

# The Archaeological Site of Kleidi-Samikon: An Early Mycenaean Settlement in Northern Triphylia Reconsidered

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**Abstract:** The archaeological site of ‘Kleidi’ (meaning ‘key’) at Samikon is located between the sandy beach of the Ionian Sea on the Gulf of Kyparissia and the Mount of Lapithos, essentially monitoring the route overland from the northwest to the southwest Peloponnese. Its strategic location has attracted the intensive habitation of the site from the Middle Bronze Age up to the years of Ottoman domination. The Hellenistic fortification of the acropolis of Samikon, just opposite the prehistoric burial and residential contexts, described by Strabo and Pausanias, testifies once again to the importance of this specific area. The present contribution attempts to reconsider the outcome of the old and recent excavations in the area. The first archaeological investigations were carried out by Wilhelm Dörpfeld in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the authors of this article conducted the latest excavations at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Although the project for the overall publication of the findings is still at an early stage, our contribution intends to examine the role and the ‘status’ of Samikon within the so-called Mycenaean world and the kingdom of Pylos. Moreover, we would like to clarify the relations and the connections with other adjacent archaeological sites, such as Kakovatos, Epitalion and Makrysia. The discussion of the historical topography, the burial and domestic architecture, the burial customs and the presentation of new finds, will help to create a clearer picture of the habitation of the site.

**Keywords:** Samikon, Kleidi, Triphylia, burial mound, tholos tomb, settlement

## Topography

The archaeological site of Samikon lies 20km south-southwest of Pyrgos and 9 km north-northwest of Zacharo and belongs to the municipality of Andritsaina-Krestena. It consists of three sites:<sup>3</sup>

1. An impressive fortified acropolis<sup>4</sup> dating to the 5<sup>th</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, located on the western edge of the Lapithos Mountain.<sup>5</sup> (Fig. 1)
2. A prehistoric burial complex that lies at the foot of the hills at the site ‘Kleidi’, situated at the southern end of the nowadays drained lagoon of Agoulinitza. The hill group extends west to the coastal plain and forms a narrow pass, where a wooded sand dune separates the Kaiafas Lake<sup>6</sup> from the southern end of the Agoulinitza Lagoon.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Liangouras 1980, 261–262.

<sup>4</sup> Papakonstantinou-Charitou 1983, 296–299; Pipili 2004, 92.

<sup>5</sup> Papakonstantinou-Charitou 1983, 294–306; Kraft et al. 2005, 16. The region of the Lapithos Mountain was a religious centre for the inhabitants of Triphylia and played a role in their effort to gain a clear ‘national/tribal’ identity (cf. Papandreou 1924, 133). On its southern slope there are two caves, the first one was dedicated to the so-called Anigris Nymphs (Ανιγρίδες Νύμφες) and the second to the worship of the Atlantids. West-southwest of the caves and near the seashore a holy grove honoured the lord of the seas, Poseidon.

<sup>6</sup> Kraft et al. 2005, 13 “Lake Kaiafa is ca. 4km in length and runs northwest-southeast, parallel to the coastline”. See also Koster et al. 2015, 128.

<sup>7</sup> Kraft et al. 2005, 1, 16, 20: “Three great sandy strandlines extend for more than 100km along the coast of Elis in the western Peloponnese, Kyparissia to Katakolon, to Chlemoutsi, to Araxos [...]. Fed by sediments eroding from the uplands of Elis via the deltas of the Peneus, Alpheios, and Nedon rivers and numerous smaller streams,



Fig. 1: View of the Classical acropolis of Samikon (photo: B. Eder)

### 3. Residential remains on top of the Kleidi hill (Figs. 2–3).

We shall focus on the site of Kleidi, which consists of a low isolated north-south oriented ridge (approx. 25 m above the plain, 300 m long and 50 m of maximum width) forming three little hills, two smaller ones to the south and a larger one to the north.<sup>8</sup> The name of the site ‘Kleidi’ (key) fits perfectly, as it commands the land route in the western Peloponnese connecting the territories of Achaia, Elis and Messenia. Flooding events,<sup>9</sup> even during the post-World War II era, turned the Kleidi hills into an ‘island’ increasing their significance in monitoring the route from north to south. This can also explain the human presence at the site throughout the centuries beginning in the prehistoric periods and continuing through historical times (with the Classical acropolis) until the Venetian and Turkish domination (tower of Kazarma) and even the modern era.<sup>10</sup>

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littoral processes have created a sequence of lagoons, marshes, barrier accretion plains, coastal dune fields, swamps, and deltas.” (p. 1) Agoulinitza Lagoon (c. 13 km long and c. 2 km wide) once extended along the coast from Lake Kaiafas to the Alpheios River. William Leake, who passed along the coast in 1805, provides useful descriptions of the lagoon, which was at that time a fishery of considerable leased value in the Ottoman economy. Cf. Koster et al. 2015, 126.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Meyer 1957, 74–79. The hill located to the north lies 32 masl and formed a small plateau on its top: It is 120 m long (orientation north to south) and its width varies from 30 to 40 m (orientation east to west). The other hills are of small dimensions, the height of the southernmost does not exceed 19 masl.

<sup>9</sup> Kraft et al. 2005, 8, 17, 20.

<sup>10</sup> Liangouras 1980, 261. The strategical significance of the site is also verified by the analytical descriptions of the foreign travellers who visited the area at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In particular, the English traveller Edward Dodwell describes the presence of a customs service and military fort, which was erected at the top of the hill monitoring the passage from the north to the south of the Peloponnese (Dodwell 1819, 344–345). Georgios Papandreou characterises the area of Kleidi as the ‘Thermopyles’ of the western Peloponnese. Papandreou and Alfred Philippson also mention the existence of the military fort installed on the top of the Kleidi hills during the Ottoman period, but still in operation at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Papandreou 1924, 133; Meyer 1957, 74; Philippson 1959, 361). Moreover, next to the channel, which connects the Kaiafas Lake and the open sea, the remnants of a tower can be seen, built for military purposes by the Venetians or the Ottomans (Flerianou-Lefa 1984, 721, 723).



Fig. 2: View of the prehistoric site of Kleidi from the east, 2006 (photo: B. Eder)



Fig. 3: Kleidi from the air with the settlement plateau and burial site (photo: T. Willershäuser)



Fig. 4: The Cave of the Anigris nymphs at Lake Kaiafa (photo: B. Eder)

Pausanias and Strabo both referred to Samikon.<sup>11</sup> The first mentions that the whole Zacharo Plain was called Samikon at that time, and the Anigris River<sup>12</sup> flowed into the sea here. Its mouth was often blocked by sand dunes, creating swamps.<sup>13</sup> Near the river lay the Cave of the Anigris Nymphs (Fig. 4).<sup>14</sup> Travelling to Olympia, Pausanias also described a fortified town, built on a high ridge of the Lapithos.<sup>15</sup> He mentions neither the Kaiafas Lake<sup>16</sup> nor the larger Lagoon of Agoulinitza.<sup>17</sup>

Strabo (8.3.19), who provides us with the etymology of the word Σάμη – high hill near the shoreline – also refers to Samikon, and he emphasises that there was a sanctuary of Poseidon, a holy grove with olive trees serving as the gathering place of all Triphylians.<sup>18</sup> At the time of

<sup>11</sup> Paus. 5.2–8; 6.1; Strab. 8,3,12–20.

<sup>12</sup> Nowadays called Mavropotamos (Kraft et al. 2005, 13).

<sup>13</sup> Lake Kaiafa initially formed a coastal lagoon which has already changed considerably since the ancient times (Kraft et al. 2005, 13).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Koster et al. 2015, 129.

<sup>15</sup> Paus. 5.6.1: “... χωρίον τε υψηλόν και πόλις Σαμία επ’ αυτού”.

<sup>16</sup> Lake Kaiafa, prior to the past several centuries was an extension of Agoulinitza Lagoon (Kraft et al. 2005, 13).

<sup>17</sup> Kraft et al. 2005, 14. The date of the earliest coastal lagoon in the Kaiafa region is unknown, but it was extant in Classical times.

<sup>18</sup> The region situated between Elis, Arkadia and Messenia was a territory of interest to the Eleans (Papandreou 1924, 64–67). Herodotus (4.145–148) refers to the history of Triphylia and the role of the Minyans, offspring of the Argonauts, who were expelled from the island of Lemnos by the Pelasgians (pre-Greek tribes and inhabitants of Lemnos). The Minyan refugees initially went to Lakonia and afterwards to Triphylia. According to Polybius (4.77.8–11), Triphylia should be considered an area belonging to Arkadia, and it was called Triphylia in honour of Triphylos, the son of Arkas. It is also proposed that the name of the region was adopted because of the coexistence of three tribes. Current research casts doubts on the substantial ethnic significance of the term ‘Triphylios – the inhabitant of Triphylia’, because the political union was founded not earlier than the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. It is quite probable that the term Triphylia/Triphylios was employed in constructing the national identity of the inhabitants of the region, who tried to distinguish themselves from the Eleans (Nielsen 1997, 133–134, 141, 145; Zoumbaki 2005, 20, 29). It is also clear that the landscape of Triphylia with fertile valleys and hills is quite different from the flat plains of Elis. This ambiguity in the affiliation of the land is also apparent during the modern era. In 1899, the

Strabo, Samikon was a fortified acropolis without inhabitants under the rule of the town Makistos, and, according to tradition, was identified with the Homeric town of Arene.<sup>19</sup>

### Excavation History

After his excavation at Kakovatos in 1907, where he believed he had found Pylos in his attempt to verify Homeric topography, Wilhelm Dörpfeld visited Kleidi, where he thought that the Homeric town of Arene was situated.<sup>20</sup> He discovered traces of habitation on the two small hills and subsequently officially requested permission to continue the Kakovatos excavation (in 1908) and to begin simultaneously conducting some trial excavations at various sites of Triphylia “from Samikon to Lepreon”.<sup>21</sup>

In the summer of 1908, the German Archaeological Expedition dug some small trenches at Kleidi. At the top of the larger hill, the archaeologists recovered parts of the ‘Cyclopean’ wall (more than 2 m wide) and thinner walls as part of a building complex. The German scholars collected a great quantity of prehistoric pottery, comparable to the pottery found at Kakovatos, Olympia, Lefkas and Pisa and sherds of the early Mycenaean period.<sup>22</sup> The results of the excavation, according to the ideology of the era, seemed poor and without significance. Andreas Skias, the supervisor on behalf of the Greek Archaeological Service noted that “the findings were few and they could neither enrich the National Archaeological Museum collection nor could they be exposed” (Fig. 5a).<sup>23</sup> As a result, the German Archaeological Institute abandoned the investigations and left the site.

Unfortunately, the architectural remains became the raw material for the neighbouring villages, as is evident from the reports by the local authorities, and the damage became more severe with the construction of the railway line connecting Pyrgos with Kyparissia (Fig. 5b–c).<sup>24</sup> After the Second World War, the destruction of the site continued when the stones of the walls were turned into lime in the nearby kilns (Fig. 6).<sup>25</sup>

In the middle of the 1950s new archaeological research was conducted by Nikolaos Yalouris. He excavated a burial tumulus with a diameter of 5.50 m located north-northeast of the larger hill.<sup>26</sup> Its peribolos was preserved only in an arc of about 2 m,<sup>27</sup> but its remains could be traced for most of its original outline. Fourteen graves had either been cut between the ridges of the soft sandstone or built on the surface of the ridges (on different levels also indicating their chronological sequence). The majority of the graves were disturbed and only two were found intact. Yalouris carefully studied the grave goods and dated the monument within the time span 1700–1200 BC

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prefecture of Triphylia was founded (with the administrative centre in the town of Kyparissia) and it was abolished in 1909, when the region was incorporated into Messenia. After the First World War, northern Triphylia became part of the Elis prefecture.

<sup>19</sup> Strab. 8,3,12–20.

<sup>20</sup> Dörpfeld 1907; Dörpfeld 1908a; Dörpfeld 1908b.

<sup>21</sup> Application letter stored in the Historical Archive of the Hellenic Archaeological Service (DEAM, box no. 153, 1901–1909 A/α 234, 23/4/1907 and 3–16/4/1908).

<sup>22</sup> For an overview of the pottery found by Dörpfeld, see Rambach 2002, 159–160.

<sup>23</sup> Historical Archive of the Hellenic Archaeological Service (DEAM, box no. 153, 1901–1909 A/α 234, 4/6/1908).

<sup>24</sup> Historical Archive of the Hellenic Archaeological Service (DEAM, box no. 153, 1901–1909 A/α 234, 19/5/1908).

<sup>25</sup> Papakonstantinou 1988, 148 n. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Yalouris 1966, 7; Zavadil 1995, 41; Zavadil 2000, 120; Nikolentzos 2011, 55–56. Architecturally it could be considered a burial mound of small dimensions, see Pelon 1976, 101; Protonotariou-Deilaki 1980, 138. However, Cavanagh – Mee 1998, 29, estimate the average diameter of burial mounds between 8 m and 25 m, and Galanakis 2011, 220, suggests 8–30 m. According to Korres 2011, 586, burial mounds could be constructed anywhere, either on a hill or on flat ground as in the case of Samikon.

<sup>27</sup> Up to 0.60 m high and 0.50 m thick, built of stones of medium or large size.

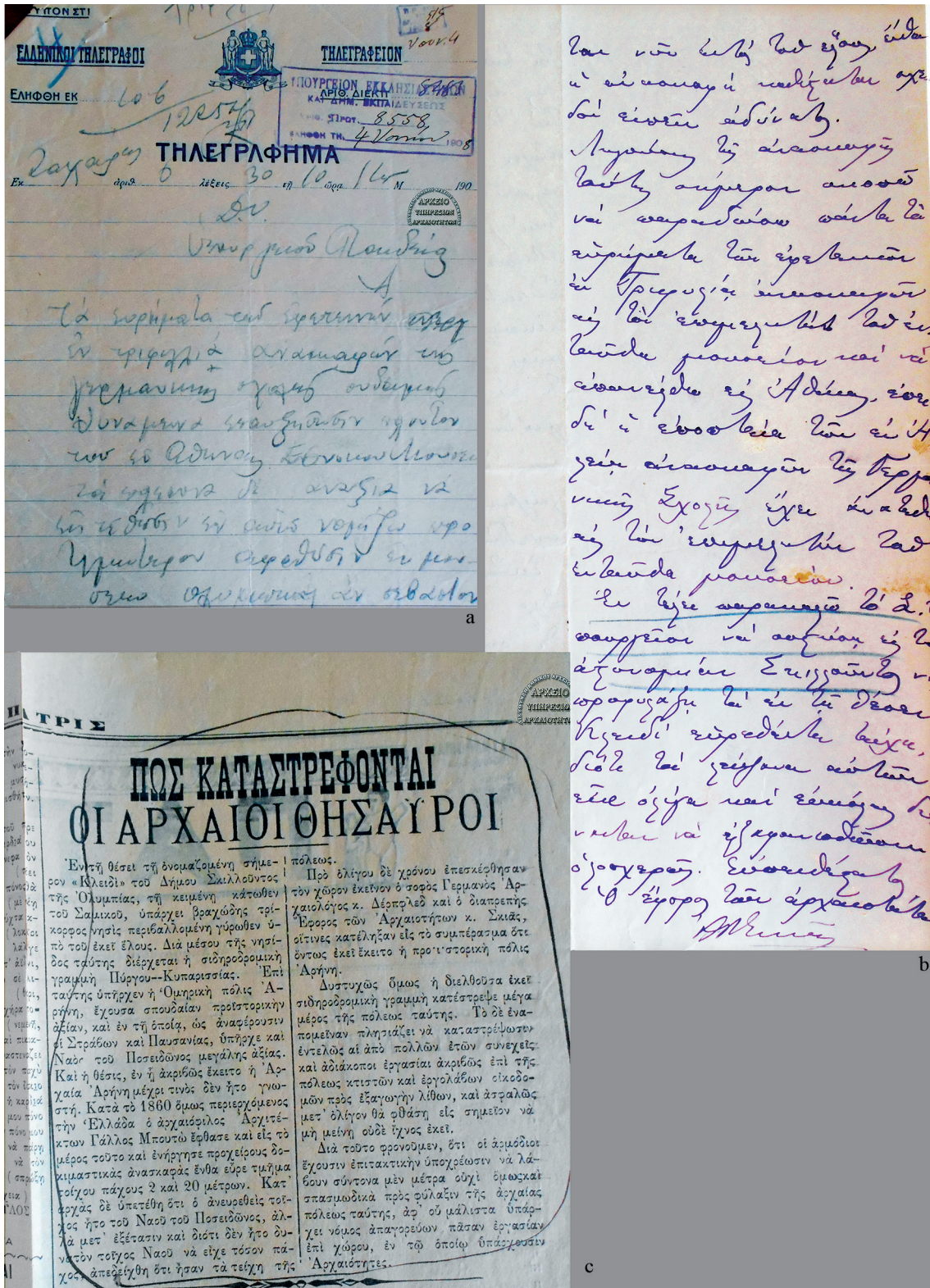


Fig. 5: a-b. Report of the Greek Ephor, Andreas Skias; c. Article from 16<sup>th</sup> July 1909 in the ΠΑΤΡΙΣ newspaper, regarding the destruction of the archaeological remains at Samikon (Historical Archive of the Hellenic Archaeological Service)



Fig. 6: The limestone quarries with post-war industrial facilities for lime production just east of the Kleidi hills (photo: B. Eder)

(MH III/LH I–LH IIIB).<sup>28</sup> It is noteworthy that Petros Kalligas has suggested that the mound of Samikon closely resembles the tumulus at Kokkolata of Kephallenia,<sup>29</sup> whereas Georgios Korres has interpreted the monument not as a tumulus but as just another tholos tomb.<sup>30</sup>

Most of the pottery dates to LH I–II and consists of shapes (Vapheio cups,<sup>31</sup> squat jugs,<sup>32</sup> alabastra) and motifs (hatched loop, running spiral, dotted running spiral, ripple pattern) common to the early Mycenaean repertoire.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, some vessels seem to have similarities with shapes and decorative patterns found in Messenia (e.g. a beaked jug,<sup>34</sup> a conical rhyton,<sup>35</sup> piriform jars with a motif under the handles differing from the main motif,<sup>36</sup> etc.).

<sup>28</sup> Few tumuli remained in use until LH IIIB: Merkouri – Kouli 2011, 209 and n. 16, mention the already known data.

<sup>29</sup> Kalligas 1977, 116–125, because of the radial location of the burials.

<sup>30</sup> During MH and LH the construction of burial mounds concentrated in southwest Greece, and the vast majority of the burial monuments are found south of the Spercheios River (Merkouri – Kouli 2011, 207 with n. 12). See also Korres 1992, 191–199, for the so-called burial mound at Makryisia, excavated by Themelis in 1968. Zavadil 1995, 125, has stressed that the mounds of Samikon, Makryisia and Vayenas (Pylos) can be considered tholos tombs because of their diameter and the thickness of their peribolos.

<sup>31</sup> Nikolentzos 2011, 145–147.

<sup>32</sup> Nikolentzos 2011, 147–148.

<sup>33</sup> Yalouris 1966, 11–35; Lolos 1987, 216–217a; RMDP, 372–378, 381, 383, 385, 387; Nikolentzos 2011, 144–158. Before Yalouris' excavation a jug belonging to the class of Mainland Polychrome pottery was delivered to the Archaeological Service. It is decorated with schematised birds (Yalouris 1966, 11–12, pl. 6a, colour pl. 1; Lolos 1987, 298–300, figs. 490a, 491; Mathioudaki 2011, 39, 63–64, 188, 191, 194, 197; Nikolentzos 2011, 151). Similarities can be found with vessels from Akrotiri (Thera), Phylakopi (Melos) and Grave Circle A (Mycenae).

<sup>34</sup> RMDP, 377, no. 22; Nikolentzos 2011, 151. The vessel is painted in the Alternating Style (the motifs are a shield and a sea urchin) and also belongs to the so-called Arcade Group. It is also comparable to a jug from Messenia (RMDP, 321, no. 17). The white-coloured slip suggests that the vase could be an import from Lakonia or Kythera, but a local provenance cannot be excluded.

<sup>35</sup> RMDP, 338, 383; Nikolentzos 2011, 262.

<sup>36</sup> RMDP, 378; Nikolentzos 2011, 235 n. 1081.

In the early 1980s excavations were resumed, when, during construction works in a nearby field at the eastern foot of the northern hill of Kleidi, four more burial mounds<sup>37</sup> and a tholos tomb came to light.<sup>38</sup>

As already noticed, the tumuli had periboloi of small diameter (e.g. Mound 1: 5.50 m),<sup>39</sup> retaining the soil that had been accumulated on them.<sup>40</sup> Cist graves roofed with large limestone slabs were located within the periboloi. The preliminary and brief report of the excavator notes that a pithos burial had been found and some horseshoe-shaped constructions,<sup>41</sup> similar to those found in Messenia.<sup>42</sup>

A tholos tomb that was covered by a mound retained by a low peribolos (d. 14.60 m), had a diameter of 5.65 m, surviving in height up to 2.40 m and its wall was 0.60 m thick.<sup>43</sup> There was a pebble floor and burial pits (one of them built), for both primary and secondary burials. The stomion and dromos of the tomb remained unexcavated.

According to the grave offerings, the tumulus, excavated by Yalouris, was in use from MH III/LH I until LH IIIB<sup>44</sup> and the other burial complexes until LH II/LH IIIA2.<sup>45</sup>

### The Recent Excavation History

The tumulus excavated by Yalouris has been almost completely destroyed and only traces of it are still visible. The prehistoric cemetery excavated in the early 1980s has received some kind of temporary protection measures, in order to preserve the tumuli and the tholos tomb. On the top of the hill a large quantity of pottery, particularly fragments of MH and LH vessels can be found on the surface.

In October 2007, the Ephorate of Elis undertook a small scale excavation on the hilltop.<sup>46</sup> The trenches were dug on the large plateau (60 m length to 20 m width) and were located on the west part of the hill overlying the prehistoric cemetery. The problems that the research had to face were the great soil erosion due to the weather conditions and the intensive cultivation combined with the lack of time the excavators had for the completion of their research.

<sup>37</sup> Tumuli rarely appear in clusters. For exceptions to this rule, see Merkouri – Kouli 2011, 204. Cf. above n. 26 for the location of tumuli.

<sup>38</sup> Papakonstantinou 1988; Papakonstantinou 1989a; Papakonstantinou 1989b; Boyd 2002, 186–189.

<sup>39</sup> See above n. 26. Korres 2011, 586–587, offers a typology of burial mounds. His types 1 and 2 show a retaining wall enclosing burial pithoi in varying order and cists in exemplary cases.

<sup>40</sup> Papakonstantinou 1988: *Mound 1*: It consists of a stone peribolos, diameter about 5.50 m, built of large stones with two circular tombs in its interior.

*Mound 2*: Inside, four cist graves roofed with big stone slabs were radially arranged. According to the excavator, the largest cist tomb shows some peculiar features at its edges, which were addressed as ‘altars’. Papadimitriou 2001, 43, does not consider them as altars but as kinds of pillars at the entrance of the tomb.

*Mound 3*: At the centre of the monument, a cist grave had been built, which was covered by three limestone slabs. According to the excavator, it is the largest cist recovered in Kleidi, resembling the central horseshoe-shaped construction as known from the burial mound of Papoulia-Ayios Ioannis in Messenia. At the periphery of the mound there was a pithos burial, therefore it is possible that the mound was initially used for pithos burials.

*Mound 4*: The excavation was not completed.

<sup>41</sup> Papadimitriou 2001, 43–45, 170–171.

<sup>42</sup> At Routsis (Messenia) inhumations in cist graves and burial pithoi coexisted (Korres 2011, 587).

<sup>43</sup> Papakonstantinou 1988, 148; Boyd 2002, 186–188; Galanakis 2011, 220 and n. 10, follows the theory of G. S. Korres that the tholoi were in fact inserted in the centre of the MH tumuli or built on the debris of previous settlements. See Korres 2011, 590.

<sup>44</sup> Boyd 2002, 187, RMDP, 387.

<sup>45</sup> Boyd 2002, 187.

<sup>46</sup> Moutzouridis – Nikolentzos 2014, 437–438, figs. 69–70.



### Architectural Remains

Three trenches were dug (4 × 4 m) on a north-south axis. Clear architectural remains were traced only in Trench 2, as the two other trenches presented a thoroughly disturbed stratigraphy – up to 1 m depth – comprising a quantity of unworked stones without any interconnection (Fig. 7a–b).

In the western part of Trench 2 a wall (TX1) with north-south orientation came to light. It can be followed along the side of the trench at a minimum length of 4 m and at a maximum width of 0.37 m. A second wall (TX2) with east-west orientation, vertical to and running under TX1 has a maximum length of 0.58 m (until joining TX1) and width of 0.56 m. Most of TX1 consisted of just a single row of stones, but in some parts two rows of stones were uncovered. TX2 has maintained two rows of stones, which led us to the conclusion that this architectural phase was destroyed and the whole superstructure was removed in order to build the more recent phase, gaining building material for its construction. The two walls are constructed from undressed stones, and in comparison, TX2 seems to have been built in a more elaborate and sophisticated way (Fig. 7c, e).

### Finds

The three trenches revealed a large amount of pottery and a few stone and bronze finds. The majority of the pottery comprises coarse and semi-coarse wares of daily use, as one would expect from a residential complex.<sup>47</sup> Closed pots and storage jars are prominent, being supplemented by drinking and eating vessels. Concerning the fine wares, we have sherds dating from the Early Bronze Age to the Byzantine period, but the majority belong to the end of the Middle Bronze Age and the Late Bronze Age.

From the study of both the architectural remains and finds, two phases can easily be distinguished in Trench 2. At the lower stratum (just above the natural bedrock) part of a beaten earth floor/level of use was found, where two MH kantharoi<sup>48</sup> were discovered in situ (Fig. 7d). The first one lacks part of the body and rim, is slipped and burnished in the colour of the light brown clay.<sup>49</sup> It has an everted lip, carinated body and vertical handles (Fig. 8a–b). The second kantharos,<sup>50</sup> lacking the handles and part of the rim, is similar to the first one, however without the sharp carination of the body (Fig. 8c–d). These two kantharoi date the lower stratum to the end of the MH period,<sup>51</sup> and represent popular MH III shapes that are found e.g. in the Argolid and Messenia.<sup>52</sup>

Moreover, we would like to present in brief some characteristic pottery fragments that provide the chronological range of this settlement:

1. Fragment of a bowl with matt-painted linear decoration (Fig. 9a):<sup>53</sup> Trench 3, 18-10-2007, layer 5, group 1. Dimensions 0.049 × 0.074 m. Date: MH II–III.

<sup>47</sup> Dickinson et al. 1992, 477; Dabney – Wright 2013, 356.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Buck 1964, 284–285.

<sup>49</sup> Πα/6, Trench 2A, 16-10-2007, layer 9, group 9. Height (including the handle): 0.086 m, d. base: 0.028 m.

<sup>50</sup> Πα/7, Trench 2A, 16-10-2007, layer 9, group 9. Height: 0.061 m, d. base: 0.026 m.

<sup>51</sup> According to their flat base, the vessels could be dated to MH IIIA (Dietz 1991, 150).

<sup>52</sup> This kind of shape seems to appear since the very beginning of MH (cf. Walter – Felten 1981, 127, fig. 117). For comparable vessels see also: Blegen 1921, 15, fig. 18; Walter – Felten 1981, 131, fig. 125; Rutter 1990, 431; Dietz 1991, 58, 87 (149–154 for an overview of the evolution of the kantharos shape during the end of MH and the beginning of LH); Howell 1992, 59, 104, no. P2466(κ), fig. 3.41, mentions that the kantharos shape “was by no means as popular at Nichoria as it was in NE Peloponnese”; Gauß – Smetana 2007, 63, fig. 7:12a/1–2. Rutter 1990, 435, speaks of “conservatism” in the evolution of the kantharos shape; see also Zerner 2008, 191.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Howell 1992, 75, 107, nos. P2535–2536, fig. 3.48, pl. 3.28. According to Howell 1992, 74, this kind of pattern developed from the large chevrons used already in MH I. Cf. also Dietz 1991, 159, fig. 49, for a relevant pattern on a miniature cup from Argos, dated to MH IIIB.

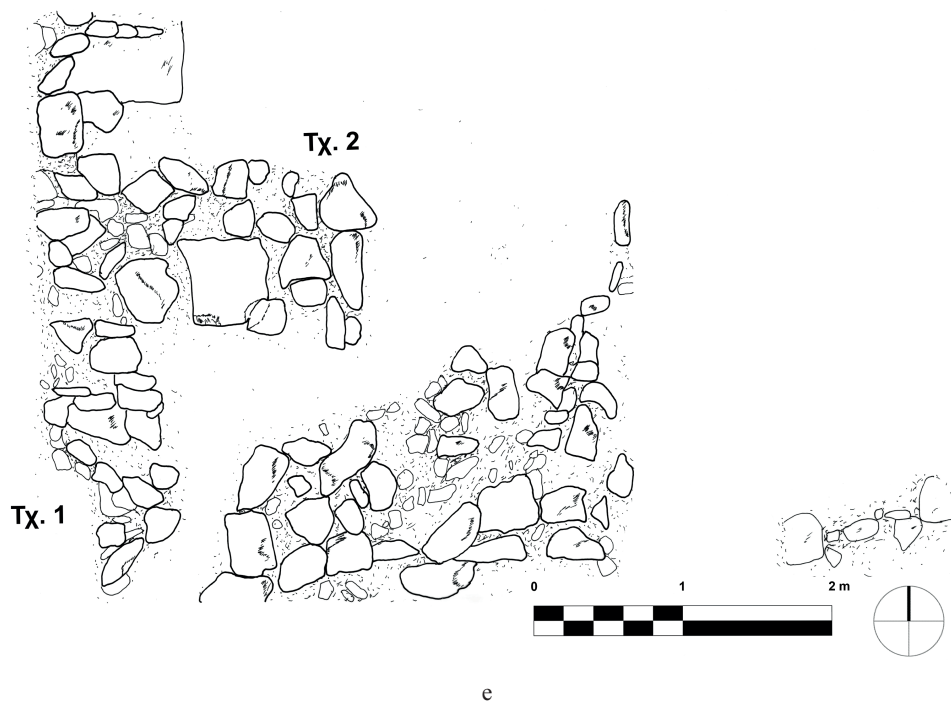
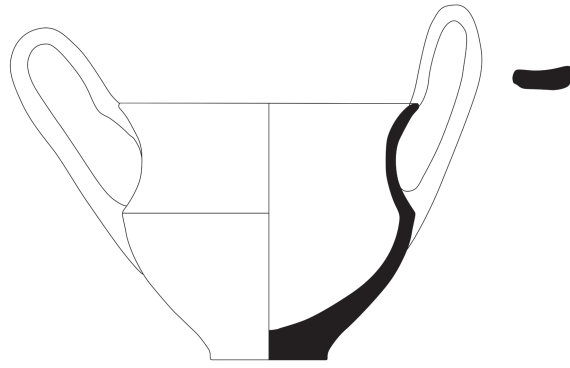


Fig. 7: a. View of Trench 1; b. View of Trench 3; c. View of Trench 2 with walls TX1 and TX2; d. Trench 2 with kantharoi found in situ; e. Plan of Trench 2. Scale 1:50



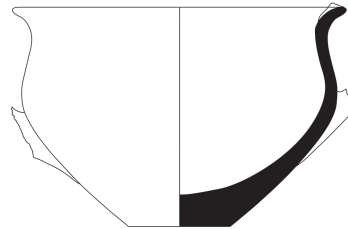
a



b



c



d

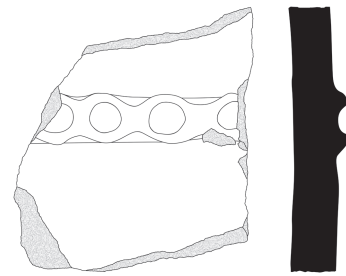
Fig. 8: a-b. Kantharos 1; c-d. Kantharos 2. Scale 1:2



a



b



c

Fig. 9: a. Rim fragment of a matt-painted bowl; b. Body fragments with incised decoration; c. Pithos fragment with plastic band decorated with finger impressions. Scale 1:3

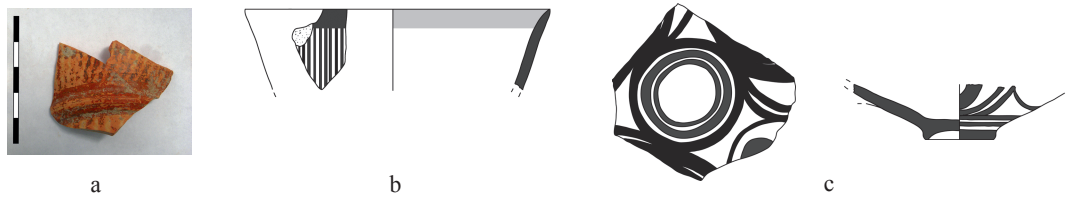


Fig. 10: a–b. Fragments of two Vapheio cups with ripple pattern; c. Base of a shallow cup. Scale 1:3

2. Sherds with incised linear decoration, the so-called Adriatic ware of MH and early LH chronology, and fragments of pithoi decorated with finger-impressed plastic bands (Fig. 9b–c).<sup>54</sup>
3. Sherds of Vapheio cups (FS 224)<sup>55</sup> with a pronounced midrib and flat base, decorated with a ripple pattern (FM 78) and a band at the rim. This decorative pattern can be found in archaeological contexts throughout the Mycenaean world testifying to a kind of cultural homogeneity (Fig. 10a–b):<sup>56</sup> Πα/2, Trench 2A, 10-10-2007, layer 6, group 6. H. 0.044 m. Date: LH II(A).
4. Base of a shallow cup (FS 218) decorated with framed spirals (FM 46) (Fig. 10c). The profile and decoration are characteristic of the LH IIA shallow cup with framed spiral that occurs frequently in early Mycenaean sites. Many cup fragments associated with the wasters of the Berbati kiln (Argolid) suggest mass production of this type,<sup>57</sup> which can be found on the Greek mainland and beyond:<sup>58</sup> Trench 3, 18-10-2007, layer 5, group 1. H. 0.036 m. Date: LH IIA.
5. Fragment of an Ephyraean goblet (FS 254) decorated with a rosette under the handle (Fig. 11a–b): Trench 3, 16-10-2007, layer 4, group 1. Max. h. 0.046 m, d. c. 0.15 m. Date: LH IIB.
6. Cup (FS 211) with vertical, almost parallel wavy lines.<sup>59</sup> This kind of decoration seems to be rare in the southern Peloponnese and probably represents a variation of the so-called ripple pattern (Fig. 11c–d): Trench 3, 18-10-2007, layer 5, group 1. H. 0.059 m, d. base 0.044 m. Date: LH II.<sup>60</sup>
7. Numerous fragments of goblets and kylikes, plain, monochrome or with banded decoration (Fig. 11e–f). Date: LH II–III.
8. Sherd of an alabastron with an illustration of a curved palm (FM 14.10) (Fig. 12a): Trench 3, 18-10-2007, layer 5, group 1. Dimensions 0.022 × 0.036 m. Date: LH IIIA1.
9. Sherd of an open vessel (krater) decorated with the stylised version of an argonaut (Fig. 12b): Trench 3, 8-10-2007, layer 2, group 1. Max. h. 0.13 m. Date: LH IIIA.
10. Sherd of an open vessel (stemmed bowl or krater) decorated with a version of the tricurved arch (FM 62) (Fig. 12c–d):<sup>61</sup> Trench 2β, 12-10-2007, layer 7, group 7. Max. h. 0.077 m. Date: LH IIIA2.

<sup>54</sup> Parallels from Nichoria: Howell 1992, 65, 69, 115, nos. P2699(κ)–P2701(κ), fig. 3.65; Dickinson et al. 1992, 480, 522, nos. P3050, P3056, figs. 9.1–2, for pithoi with plastic bands with finger impressions that are a familiar feature in MH and LH settlement contexts; Howell 1992, 64, 68, fig. 3.60, for pottery with incised decoration.

<sup>55</sup> Hiller 1975, 16–18; Mountjoy 1986, 15–16 (LH I), 33–34 (LH IIA); Lolos 1987, 240–260.

<sup>56</sup> Ripple pattern: cf. e.g. Hiller 1975, 16, 69, pl. 3, nos. 30–34; Dietz 1980, 112; Lolos 1987, 426–430; Dickinson et al. 1992, 475, 482; Mountjoy 2008, 326, fig. 6.15; 351, fig. 6.28. The motif is popular during LH I–II.

<sup>57</sup> Dickinson 1972, 105; RMDP, 23.

<sup>58</sup> E.g. Hiller 1975, pl. 5, nos. 82–83 (Aigina); RMDP, 203, 205, fig. 62, no. 12 (Korakou); 322–323, fig. 108, no. 22 (Pylos); 376–377, fig. 130, no. 24 (Elis/Makryisia); 890, 900 (Melos); 1083, fig. 442, no. 3 (Kos/Serraglio).

<sup>59</sup> Hiller 1975, 18–20.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Hiller 1975, 18, 71, pl. 5, no. 64; RMDP, 203–204, fig. 62, no. 9. The motif is more popular in the northeast of the Peloponnese and the Central Greek mainland.

<sup>61</sup> For the motif cf. RMDP, 271–272, fig. 90, no. 119; Mountjoy 2008, 305, no. 3039; 306, no. 3043, figs. 6.3, 6.4.



Fig. 11: a–b. Ephyraean goblet; c–d. Shallow cup; e–f. Various types of goblets and kylikes. Scale 1:3

11. Upper part of an alabastron decorated with stacked zigzag and banding consisting of fine line groups flanked by wide bands (Fig. 12e–f).<sup>62</sup> This motif becomes popular in Messenia and Elis, where it appears between the handles of squat alabastra and small piriform jars.<sup>63</sup> According to Penelope Mountjoy, this motif derives from the Minoan repertoire,<sup>64</sup> but it could be a variation of the abstract foliate band.<sup>65</sup> Vessels with such decoration also

<sup>62</sup> Cf. RMDP, 385–387, fig. 134, nos. 55–57 (LH IIIB).

<sup>63</sup> Nikolentzos 2011, 237 and 238, for the decoration with stacked zigzag of small piriform jars; 241–242, for the decoration of squat alabastra. The motif is found on the shoulder of ten squat alabastra and it appeared (in Elis) already since LH IIIA2.

<sup>64</sup> RMDP, 334–335. For the motif see also Nikolentzos 2011, 237, 241–242.

<sup>65</sup> The southwest Peloponnese had strong connections with Crete. Dickinson (Dickinson et al. 1992, 469–473) notes a kind of ‘Minoanising’ pottery only at Nichoria during the transitional period of MH III–LH I. However, the Minoan influence seems more obvious in LH II (Davis – Stocker 2016, 636).

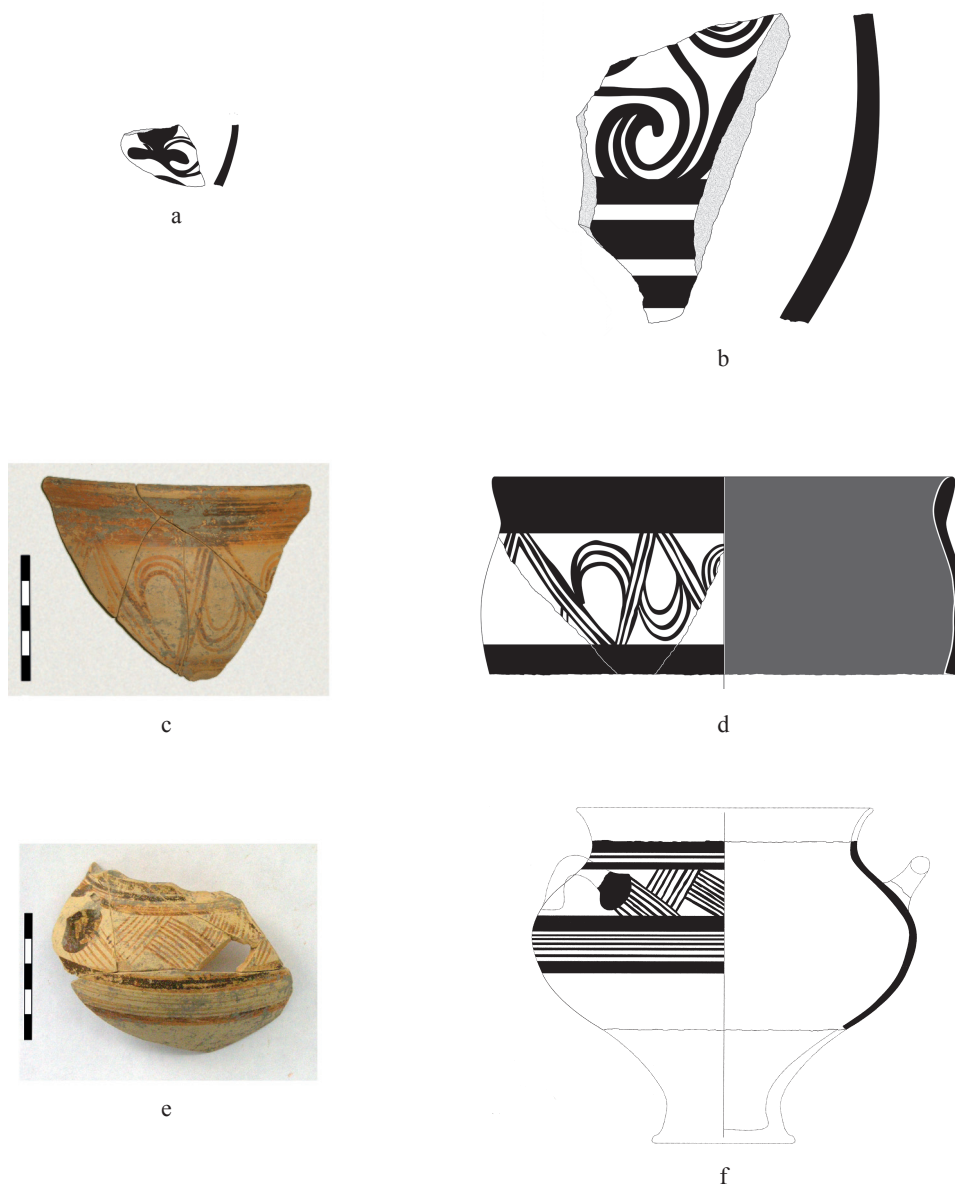


Fig. 12: a. Fragment of an alabastron with palm motif; b. Fragment of a krater with stylised argonaut; c–d. Fragment of an open vessel with a variant of tricurved arch; e–f. Alabastron or piriform jar. Scale 1:3

originated from Achaia and can be found along the Corinthian Gulf. Trench 3, 18-10-2007, layer 5, group 1. H. 0.068 m. Date: LH IIIA2–IIIB.

12. Part of a flask (FS 190), consisting of the lip, the upper part of the neck and the two vertical handles (Fig. 13a). The shape does not seem to be very common in Mycenaean times, but is found relatively frequently in Elis and Messenia:<sup>66</sup> Trench 2, 5-10-2007, layer 4, group 4. Max. h. 0.035 m, d. 0.025 m. Date: LH IIIA2–IIIB.
13. Part of a stirrup jar consisting of the false neck, decorated with a circle, and the two vertical strap handles, solidly painted, with the exception of a triangle (Fig. 13b). The aforemen-

<sup>66</sup> Mountjoy 2008, 361, no. 3575, fig. 6.32; Nikolentzos 2011, 250–251.



Fig. 13: a. Rim fragment of flask; b. Fragment of stirrup jar. Scale 1:3

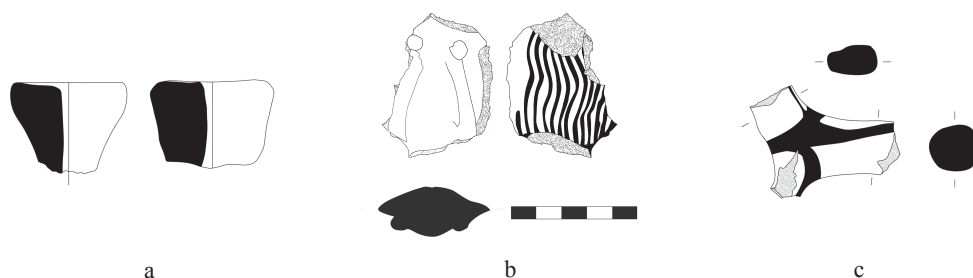


Fig. 14: a. Spindle whorls; b. Anthropomorphic figurine; c. Zoomorphic figurine. Scale 1:3

tioned properties are typical for stirrup jars dated to LH IIIA2 and early IIIB.<sup>67</sup> Trench 3, 18-10-2007, layer 5, group 1. Max. h. 0.03 m, d. 0.021 m.

14. Another sherd, probably from a straight-sided alabastron or cup, was decorated with a scale pattern (FM 70) and its bottom base with concentric circles: Trench 3, 18-10-2007, layer 5, group 1. H. 0.047 m. LH IIIA2/B.
15. Clay spindle whorls offer evidence for textile production (Fig. 14a).<sup>68</sup>
16. Obsidian was imported from the island of Melos.<sup>69</sup>
17. A female figurine decorated with vertical wavy lines (on the back). The plastic modelling of the arms and breasts may be taken to indicate an idol of the 'transitional type' after Elizabeth French.<sup>70</sup> The motif is comparable to an idol from Ayios Stephanos in Lakonia<sup>71</sup> (Fig. 14b): Trench 3, 16-10-2007, layer 4, group 4. Max. h. 0.054 m. Date: LH IIIA–B.
18. Fragment of a zoomorphic figurine with linear decoration (Fig. 14c):<sup>72</sup> Trench 3, 17-10-2007, layer 5, group 1. Max. l. 0.055 m, max. h. 0.042 m. Date: LH IIIA–B.

<sup>67</sup> Nikolentzos 2011, 269.

<sup>68</sup> Carington Smith 1992, 675; French – Janko 2008, 448.

<sup>69</sup> Blitzer 1992, 720.

<sup>70</sup> French 1971, 123–124, pl. 17.

<sup>71</sup> French – Janko 2008, 453, 455, no. 7090, fig. 10.4; see also Eder 2016, 177, on the production of figurines in specialised pottery workshops with references to the pertinent bibliography.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. French 1971, 155–156; Weber-Hiden 1990, 55. For the decoration, see also Weber-Hiden 1990, 58, pl. 41. These figurines date to LH IIIB, but their production continues into LH IIIC.

## Conclusions

Reconsidering the aforementioned data, the following questions emerge concerning the nature and the character of the habitation at Samikon:

Which role did Samikon play within the so-called Mycenaean world? Which position did an archaeological site that featured mounds, a tholos and residential remains occupy in the Mycenaean political structure?

What kinds of relations developed with other neighbouring sites, such as Kakovatos (to the south) or Epitalion (to the north)? What was the social status of its inhabitants? What kind of relationship did Samikon have with the adjacent region of palatial Messenia, taking into consideration that the distance between Samikon and Peristeria (a very important and wealthy archaeological site that flourished during MH III–LH II) is just about 30 km.

Let us recapitulate the already known data:

1. The site is located in an excellent position of great strategic significance monitoring the route from north to south on the western coast of the Peloponnese. However, based on the details of palaeogeographic and geological data as well as the descriptions of ancient travellers, it can be assumed that Samikon did not have a sufficient area providing adequate arable land for agriculture. On the contrary, the site lies between lakes, lagoons, filthy and unhealthy swamps.

The inhabitants could cultivate the fertile plain of Zacharo, although this area was somewhat distant from the hills of Kleidi. However, a general picture of mainland Greece in the Bronze Age suggests that the common small sites were integrated into a local network of habitation of 5–15 km radius (naturally the palatial centres were the exception).<sup>73</sup>

2. The burial architecture of Kleidi-Samikon seems quite interesting, combining various grave types. Based exclusively on the preliminary reports and the conclusions of the excavators, burial mounds<sup>74</sup> and a tholos tomb coexisted. Regarding the tumuli, the inhumations took place in pits or cist graves, types of graves that were neither especially labour-intensive nor required specific knowledge of sophisticated construction techniques. However, the burial mounds were also imposing monuments, a kind of public declaration and display.<sup>75</sup> We can imagine these monuments dominating the surrounding area, lining and defining the territorial boundaries and enhancing the social and ethnic ties among the members of the small community or families.<sup>76</sup>

In contrast, tholos tombs testify to the existence of local elites in these regions. Such imposing burial monuments demanded effort, a specialised labour force, time and expenses for their construction, so they were focal points for the display of power and wealth of LH I–II high-ranking families or individuals.<sup>77</sup>

Large areas of the so-called Mycenaean world such as Achaia, Elis, Arkadia, Corinthia, Aitolia, Phokis, Lokris, and Euboia have revealed neither actual palatial buildings nor clear indications of administrative activities.<sup>78</sup> In the case of Kleidi-Samikon the construction of the aforementioned burial monuments indicates the existence of some kind of social or administrative hierarchy and the interest of the inhabitants in displaying their power and sovereignty over a specific area.

<sup>73</sup> Arena 2015, 21, 25. Based on Colin Renfrew's Early State Module Theory the territory of a Mycenaean state entity can be estimated as 1300 m<sup>2</sup> and a radius of 22 km.

<sup>74</sup> According to the study of the excavated burial mounds, these monuments are located close to rivers, a settlement or a nearby acropolis (Merkouri – Kouli 2011, 207).

<sup>75</sup> See also Galanakis 2011, 220.

<sup>76</sup> Merkouri – Kouli 2011, 204.

<sup>77</sup> Arena 2015, 4. According to Arena 2015, 13, the construction of tholos tombs in Achaia indicates the existence of elites, particularly in western Achaia.

<sup>78</sup> Arena 2015, 3.



3. The offerings of the early Mycenaean period are substantially limited to pottery, and only one or two vases accompany each inhumation. The majority of vessels consist of alabastra, squat jugs and cups. The decoration follows the typical Mycenaean repertoire, and the imported items seem to be quite few. This picture becomes even clearer when the finds from Kleidi-Samikon are compared with those from the adjacent site of Kakovatos, where monumental tholoi tombs were constructed,<sup>79</sup> and weapons, jewellery made of gold or precious stones, great quantities of amber beads and spacers, numerous palatial jars, stone or glass vases, ivory items etc. were deposited as grave offerings.<sup>80</sup> Even the residential remains at the top of the Kleidi hillock seem to be poor considering that the excavated walls were just 60 cm wide, whereas in Kakovatos the thickness of the main building's walls exceeded 1 m, verifying the existence of a large building with at least one upper storey.

The relatively few LH IIIA–B pottery finds (such as a conical rhyton, piriform jars, etc.) demonstrate close relations with the adjacent region of Messenia and testify to the continued habitation of the area, even after the abandonment of the tholos tomb at Samikon and the desertion of Kakovatos.

4. The case of Kleidi-Samikon presents close resemblances, regarding its period 'of life' with the settlement of Epitalion. It can be suggested that during the early Mycenaean period settlements in North Triphylia were placed close to the coastline with a distance of 10–12 km between them, where they could monitor the land routes (compare also Lepreon, Kakovatos, Epitalion).<sup>81</sup>

Based on the aforementioned arguments, it can be suggested that Kleidi-Samikon was a kind of fortress or military facility integrated into a system of small settlements, located near the sea-shore, and it had the role of guarding (as in modern times) the land route and imposing the power of the local rulers on this relatively small area. Initially, this military checkpoint was under the political influence/rule of Kakovatos, where, according to the noteworthy finds, the administrative centre of northern Triphylia was situated (a kind of peripheral 'petty kingdom' such as Peristeria, Antheia, Routsis, etc.).<sup>82</sup> At Kleidi-Samikon the tholos tomb might have belonged to an officer's/commander's family and the burial mounds to the ordinary people and inhabitants of the region. This hypothesis may explain the obvious differences between the two sites (Kleidi-Samikon and Kakovatos), concerning the burial and residential architecture as well as the findings. During LH III times, when the administrative centre of Kakovatos was abandoned because of the emergence and growth of the centralised bureaucratic Messenian state,<sup>83</sup> Kleidi-Samikon became a remote administrative station of Messenia.<sup>84</sup> It was deserted when the collapse<sup>85</sup> of the Mycenaean palatial system of Pylos occurred.<sup>86</sup>

The final publication of the excavation data, the detailed study of the pottery, involving also chemical and petrographic analysis, and the examination of Kleidi-Samikon in relation to the adjacent Mycenaean sites may allow us to verify these speculations and to find convincing answers to the aforementioned questions.

<sup>79</sup> Following the habitation pattern that can be traced in Messenia, cf. Wright 2006, 11.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. de Vre , this volume. Eder 2016, 176, about the materialisation of ideology and social power. An important aspect is given by the fact that these raw materials could not be produced locally.

<sup>81</sup> For a brief presentation of these sites, see also Nikolentzos 2011, 324–325, 328.

<sup>82</sup> Shelmerdine 2001, 349; Sgouritsa 2005, 518; Cavanagh 2010, 636; Nikolentzos 2011, 332.

<sup>83</sup> Eder 2007, 36.

<sup>84</sup> Nikolentzos 2011, 334–338; for the close relations between Messenia and Elis, during the Late Bronze Age, see also Nikolentzos 2014.

<sup>85</sup> Dickinson 2006, 24–57.

<sup>86</sup> Eder 2006, 550, on the consequences of the collapse of the palatial centres. On the contrary, Elis seems to flourish during LH IIIC, after the destruction of the palatial world (Eder 2006, 556–557). Birgitta Eder refers to the extended cemetery of Aya Triada (northeast Elis) and stresses the continuity of the burial practices and rites until Geometric times.

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## Illustrations

Photography of pottery: K. Nikolentzos, P. Moutzouridis

Drawings of pottery: G. Katsoudas

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