

KONSTANTINA AKTYPI,¹ *The Mycenaean Cemetery at Agios Vasileios, Chalandritsa, in Achaea*. Archaeopress, Oxford 2017, Paperback, xii+296 pages, 29 b/w and 258 colour figures, 8 tables, 3 colour maps, paperback, ISBN 978-1-78491-697-8.

In recent decades the archaeology of Mycenaean Achaea and the north-western Peloponnese in general has developed into a very active, interesting, and somewhat idiosyncratic research field within Late Bronze Age Greece (c. 1600–1060 BC). Its peculiarity lies principally in two factors. The first is the distinctive character of the region under discussion when compared to the palatial states of the Mycenaean world. In contrast to the palatial centres of southern Greece that flourished during the period c. 1400–1200 BC, the north-western Peloponnese belongs to the so-called Mycenaean periphery.² As a result, it lacks the clear historical reference points provided by the rise and collapse of the Mycenaean palaces. Since no palatial structures have yet been located in Achaea, both the historical assessment and social interpretation of the Late Bronze Age archaeological record are extremely difficult tasks. This is especially true with regard to the Early Mycenaean period (Late Helladic I–II) and the Mycenaean Palatial period (Late Helladic IIIA–B). Despite the gradual appropriation of Mycenaean material culture from the beginning of the Late Bronze Age onwards, it is possible that during these periods, in terms of social complexity at least, Achaea experienced its ‘long Middle Helladic period’.³ The second peculiarity of Mycenaean archaeology in Achaea is the unbalanced state of research, in that the large number of excavated cemeteries contrasts with the very few excavated settlements. A 2008 site survey, for example, recorded 52 cemeteries compared to only seven settlements.⁴ New field projects, such as the promising excavation of the settlement of Mygdalia in Petrotó,⁵ will hopefully yield qualitative evidence which will enable us to gradually bridge this major quantitative gap.

Within this not entirely unrestrictive research framework, every new publication of primary archaeological

material enhances the wider picture and poses important interpretative challenges. Konstantina Aktypi’s 2017 publication of the Mycenaean chamber tomb cemetery at Agios Vasileios in Chalandritsa is a very welcome and significant step forward in the study of Mycenaean Achaea. The cemetery of Agios Vasileios was initially investigated by Nikolaos Kyparisses between 1928 and 1930. After the repeated and intensive looting of the site, the excavations were resumed by the Greek Archaeological Service in 1961 and in the years between 1989 and 2001. Aktypi’s monograph, with contributions by Olivia Jones and Vivian Staikou, presents the archaeological material from 45 chamber tombs, which consists of c. 260 artefacts dating from the beginning of the Late Helladic (LH) IIIA to the LH IIIC Late period (c. 1400–1060 BC). In this review, I will at first present the structure, organisation, and content of the publication and then proceed to a discussion of certain general and particular aspects of it. Finally, I will try to make use of the publication under review to express some more general thoughts regarding the current and future prospects for Mycenaean archaeology in Achaea.

The volume consists of nine chapters (A–I), some of which are divided into subsections. In the preface, the author briefly presents the research history of the Mycenaean cemetery at Agios Vasileios as well as the history of her own engagement with the site, its archaeological material and Mycenaean Achaea in general. As she points out,⁶ one of the major aims of the publication is to highlight the importance of a cemetery that has repeatedly fallen prey to looters and to provide evidence that might lead to the identification of the stolen finds. Without a more detailed introductory note on the work’s methodological framework, Chapter A focusses on the topography of the Chalandritsa-Katarraktis region, an important Mycenaean nucleus in the region of ancient Pharai, south-west of Patras. The author correctly underlines the importance of the geographical setting of this region which connects the coastal area of Patras with the central, mountainous Achaean hinterland.⁷ She discusses the topographical features of Mycenaean settlements and provides a brief catalogue of 35 ancient sites. Chapter A.4

1 With contributions by Olivia A. Jones and Vivian Staikou.

2 For the periphery of the Mycenaean world see FROUSSOU 1999. – KYPARISSI-APOSTOLIKA, PAPA-KONSTANTINOY 2003.

3 The term is used here by analogy with the ‘long Hellenistic period’, a concept advanced by the ancient historian A. Chaniotis: see CHANIOTIS 2018. – For a recent discussion of the social development in Achaea during the LH IIIA and LH IIIB periods see ARENA 2015.

4 GIANNOPOULOS 2008, 95. – For a more recent survey of the main sites see ARENA 2015, 8–14.

5 PAPA-ZOGLU-MANI-ODAKI, PASCHALIDIS 2017.

6 p. XII.

7 pp. 1, 8.

presents the research history of the cemetery of Agios Vasileios in greater detail and suggests a direct relationship with the neighbouring Mycenaean settlement of Stavros. The plausible link between the two sites is illustrated in an orthophotomap, Figure 3.⁸ This part of the volume is enhanced by the inclusion of high quality photos from both the old and the more recent excavations at Agios Vasileios. Chapter A concludes with a brief consideration of the medieval and modern history of Chalandritsa. Chapters B to E form the core of the publication, presenting the tombs in the cemetery and the finds associated with them. In most cases the publication includes useful 3D-reconstructions of the tombs as well as a 2D-visualisation of the position of the finds inside the chambers and in the *dromoi*. Chapter F is Staikou's account of the small finds of stone and shell, while Chapter G is Jones' bioarchaeological study of the human remains from the cemetery. A general discussion of the finds by Aktypi is presented in Chapter H, while Chapter I and the Epilogue provide a series of concluding remarks on the topography of the site, the tombs, and the finds.

The first step in assessing Aktypi's publication is to acknowledge that every new monographic publication of long excavated archaeological finds constitutes an important research milestone. The author undoubtedly deserves high praise for responsibly using her publication rights in order to make the finds under discussion accessible to the wider scientific audience. Moreover, in order to make sense of the excavation data, the author had to overcome several serious difficulties, including the disturbance of many contexts by looters and the inadequate documentation of the older excavations. Despite these restrictive conditions, Aktypi's publication of the material is very competent, since it successfully combines a traditional analysis of chronology, typology, and classification with advanced technical presentation. In this regard, the numerous digital reconstructions, highly effective visual reconstructions of the excavation data pertaining to the shape of the tombs and the context of the finds inside the chambers or even in the *dromoi*, are particularly notable.⁹ Furthermore, one of the most positive features of the volume is that all the finds are illustrated with colour photographs of excellent quality. Such colour illustrations undoubtedly convey a very accurate impression of the finds and are of great value for all specialists in Mycenaean material culture. To a certain extent, these colour pictures also compensate for the lack of drawings.¹⁰ Ideally, of course, drawings and photographs should both have

been provided as, for instance, in the case of the stirrup jar shown in Figure 208,¹¹ where the interesting potter's 'sign' on the underside of the vase mentioned by the author¹² is not visible in the photograph. Another remark relating to the technical aspects of both the work under review and also to other publications is that, in the reviewer's opinion, the illustrations of the finds are actually more easily accessible if presented at the end of the volume rather than embedded into the main chapters. Since such a separate section is normally restricted to a much more limited part of the book, the navigation of the reader between the illustrations becomes significantly easier. Regarding the textual description of the better preserved and documented tombs (in chapters C–E), another feature that could have made the publication even more user-friendly would have been an introductory or concluding summary outlining the chronology and the number of grave goods found in each tomb.

Apart from these technical aspects, the archaeological study of the finds of Agios Vasileios demonstrates the author's competent and up-to-date command of both the relevant scholarly literature and the material under consideration. The finds from the cemetery encompass almost the whole range of well-known Achaean funerary offerings of this period, clearly indicating that Agios Vasileios was an important Mycenaean site in western Achaea. In terms of the pottery, most of the known shapes and designs are represented, including stirrup jars, alabaster, *amphoriskoi*, piriform jars, duck vases, ring vases, large two- and four-handled jars as well as the typical Achaean evenly-spaced decorative banding of LH IIIC Middle and Late date.¹³ There are also interesting cases of find associations, something also recognised on other Achaean sites. These include, for example, the stirrup jar with a pedestal (no. 231) and the bronze knife (no. 228) with a characteristic handle ending in a loop, which were found in Tomb 44.¹⁴ An identical association of finds is known from Tomb 2 at Spaliareika, with the stirrup jar (no. 35) and the razor (no. 38) forming part of an assemblage which reveals Cretan influences.¹⁵

With respect to relative chronology, the author is absolutely correct to acknowledge the difficulties of dating ceramic grave offerings on stylistic grounds.¹⁶ In contrast to the numerous grave finds, the lack of well-stratified and published settlement deposits in western Achaea deprives us of the solid evidential basis required for establishing a

⁸ pp. 11–12.

⁹ See, e.g., pp. 30–31 and figs. 27–28 and pp. 59–60 with figs. 71–72.

¹⁰ E.g. figs. 202–206.

¹¹ p. 152.

¹² p. 231.

¹³ E.g. figs. 139, 141, 205–206.

¹⁴ pp. 160–162, 230, 249–250 and figs. 222, 225.

¹⁵ GIANNOPOULOS 2008, 230–233 and pls. 25/35–38, 41/35–38.

¹⁶ p. 238.

reliable chronology. Regarding the LH IIIC period,¹⁷ the author wisely stresses the difficulties of introducing a local chronological system based on the styles of pottery found in funerary contexts.¹⁸ The study of Tomb 2 at Spaliareika in western Achaea¹⁹ left the author of this review with the impression that even a seemingly well-preserved context in a Mycenaean chamber tomb might have been significantly disturbed and, hence, might also be quite deceptive in terms of identifying the primary contexts of the human remains and their contemporary grave goods. Despite the limitations inherent in relying on available stylistic criteria, Aktypi's ceramic analysis is comprehensive and her chronological assessments are convincing. The discussion of the pottery finds is organised by chronological periods,²⁰ an arrangement that could have been even more successful if it had been accompanied by an introductory or concluding overview of the quantitative chronological distribution of the ceramic offerings. An additional summary of the results, organised by pottery shapes, would have further enhanced our understanding of the overall ceramic development at Agios Vasileios.

Another very welcome aspect of the publication is the incorporation of the fragmentary pottery finds from the *dromoi* of the tombs.²¹ These pottery sherds, mostly from open shapes such as kylikes or craters, deserve every excavator's attention, since they provide important evidence of Mycenaean burial customs and of the rituals conducted in the *dromoi*. The author's interest in a well-balanced presentation of the whole range of finds is further expressed in the integration of Staikou's study of the small finds of stone and shell (Chapter F) into the volume. This is another example of the author's concern with a diachronic perspective on the site, since many of the published stone finds do not necessarily date to the Mycenaean period.²²

Jones' bio-archaeological account of the human remains (Chapter G) is particularly thorough and systematic. Jones' study is not restricted to the presentation of the basic osteological data for each tomb, but it also goes into a theoretical analysis and interpretation of the Mycenaean mortuary practices. Apart from important statistical evidence regarding the age and sex ratios of the Agios Vasileios sample,²³ Jones' careful study of the excavated evidence also includes a very interesting hypothesis regarding the use of Mycenaean

chamber tombs. According to Jones, the excavation data from Agios Vasileios suggest that tombs were sometimes reopened solely for the secondary treatment and burial of bones and/or artefacts. Consequently, in at least some cases, the final actions within the tombs were in fact secondary burial practices rather than interments of new individuals.²⁴ This is an important and plausible suggestion generating a very constructive theoretical discussion regarding the definition of the 'last actions' in the use of a Mycenaean chamber tomb. It is certainly a matter of debate whether the recorded secondary burial practices were indeed the intentional last actions in the sequence or just a preparation stage for future additional burials within the tombs that simply (and for reasons unknown) never took place. In any case, as Jones correctly points out, variation in the character of the burials makes generalisations quite difficult and a larger sample from other sites might reveal a much more complex pattern.²⁵

Jones' constructive links between data and interpretation leads the reviewer to conclude with some general thoughts regarding the wider perspective of Mycenaean archaeology in Achaea. Aktypi's work undoubtedly enriches the dataset of Mycenaean Achaea with well-published primary archaeological material from an important cemetery. The thorough study of the traditional essentials of archaeology (chronology, classification, typology, and stylistic analysis) properly introduces the finds from Agios Vasileios into the scientific discussion. As Matthew Johnson, however, so lucidly stresses, our archaeological finds actually belong to the present.²⁶ Consequently, the next challenge for all of us working in the field of Mycenaean Achaea is to find ways to translate the present material evidence into meaningful interpretations of the past, in terms of historical and social reconstruction. In recent decades, many scholars have attempted to reconstruct the social development in Achaea despite the limitations and imbalances of the archaeological record. Emiliano Arena²⁷ and Sophia Kaskantiri²⁸ offer the most up-to-date and bibliographically informed summaries of the relevant discussions and arguments. It would be interesting to know how the material evidence from Agios Vasileios fits into this 'big picture' and especially how it helps us to further elucidate, in social terms, the peripheral character of Achaea in comparison to the palatial Mycenaean world. How are we, for instance, to interpret the very

¹⁷ p. 262 with n. 612.

¹⁸ MOSCHOS 2009 with Table 1.

¹⁹ GIANOPOULOS 2008, 221–237.

²⁰ pp. 210–249.

²¹ E.g. pp. 135–145 and figs. 183–194.

²² p. 185.

²³ Fig. 278.

²⁴ p. 208.

²⁵ p. 208.

²⁶ JOHNSON 2010, 12.

²⁷ ARENA 2015.

²⁸ KASKANTIRI 2016, 417–435.

limited evidence regarding LH IIIB in Agios Vasileios?²⁹ Since the same phenomenon has been observed in other sites in the Patras area (including Krini, Klauss, and Voudeni,³⁰ it seems that a pattern is beginning to emerge which requires an explanation. A hypothesis worth examining in the future is that during LH IIIB a modest process of urban centralisation might have taken place, with the semi-mountainous regions around Patras gradually being depopulated to the benefit of a more central, coastal, and important site.³¹ Although this suggestion must, of course, be fully evaluated in the future, it indicates the potential of incorporating the material into plausible interpretative models.

In my view, there are also other finds from Agios Vasileios that can contribute to the study of social processes. As an example, let us consider the pottery vessels found in the excavated chamber tombs, which bear a close resemblance (in terms of shape and decoration) both to each other and to vases found on other sites in the north-western Peloponnese. Particularly notable in this context is the phenomenon of the 'twin or identical' vases.³² Aktypi correctly lays emphasis on these ceramic resemblances and in many cases tries to trace them back to the hand of the same potter.³³ Vases decorated by the same potters certainly existed in Mycenaean times and the search for them is not unknown in Mycenaean archaeology. The case study of the Mycenaean pictorial craters of the LH IIIA2–IIIB period found in Cyprus, where an attempt was made to ascribe certain vessels to specific painters (e.g. Protome Painter A), is of particular importance.³⁴ This was part of a wider characterisation project regarding the origins of Mycenaean pottery in Cyprus,³⁵ in which the art historical methods of classical archaeology produced some useful results. In the case of Agios Vasileios, and Mycenaean Achaea in general, the search for individual potters or workshops is certainly a legitimate enterprise which could contribute significantly to our general understanding of the pottery production processes. However, it would be also fruitful to explore the social significance of the same group of finds. Could, for example, the similar or 'twin' vessels, many of which date to LH IIIC Early period,³⁶

betray not just the actions of individual potters, but a much larger process of supra-regional standardisation in pottery production across parts of the north-western Peloponnese? And if this is the case, what kinds of social, demographic, and political conditions made this standardisation process necessary at the beginning of the post-palatial period? Are we faced here with the first signs of social developments that eventually came to be reflected in the later and quite homogeneous LH IIIC Middle and Late Achaean style pottery?

Furthermore, the implicit influence of certain traditions of classical archaeology can also be detected in specific assumptions regarding gender roles in pottery production. In this case, the fact that many famous painters and potters of Classical Antiquity were men (e.g. Exekias, Andokides) seems to generate the presumption that pottery production was in general a male-dominated activity.³⁷ There is, however, no reason to exclude the possibility that, at least in peripheral areas of the Mycenaean world, women were also involved in pottery production and/or decoration, something that is well attested in other archaeological and anthropological contexts.³⁸ These issues cannot, of course, be addressed solely on the basis of the present evidence from Agios Vasileios. Nevertheless, they indicate the importance of socio-anthropological concerns in addition to art historical approaches.

These theoretical considerations bring us to our last point. In enriching our dataset with another assemblage of primary archaeological evidence, Aktypi's work highlights the necessity of something that has been pending for decades: a conference on Mycenaean Achaea. By bringing together all scholars engaged in the field as well as published and still unpublished material,³⁹ such a conference would pave the way for constructively and explicitly confronting the data with theoretical and interpretative concerns. Mycenaean Achaea is still a jigsaw puzzle with many important missing pieces and these are to be understood not only as pieces of new material evidence but also as parts of new interpretative pathways. In summing up, Aktypi's publication of the cemetery of Agios Vasileios in Chalandritsa fulfils the aim of introducing the archaeological finds of an important Achaean cemetery to the wider scientific audience. It provides a sufficient study of the chronological, typological, and stylistic

²⁹ pp. 217–220, 284.

³⁰ MOSCHOS 2002, 32. – KASKANTIRI 2016, 278, 414.

³¹ The LH IIIB period seems indeed to be better represented in the hitherto uncovered material evidence in Patras (Odos Germanou, Pagona). – For a summary of the Mycenaean finds from Patras see GIANNOPOULOS 2008, 60–64.

³² p. 263 and Fig. 279.

³³ E.g. p. 224.

³⁴ VERMEULE, KARAGEORGHIS 1982, 173–177.

³⁵ For the history of research see IMMERWAHR 1993.

³⁶ pp. 220–228.

³⁷ p. 222: 'These elements can probably be related to a potter who tries to imitate motives with which he is familiar...'

³⁸ See e.g. KELLY, HEIDKE 2016.

³⁹ It is, e.g., worth mentioning that the publication under review contains many references to pottery finds from the Achaean cemetery of Voudeni, even to a ceramic 'Voudeni workshop' (p. 233). However, the finds of Voudeni are still unpublished and, as a result, the reader cannot properly assess these parallels.

aspects of the material, accompanied by high quality colour illustrations, 2D- and 3D-reconstructions, tables, and maps. It demonstrates a very welcome interest in the whole range of archaeological evidence and in the diachronic perspective on the site. Consequently, the main challenge for the future is to incorporate this material into fruitful theoretical and interpretative models seeking to illuminate Achaea's social structure and historical development in Mycenaean times. In any case, although not as famous as the homonymous site in Laconia, the Achaean Agios Vasileios in Chalandritsa is now, thanks to this publication, in the process of becoming another point of reference for Mycenaean archaeology.

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