pivotal importance assigned to the ‘unexpected rupture’ at Argos, and we believe that it can probably be attributed to certain event(s) which should be placed within the MH III–LH I period. Therefore, particular attention needs to be given to the evidence concerning the social space during this phase at Argos.

Evidence from the Aspis hill and the Lower Town reveals a series of changes in the habitation patterning. These changes, which are expressed spatially with the abandonments of certain residential areas and the relocation in others, are certainly associated with a series of movements of population groups on a local or more regional scale. Similar movements have been observed in several sites during the same period, their causes possibly being related to the changed socio-economic situation.⁷³ However, until now the specific conditions for each case were not pursued further. In order to understand better the new socio-economic conditions that prevailed at Argos during the MH III–LH I, we will examine more closely the changes in the residential space and the movements of population groups as depicted at the local micro-scale and the wider region.

Settlement Space: Abandonments and Relocations

On the Aspis hilltop, major changes took place in MH IIIA and MH IIIB–LH I. In the northern sector of the settlement, the recent detailed study of the pottery revealed that the latest building phase (large House MI and the partly excavated House MJ; Fig. 6) dates to MH II late, with only a few elements of MH IIIA.⁷⁴ Since this sector of the settlement was not inhabited in later phases, we may conclude that the abandonment of these houses marks the definitive desertion of this area at the very beginning of MH III.

In the southeastern sector, three houses were also abandoned or destroyed during MH IIIA (the apsidal House MA, House MB and House MC, Fig. 6), but here habitation continued in the next MH phase: the ‘Peripheral Complex’ was constructed in MH IIIB (Fig. 9) over the ruins of these earlier houses. The complex was built according to a specific plan and apparently for specific purposes. We have already suggested that it was intended to strengthen the protection of the Aspis settlement and emphasise its dominant position.⁷⁵ However, we should also emphasise that the construction of the complex was accompanied by a significant decrease in the size

⁷¹ Philippa-Touchais 2007; Touchais 2007; Spencer 2010.

⁷² Maran 2015, 278.

⁷³ Maran 1995, 72.

⁷⁴ Philippa-Touchais – Balitsari 2016, 738–739.

⁷⁵ Philippa-Touchais 2010, 794; Philippa-Touchais 2016, 654.



Fig. 9: Aspis, Argos. Artistic reconstruction of Aspis phase IV (MH III B–LH I). In this phase, the houses of the northern sector are abandoned as some of the houses of the central and eastern sectors (drawing: Y. Nakas, colouring: A. Goumas; based on the reconstruction of this phase published in Philippa-Touchais 2010, 801, fig. 10)

of the habitation area, since on the one hand the northern sector was already abandoned, and on the other, the space at the exterior of the complex (between the latter and the older exterior enceinte) was left uninhabited (Fig. 9). Moreover, we do not know to what extent the houses of the central and the eastern sectors (excavated by W. Vollgraff) were still in use, since the pottery preserved from these sectors dates mainly to MH I–II early and MH II–III A; very few sherds can be dated to the final phase of the settlement.⁷⁶ The ‘Peripheral Complex’ was in use for a short period of time, lasting no later than LH I, when it was abandoned, as was the entire acropolis of the Aspis.⁷⁷

In the South Quarter of modern Argos, near the ancient theatre, the fragmentarily known MH I–II settlement (‘Quartier Sud’) was also thought to have been abandoned (or moved) at the very beginning of MH III and used afterwards as a burial ground during the MH III–LH I period.⁷⁸ This hypothesis was

recently confirmed by the thorough study of the MH remains in the area.⁷⁹

In the southeastern foothills of the Aspis, where a cemetery had already been in use since MH I, a new habitation area was created, beginning in MH III. The excavations of the Archaeological Service in this area brought to light an important number of MH III–LH I architectural (and burial) remains.⁸⁰ Henceforth habitation (and burial) concentrated at this area.

Some Thoughts on the Evidence Concerning Settlement Space

Judging from the above-mentioned evidence, during the MH III–LH I period the society of Argos was in constant movement. According to the evidence, we propose two main instances of population movement and household relocation: the first one, that we call ‘Movement A’, took place at the beginning of MH III, while the second one, ‘Movement B’, happened in MH III B final or LH I. Two questions arise immediately: 1. what were the reasons behind these successive abandonments, and 2. where might the departing families have resettled?

‘Movement A’

Two cases of abandonment of residential areas were identified during MH III A, one in the northern sector of the Aspis and the other in the South Quarter (in the foothills of the Larissa). Recently it has been proposed that the abandonment of the South Quarter is related to the increasing importance of the Aspis area and the creation of a more coherent communal identity that led to a less dispersed settlement pattern, with a proper acropolis (Aspis) and a lower town (southeastern foothills of the Aspis).⁸¹

⁷⁶ Balitsari – Philippa-Touchais 2015, 805–807; Balitsari – Philippa-Touchais, forthcoming.

⁷⁷ Philippa-Touchais 2016, 657–658.

⁷⁸ Touchais 1998.

⁷⁹ Balitsari 2017; Balitsari 2020.

⁸⁰ Divari-Valakou 1998; Papadimitriou 2010, 49–50; Papadimitriou et al. 2015, 164–165.

⁸¹ Balitsari 2017.

For the causes of the definitive abandonment of the Aspis hilltop (MH IIIB final/LH I), we had proposed in the past that it could have been connected with the spectacular growth of Mycenae at this very time.⁸² The new case of definitive abandonment in the northern sector of the settlement ('Movement A'), dated quite a bit earlier, certainly cannot be linked to the same events at Mycenae, since, according to the existing evidence the impressive growth had not yet manifested at Mycenae then. Before focusing on possible factors that led to 'Movement A', it is worthwhile to formulate an estimate of the household numbers that moved from the Aspis in MH IIIA. It is estimated with great caution that this group might involve about five or six households, namely at least two households in the northern sector (Houses MI and MJ), and possibly some more from the central and eastern sectors since, as we mentioned above, only a few sherds from the latter sectors are dated to MH IIIB–LH I. We therefore tend to conclude that the northern sector was no longer inhabited in the transitional phase, while the central and eastern sectors became lesser occupied.

The causes that led part of the population to leave the settlement are more likely to be related to internal growing social tensions due to an increase in population (in MH II), and a settlement expansion which ended up becoming a kind of 'village-state'; in this case, as accurately proposed by John Bintliff, the necessity for a more elaborate internal system of social control could have given rise to a minority ruling elite,⁸³ or to the emergence of leadership, as proposed by James Wright.⁸⁴ In the emerging complex and competitive social landscape of MH II–IIIA Argos, the existence of intense confrontations between competing groups would be more than expected. In one of these conflicts, some groups, particularly active and already involved in interconnected networks, chose (or were forced) to leave Argos. Tensions and increased mobility were also developed at a regional level as a result of denser habitation, interaction and competition between settlements over access to foreign trade partners or scarce resources.⁸⁵

Concerning the possible place of relocation of these departing households, it seems likely that they simply went to the southeastern foothills of the Aspis, where architectural remains of MH III were found, though habitation in this area intensifies mainly in MH IIIB/LH I. According to an alternative scenario, groups of 'Movement A' went to Mycenae, thus participating actively in the creation of the upcoming 'Mycenaean Spring'. But why Mycenae? Was the ambience there more welcoming? We suggest that this is a possibility. They might have maintained some kind of relations with local groups at Mycenae since long before (i.e. through exogamies⁸⁶ or as partners in some venture), or perhaps the new place (economically and politically) promised them more. As for the Mycenaeans acting as hosts, they could have been most pleased at such an arrangement because it would offer them more power, new alliances and possibly people with new know-how. In the *longue durée*, this venture indeed proved particularly successful, for all of them.

This hypothesis is based mainly on the fact that Mycenae before MH IIIB does not appear to be a particularly important site, based on the available data. Instead, as we saw above, at MH II Argos a number of developments in architecture ('proto-Cyclopean' fortification wall), craft production (local pottery of excellent quality, metallurgy: e.g. gold pendant, bronze and lead items⁸⁷ and a clay bellow's nozzle/tuyère fragment,⁸⁸ possibly a boar's tusk helmet, see below), and in the sphere of burial practices (construction of tumuli, possibly the built grave with the cremation in the south district), indicated a particularly active and inventive society. All these developments, which Mycenae seems to lack before MH IIIB, were already present at Argos in MH II.

⁸² Philippa-Touchais 2010, 796; Touchais 2013, 110–111.

⁸³ Bintliff 2010, 760.

⁸⁴ Wright 2001; Wright 2004a; Wright 2008a, 242–243; Wright 2008b, 148; Wright 2010.

⁸⁵ Bintliff 2010; Wright 2010; Wiersma 2014, 231.

⁸⁶ On small communities practising exogamy with neighbouring (typically three or four) settlements, see Bintliff 2010.

⁸⁷ Papadimitriou et al. 2015, 163; Kayafa 2016.

⁸⁸ Under study by Konstantina Karaindrou as part of her PhD thesis, entitled "Τεχνολογία, παραγωγή και κεντρική εξουσία στην Ηπειρωτική Ελλάδα κατά την Εποχή του Χαλκού. Η περίπτωση της μεταλλουργίας" (University of Thessaly).

‘Movement B’

This movement concerns the last inhabitants of the Aspis acropolis. Most of them very probably moved to the foothills of the Aspis, where the habitation became denser during the transitional phase. According to the archaeological evidence, most of the architectural remains were located on either side of a paved road of late MH/early LH date, today coinciding with Herakleous Street.⁸⁹ If most of the newcomers from the Aspis hilltop resettled along this road, as we suppose, a possible motivation for this could be a shift of economic activities.

We suggest that this paved road was possibly part of a longer one coming from Lerna, the old port of the Argolid, first to Argos and then on to Mycenae. The road might have connected all three settlements since the early MH period but it may have been paved in the transitional phase for the new needs of Mycenae, which was involved in an unprecedented level of importing valuables, as is indicated by the grave goods of the Shaft Graves. Finished artefacts or precious raw materials arriving by sea, mainly from Crete, would be transported via this road (though perhaps not only) to their final destination at Mycenae. Since Argos was situated at the midway point of this road (measuring some 21 km in total), it is quite plausible that carriages and travellers would stop at some rest house on the ‘proto-Herakleous Street’. Argos could therefore take advantage of being at this focal point of traffic, either by promoting its own agricultural or craft products, or by focusing on some other transport or commercially oriented undertakings. Therefore, the spectacular growth of Mycenae and the creation of a new, potential pole of economic attraction in the lower town of Argos could have contributed to the abandonment of the Aspis. However, more dramatic factors for this abandonment would certainly include the gradual weakening of the community (after ‘Movement A’) and its inability to compete with a neighbouring community, where the most dynamic human resources were now concentrated.

The intense transportation activity along the paved road probably lasted until early LH II at the latest, since after this phase Lerna seems to lose its role as the main port of the Argolid (see below). By LH I, a new harbour was developing at Nauplion on the eastern side of the Argive Gulf,⁹⁰ while during the Palatial period the main port of the Argolid is considered to be Tiryns.⁹¹ Consequently, the main transport road to Mycenae gradually shifted to the eastern part of the plain. We here pass over the exact reasons for this shift, which were probably of a political nature and driven by Mycenae. The certainty is that Argos did not benefit from this shift: it is likely that the former leaders of the Argolid felt aggrieved by this development.

Burial Space: Tradition versus Innovation

In MH IIIB–LH I, a demarcation between the residential and the burial space can be observed on the Aspis settlement, since no burials of this phase have been identified within the citadel. We have already argued that all inhabitants of the Aspis hilltop were now buried in the cemetery in the eastern/southeastern foothills of the Aspis.⁹² However, since the latter area now becomes densely inhabited, the graves are still related to houses⁹³ and not yet segregated in distinct or formal places. This continuous use of the traditional burial ground of MH Argos points out the persistence of traditional burial practices.⁹⁴ It is of great interest, however, that during the excavations of the Archaeological Service in this area some kind of demarcation was noticed between the residential and the burial space, with most buildings being located nearer to the hillside and most

⁸⁹ Segments of its pavement came to light at the northern end of the town, Papadimitriou 2010, 50–52; Papadimitriou et al. 2015, 165, tab. I; 167, tab. 2; 168.

⁹⁰ The wealthy cemetery of Evangelistria dated to LH I–IIIB2 (Protonotariou-Deilaki 1977; Protonotariou-Deilaki 1979) suggests a thriving LH settlement certainly related to maritime trade.

⁹¹ Maran 2015, 282 (with older bibliography).

⁹² Philippa-Touchais 2013, 84; Papadimitriou et al. 2015, 169 n. 67.

⁹³ Divari-Valakou 1998; Papadimitriou, 2010; Papadimitriou et al. 2015, 171–172 and fig. 6b.

⁹⁴ Papadimitriou et al. 2015, 178; Papadimitriou et al. 2020.

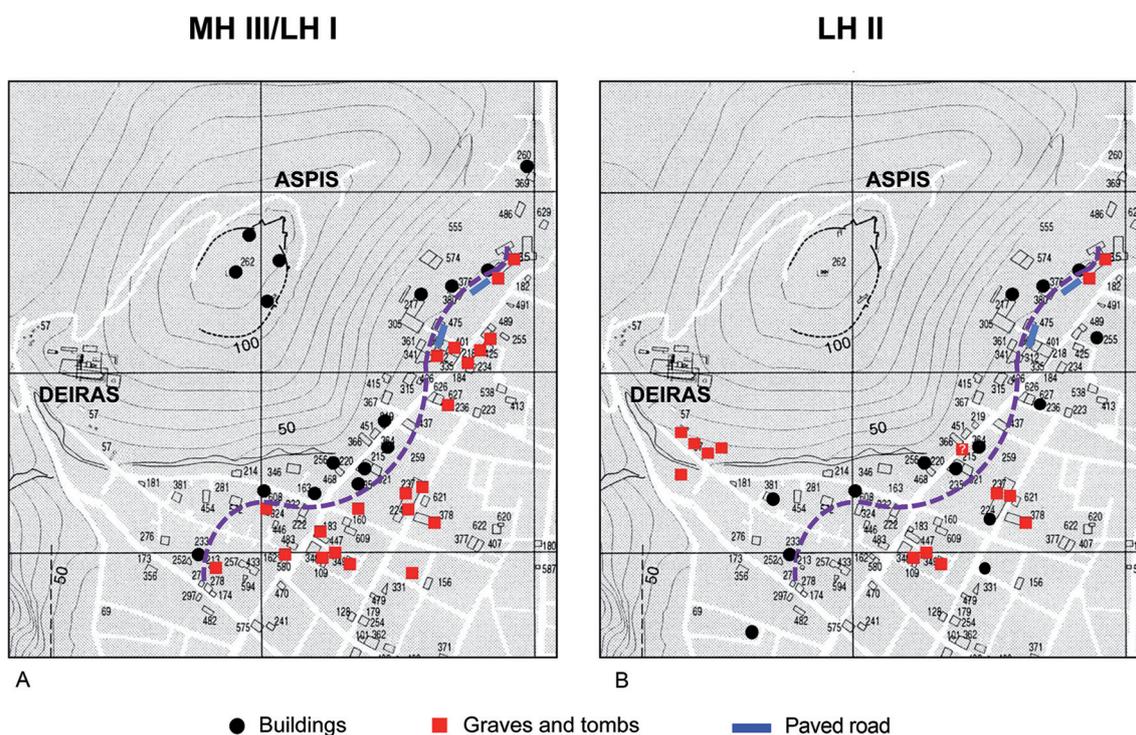


Fig. 10: a–b. The gradual change in the spatial relation between habitation and burial grounds in Argos from MH III/LH I to LH II

graves closer to the plain (Fig. 10a).⁹⁵ The hypothetical line separating the two spaces follows the relief of the Aspis foothills (Fig. 10a, in dotted line), as does likewise the course of the two excavated sections of the paved road leading towards Mycenae (Fig. 10a, in blue). This being so, the paved road would have physically demarcated these two differently utilised spaces. It could also be proposed that the burial ground, lying all along the east side of the site, gives the impression of a kind of symbolic ‘bastion’ for the protection of the settlement.

Moreover, at this time (MH IIIB–LH I) there is still no significant change in the special treatment of the dead. Most burials continued to be individual, in the traditional MH types of graves, and without exceptional offerings.⁹⁶ Certainly some change does occur: several MH IIIB graves contain offerings of some value (e.g. gold bands, bronze weapons and tools),⁹⁷ while two published built chamber tombs contained multiple burials with some LH I pottery.⁹⁸ Furthermore, two unpublished graves probably dating to MH IIIB–LH I should be considered exceptional, as they seem to belong to warriors. The first, in the southeastern foothills of the Aspis (in the area of MH ‘Tumulus A’), contained a boar’s tusk helmet in excellent condition, which was dated by Imma Kilian-Dirlmeier as prior to the transitional phase (i.e. MH II);⁹⁹ however, this early date cannot be confirmed before all the grave goods have been studied. The second grave, in the South Quarter (area of the municipal stadium, southern foothills of the Larissa), contained at least two individuals equipped with exceptional offerings, such as a bronze sword and other bronze weapons, a silver cup, a gold ring, beads of gold and carnelian, several ivory items and fragments probably coming from a boar’s tusk helmet.¹⁰⁰ This grave, as well as the presence of some others of MH IIIB–LH I date from the

⁹⁵ Papadimitriou 2010, 52; Papadimitriou et al. 2015, 171–172; Papadimitriou et al. 2020.

⁹⁶ Voutsaki et al. 2009, 178–179 (by E. Milka).

⁹⁷ For a review, see Papadimitriou et al. 2015, 172, with bibliography.

⁹⁸ Papadimitriou 2001; for a review, see Papadimitriou et al. 2015, 173, with bibliography.

⁹⁹ Kilian-Dirlmeier 1997, 40, 45–47.

¹⁰⁰ Aikaterini Barakari-Gleni, personal communication; the tomb, excavated in 1987, was dated to LH I (Touchais – Divari-Valakou 1998, 12 n. 20; see also Papadimitriou et al. 2015, 176).

same area, excavated by the Archaeological Service¹⁰¹ or by the French School,¹⁰² may imply that the South Quarter was not completely abandoned during the transitional phase.

These novelties, though significant, are, however, rather exceptional within the prevailing burial ideology, which still does not seem to favour the use of the burial ground for conspicuous consumption or for self-aggrandisement. This perseverance in adhering to the traditional attitudes toward death is certainly related to the dominant conservative aspect of the community. Perhaps this conservatism was among the causes of tension and conflict within groups of the community, namely between traditional lineages and more innovative ones which were shaping and negotiating collective identities through new social practices and funerary rituals.¹⁰³

The Regional Socio-Political Landscape and the AC in the Transitional Phase

Concerning the socio-political landscape at a regional level, data from Lerna in this period are scarce: since MH III Lerna had been gradually shrinking and the residential area was later confined to only part of the site, unless another area was selected for habitation,¹⁰⁴ as in the case of the Aspis. Evidence, deriving mainly from burials and two large LH I shaft graves,¹⁰⁵ although denoting the presence of important funerary rituals and some affluent groups in the area, does not bear witness to the existence of a developed settlement such as that of MH I–II.¹⁰⁶ As for Mycenae, even if the evidence comes exclusively from the world of burial, it clearly suggests a thriving community with a rapidly increasing potential.

We could thus conclude that in terms of the AC, both for Argos and for Lerna the MH III–LH I period provided social disturbances and, to a certain degree, disruption of the (pre-)existing system: total or partial abandonment of habitation areas, relocations of population groups,¹⁰⁷ increased need for spatial demarcation and control ('Peripheral Complex' in the case of the Aspis) deriving from a rise in internal and regional conflicts,¹⁰⁸ a shift in economic activities, increasing introversion underlined by the decrease in exchanges and the development of locally produced ceramics (at least in the case of Argos),¹⁰⁹ continuing variation in funerary practices, relatively few rich graves and uneven expression of personal status. In Argos, although there does not seem to be a general population decline or an economic recession, still one cannot argue that there is any social or political stability, since the existence of the Upper and the Lower Town may indicate some intra-communal tensions. It could be suggested, therefore, that Argos enters a phase with elements of social disintegration and release (Fig. 2a), as is probably the case in Lerna. Instead, Mycenae offers many clues in terms of a population increase, suggesting the arrival of new population elements, an active exchange, growth in economic and political power, competitive consumption in death and personal status defined in funerary performances. Of course, here too, there exists variability in pottery¹¹⁰ and heterogeneity in burial practices,¹¹¹ both characteristic of periods of reorganisation and exploitation. All told, we would propose that Mycenae is making spectacular advances and is entering the front loop (Fig. 3).

¹⁰¹ K. Barakari-Gleni, personal communication.

¹⁰² Touchais 1998, 74; Papadimitriou et al. 2015, 169; Balitsari 2017.

¹⁰³ Papadimitriou 2011; Papadimitriou 2016; Boyd 2016.

¹⁰⁴ Wiencke 1998, 207.

¹⁰⁵ Wiencke 1998, 207; Lindblom 2007; Lindblom – Ekroth 2016.

¹⁰⁶ See also Voutsaki – Milka 2017, 118.

¹⁰⁷ Maran 1995, 68.

¹⁰⁸ See also Maran 1995, 69; Wright 2010.

¹⁰⁹ Philippa-Touchais 2007, 112; Voutsaki et al. 2009, 168.

¹¹⁰ Rutter 2010; Rutter 2015.

¹¹¹ Cavanagh – Mee 1998, 34.

LH II: Ruptures with the Past and the Emergence of Innovations

In LH II, mainly in LH IIB, important changes at Argos indicate a process of development and an effort to create a new collective identity, one that is different from the past.

Burial Space: The Innovations

The biggest change took place in the burial sphere. Five large chamber tombs inaugurated a new burial ground at some distance from the settlement, in the Deiras ravine (Fig. 10b).¹¹² The new type of monumental tomb and the formal cemetery are closely intertwined with new burial practices, as part of a novel funerary ideology. The large Chamber Tombs VI and VII preserved part of their wealthy offerings: gold jewellery, many ivory items, palatial jars, etc., clearly suggesting that the Deiras cemetery and the concurrent novel funerary ideology were inaugurated by privileged members of the Argos society seeking to display power, claim access to networks of exchange, and emphasise their identities and lineages (by breaking away from tradition).¹¹³ Even so, a large part of the population is still buried within the old cemetery in the foothills of the Aspis (Fig. 10b).¹¹⁴ The prolonged use of this burial ground next to the residential area suggests the symbolic power of the ancestors' place over the landscape of Argos until LH IIB/IIIA1.

Settlement Space: A Site Under Construction

The Aspis citadel was now definitively abandoned and habitation confined to the Lower Town. The data from this new settlement space are very scanty.¹¹⁵ However, the emerging use of a new burial ground led to the gradual expansion of the settlement to the east and the occupation of the area of the former cemetery by secular buildings, a process that becomes more apparent in LH III.¹¹⁶ The progressive 'encroachment' into the traditional funerary space by a new residential district may also have some symbolic significance. The levelling of the ancestors' living-burial locales to accommodate the expansion of the settlement and the configuration of a new residential landscape could be considered as another arena for breaking away from tradition, promoting new lineages and ideologies,¹¹⁷ and reshaping collective identity.

The Regional Socio-Political Landscape and the AC in LH II

In terms of the AC, at the beginning of LH II (LH I–IIA) Argos is undergoing a period of reorganisation (back loop, Fig. 2b), since there is still a prolonged fluidity between the burial and the residential space, which perhaps reflects weak social connectedness and consistency. LH IIB is a period that can be characterised by intensive experimentation, agency and increasing growth: the first definite innovations in the burial and settlement areas suggest evolving structures, while rich and exotic grave goods underline the capacity to exploit resources and opportunities, as well as the active participation and integration in regional networks. We think that Argos presents many characteristics of a community entering the fore loop (Fig. 2b). By that time, though, Lerna no longer seems to be following a course similar to Argos; the latest burials on the mound date

¹¹² Philippa-Touchais – Papadimitriou 2015; Papadimitriou et al. 2015; Papadimitriou et al. 2020.

¹¹³ Philippa-Touchais – Papadimitriou 2015, 462–465.

¹¹⁴ Papadimitriou et al. 2015, 174 and fig. 6d.

¹¹⁵ Papadimitriou et al. 2015, 166–168, with detailed bibliography.

¹¹⁶ Papadimitriou et al. 2020.

¹¹⁷ Eder 2016.

to early LH IIB and the area is not inhabited again until sometime within LH IIIA2: “It may be that the earlier wealthy elite failed in some way to sustain their influence after LH IIB.”¹¹⁸ As for Mycenae, the evidence, albeit coming almost exclusively from the burial sphere,¹¹⁹ indicates an increasing differentiation of status and the consolidation of an elite class;¹²⁰ this evidence clearly testifies to its upward course within the phase of exploitation (Fig. 3).

Conclusions

From the very beginning of the MH period, the community established on the strategic Aspis hilltop was apparently able to exploit in an effective and successful way the territorial dynamics of the Argive Plain, where the coexistence of two rivers, a wetland, and the proximity of the sea favoured a diversified agro-pastoral economy and at the same time marine communication and exchange.¹²¹ Argos underwent spectacular growth in MH II, something that is particularly interesting because it does not conform to the traditional narrative for that period.¹²² Most features of this growth (i.e. settlement expansion and consolidation, collective action, technical improvement in architecture, increased spatial control, increased imports, elements of standardisation in material culture, socio-economic complexity, connectedness and social networking) allow us to argue that this phase may be viewed, according to the AC model, as a period of exploitation and conservation through the so-called front loop. However, some prolonged features of diversity (e.g. the lack of standardisation in burial practices) suggest that MH II late/III A Argos, though in a phase of spectacular expansion, had possibly not reached a fully developed functioning of the conservation phase, as conceived in the AC model.

About the beginning of MH III (MH IIIA), at least one area of the Aspis settlement was definitively abandoned (northern sector). We assume that intra-communal rival groups might have come into conflict and some of them decided to move elsewhere. A possible destination might have been Mycenae. This hypothesis is not based on any conclusive data (which in any case are very difficult to find) and therefore must be regarded as rather fragile. In a recent article, Maran was led to a similar conjecture: “It would be important to know whether these persons [who were buried in the shaft graves of Mycenae and who must have had an active role in subverting the old system and shaping new norms, values and practices...] originated from Mycenae or were recent arrivals who had split off from Argos to regroup themselves against their former community.”¹²³ We believe that the new evidence from Argos may support this hypothesis; in any case it is gratifying to have arrived at similar assumptions via different paths.

At the beginning of the transitional phase (MH IIIB–LH I), Argos underwent a period of restructuring, but essentially it was a period of concern and introversion. The settlement extends to the Lower Town, but the acropolis on the Aspis is weakened and presents contradictory characteristics: while the living space is reduced, which means that the community has declined in number, an impressive building programme is conceived, encircling at least part of the settlement by an imposing complex. We do not know whether this ‘Peripheral Complex’ was built under conditions of socio-political insecurity or, as proposed for the building programmes at Tiryns in final LH IIIB, with a “feeling of security, which prevented the political dignitaries from comprehending how much the foundation of their society had been weakened.”¹²⁴ In the interior of this

¹¹⁸ Wiencke 1998, 208.

¹¹⁹ French – Shelton 2005; Shelton 2010.

¹²⁰ Dickinson 1994, 222.

¹²¹ Philippa-Touchais et al. 2014, 531–532; Chabrol 2018.

¹²² See also new evidence from Plasi Marathon (Polychronakou-Sgouritsa et al. 2016), and Vrana Marathon (Pantelidou-Gofa et al. 2016a; Pantelidou-Gofa et al. 2016b; Pantelidou-Gofa et al. 2018); on Vrana Marathon and the existence of marked social inequality prior to the Shaft Grave period, see also Maran 2011, 285.

¹²³ Maran 2015, 278.

¹²⁴ Maran 2015, 283.

complex, or at least in some of its buildings, ceremonial forms of commensality were employed, perhaps with a view to strengthening the disturbed social cohesion.¹²⁵

By the end of this phase, despite the restructuring efforts, the acropolis of Argos was eventually abandoned. Signs of the community's recession now become clearer: the loss of spatial control over a strategic and powerful position, and the pause in collective action are indications of socio-political and moral weakening. Therefore, we may deduce that, according to the AC model, the transitional phase marks a short phase of release for Argos. However, it should be emphasised that this was not a collapse, nor a crisis on a scale that could have dramatically disrupted the social cohesion of the community. Data from the habitation in the Lower Town and the funerary area illustrate a community resisting difficulties and maintaining its roots.

The phase of trouble and introversion lasted until the beginning of LH IIB, when Argos ceased to uphold its traditional cemetery and introduced radical reforms in the social space such as a new burial ground and a new residential district on the ancestors' ground. These reforms suggest the adoption, by some influential groups, of new ideologies and behaviours, more in conformity with the general practice of the time, and the beginning of a new period of growth. However, despite these changes it seems that the negative impact of the social and political difficulties faced by the community during the Transitional phase led Argos to lose its leading role and turn into a secondary political power throughout the LH period.

In closing, we would like to stress the most significant elements that emerge through the application of the AC model, namely a rather remarkable diversity and a lack of synchronisation between the various ACs. This is not unexpected since "societies are not homogenous whose members work towards common goals. Instead each society forms a unique social space."¹²⁶ Indeed, the life cycles of communities do not always correspond with each other, the advances and retreats do not follow the same pace and do not have the same dynamics. Mycenae, in our opinion, traced a long and slow AC (MH I–LH IIIC), possibly spent almost the entire MH period (MH I–IIIA) in the back loop and a longer and stable period in the front loop (MH IIIB/LH I–LH IIIB). Argos, however, within the same period, traced, according to our analysis, two shorter and faster cycles of adaptive change: an intensive but unstable one (MH I–MH IIIB/LH I), and a moderate but more stable one (LH IIA–LH IIIC). As for Lerna, it went through an AC similar to that of Argos during the MH period, but in and after the early Mycenaean period its traces are not tangible enough for us to follow its course.

Another element related to the diversity of the various cycles can be detected in the differentiation of their intensity level. A characteristic difference between Argos and Mycenae was that Mycenae's cycle was marked by a spectacular rise and a spectacular fall, while the ups and downs of Argos were more numerous but less intense. Thanks to its temperate pace, due probably to a more moderate socio-political complexity and a higher resilience, Argos managed to withstand and recover more easily from stresses: the relatively small crisis at the end of the MH, but also the more serious one at the end of LH period. In the latter crisis, it is well known that there were also population movements, and indeed on a much larger scale than any postulated in MH III–LH I.

Taking into consideration the strategy of migration or fragmentation in the face of stresses¹²⁷ and the heterogeneity of the various communities, we would like to add a small note on the interpretation of the discontinuities in the history of settlements during the Shaft Grave period.¹²⁸ Klaus Kilian saw these discontinuities as signs of a recession of settlement activities, while Joseph Maran connected them with the restructuring of the settlements and therefore saw them as signs of progress. We think that the problem is, to a great extent, one of trying to deduce conclusions valid for all cases, or emphasise uniformity over a phenomenon that is, in fact, heterogeneous.¹²⁹ Restructuring may indeed upgrade the construction of society, but may also degrade it. In the

¹²⁵ Philippa-Touchais 2010, 794–795.

¹²⁶ Maran 2015, 278.

¹²⁷ Cunningham 2017, 17.

¹²⁸ Maran 1995, with bibliography.

¹²⁹ Wright 2004c; Wright 2008a, 230–231.

case of Argos, the restructuring in the transitional phase was clearly, contrary to Mycenae, one of lowering in status, while for Lerna it was a phase of decline. Therefore, it seems that changes discerned in the Shaft Grave period do not fit into a single and homogeneously applicable model, and that life cycles of sites, even when taking place in a similar cultural context, depend on diverse choices based on background conditions, internal dynamics and ambient conjunctures. Moreover, it seems that this multiplicity, which underlies the transformations in the very early LH societies, not only did not prevent most of them from developing, each one in its own way, but instead allowed for increasing activity, ingenuity and new aspects of connectedness and uniformity.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1: The cyclical model of the Adaptive Cycle. Online <<https://www.resalliance.org/adaptive-cycle>> (last access 7 Feb. 2020)

Fig. 2: The proposed Adaptive Cycles for Argos in the MH (2a) and the LH (2b) periods respectively (drawings: V. Philippa)

Fig. 3: The proposed Adaptive Cycle for Mycenae in the MH and the LH periods (drawing: V. Philippa)

Fig. 4: Aspis, Argos, topographic plan with vestiges of all periods. Sectors I–III excavated by W. Vollgraff (1902–1903). Sectors IV (southeast) and V (north) excavated under the direction of G. Touchais, French School at Athens (1974–1990, 2011). Cleaning took place in Sector II (east) in 2006–2007. The two stars in the southeast sector (IV) and the east sector (II) indicate the location of the MH I–II early pottery deposits (plan: L. Fadin; École française d’Athènes)

Fig. 5: Pottery from the ‘Ghost House’, southeast sector (drawings: Y. Nakas; École française d’Athènes)

Fig. 6: Aspis, Argos. Reconstruction of Aspis Phase III (MH II late – MH IIIA). In Sectors I and II (excavated in 1903) the presence of houses of this phase is suggested by Vollgraff’s plan and the dating of the pottery preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Argos and the NMA (drawing: V. Philippa)

Fig. 7: Aspis, northern sector. The inner face of the ‘proto-Cyclopean’ MH II late fortification wall

Fig. 8: The gold pendant from the Aspis settlement (photo: R. Prévalet; École française d’Athènes)

Fig. 9: Aspis, Argos. Artistic reconstruction of Aspis phase IV (MH IIIB – LH I). In this phase, the houses of the northern sector are abandoned as some of the houses of the central and eastern sectors (drawing: Y. Nakas, colouring: A. Goumas; based on the reconstruction of this phase published in Philippa-Touchais 2010, 801, fig. 10)

Fig. 10: a–b. The gradual change in the spatial relation between habitation and burial grounds in Argos from MH III/LH I to LH II