

# The Monumental Architecture of Iklaina

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*Michael B. Cosmopoulos*<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The excavations of the Athens Archaeological Society at Iklaina have brought to light a major LH settlement that is identified with *\*a-pu<sub>2</sub>*, one of the district capitals of the Mycenaean state of Pylos. One of the most striking features of the site is its monumental architecture, which includes at least two large buildings, two paved roads, a paved piazza, and massive built stone drains. The presence of this kind of monumentality outside the traditionally defined ‘palaces’, combined with other markers of advanced socio-political complexity, opens up a number of questions regarding the processes of the unification of the Mycenaean state of Pylos. In the present paper I review the relevant architectural and stratigraphic evidence and assess its possible implications for this issue. It is concluded that the emergence of monumental architecture at Iklaina could have been initiated either by the Palace of Nestor following a peaceful annexation of Iklaina in the early Mycenaean period, or by the local Iklaina rulers following a period of continuous growth before a forced annexation in LH IIIB.

**Keywords:** Monumentality, state formation, Mycenaean, Pylos, Iklaina

## Introduction

The excavations at Iklaina are conducted under the auspices of the Archaeological Society at Athens.<sup>2</sup> Over the course of nine field seasons we have unearthed a significant part of a LH settlement, which can be identified with *\*a-pu<sub>2</sub>*, one of the district capitals of the Mycenaean state of Pylos.<sup>3</sup> The site includes three general areas: residential, industrial, and administrative (marked as R, I, and A in Fig. 1).

A number of buildings and structures within the administrative area are monumental, in the sense that they are “large houses, public buildings, and special purpose structures, whose principal defining feature is that their scale and elaboration exceed the requirements of any practical functions that a building is intended to perform”.<sup>4</sup> In the present paper I provide an overview of the architectural and stratigraphic sequence of Iklaina, with special emphasis on its monumental buildings, before assessing the possible implications that the monumental architecture of the site has for the unification of the Pylian state. It should be stressed that the reconstruction of the stratigraphic sequence presented here is based on a preliminary study of the data and that conclusions may change after the final study.

## The Pre-monumental Phase

Although several MH and LH I deposits have been identified at the site, the earliest substantial architectural remains date to LH IIA/IIB and belong to a structure that we named ‘Building V’

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Anthropology and Archaeology, University of Missouri-St. Louis, St. Louis, MO. 63121, USA; e-mail: cosmopoulos@umsl.edu.

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<sup>3</sup> Cosmopoulos 2006, 215, with further references.

<sup>4</sup> Trigger 1990, 119.





Fig. 1: Aerial view of the site from the north showing the three general areas (R = Residential; I = Industrial; A = Administrative)

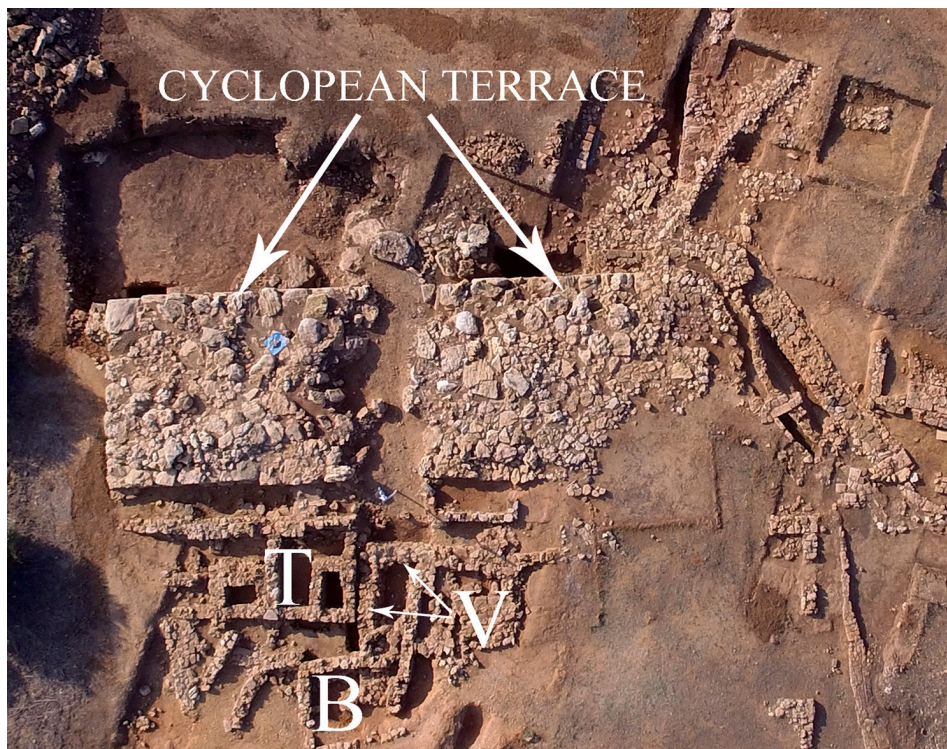


Fig. 2: Aerial view of the area of the Cyclopean Platform



(Fig. 2). Building V has only two thick (0.60–0.80 m) walls (north and west), with smooth external and rough internal faces. These features, coupled with the fact that at that point the slope drops sharply towards the northwest, suggest that the purpose of this structure was to form a terrace that supported a flat area to the east.

The next identifiable buildings are Buildings T and B (Fig. 2), which seem to date to LH IIB/IIIA1. In LH IIIA2 the two easternmost rooms of Building T were divided into smaller spaces, when this building was incorporated in the Cyclopean Terrace Building (see below). The fill from these rooms contained a large number of fresco fragments that belonged to this complex.

During the same period, a group of other buildings (Beta, Alpha, Kappa) was erected to the northwest of Buildings V and T (Fig. 3).

### The Monumental Architecture

The earliest monumental architecture of the site dates to LH IIIA2, when an ambitious building project was materialised. This project included two monumental buildings connected with paved roads and a paved piazza drained by a massive built stone drain.<sup>5</sup>

The larger of the two monumental buildings is a massive platform built in Cyclopean masonry. It is rectangular and measures 24.30 m × 8.20 m (Figs. 1, 2, 4). Its outer walls are constructed with Cyclopean masonry and the core is filled with limestone rubble and unworked slabs of various dimensions. At regular intervals the platform forms indentations (Fig. 5), similar to those of Cyclopean terraces at Tiryns, Glas, and the Palace of Nestor.<sup>6</sup> The level of the Mycenaean floor (presumably a courtyard) in front of the Cyclopean Platform is marked by a number of thick (approx. 0.60 m) slabs placed along the base of the north wall (Fig. 4). The height of the platform, from the level of this courtyard to the level of its original floor, is approx. 4 m (Fig. 4) and another 1.60 m of Cyclopean foundation continues under the courtyard all the way to the bedrock. Partial remains of a thick layer of white plaster, some with traces of blue and red colour, are still attached on the north wall of the platform and other pieces have fallen on the ground in front of this wall, suggesting that the platform was coated with a thick layer of plaster.

The purpose of this platform was to support a large building constructed in ashlar blocks, several of which (Fig. 6) have been found in a destruction layer in front of the northwest and southeast sides of the platform. This layer also contained burnt mudbricks, remains of carbonised wooden beams, and bronze nails, presumably from the building that stood on top of the platform. Based on the massive size of the platform, it is reasonable to suggest that that building would have had at least two storeys. The rooms of Building T to the south were part of the same building complex. In the early days of the excavation, when the form and function of the Cyclopean Platform, on which this building rests, had not been clearly determined, we referred to it as the ‘Cyclopean Terrace’, a name that has since become part of the narrative of the site and embedded in the bibliography. Although now it is clear that this is a platform (a solidly built structure with a stone core) and not a terrace (a structure consisting of one to three walls retaining earth), the term ‘Cyclopean Terrace Building’ has been preserved to avoid confusion.

The east end of the Cyclopean Platform is defined by a layer of flagstones that appear to have belonged to the floor of a paved open space. Further to the south there is a large open area without any architectural remains or artefacts, in places preserving patches of clay packed floor; this may have been a courtyard, but its extent and plan cannot be determined.

In the early years of the excavation we had thought that the Cyclopean Platform and the building that rose on top of it dated to the early Mycenaean period and that it was destroyed in LH IIIA2. Soundings in the northeast, northwest, and southwest corners of the platform indicate,

<sup>5</sup> Cosmopoulos 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Wright 1980, figs. 4, 5, 9.

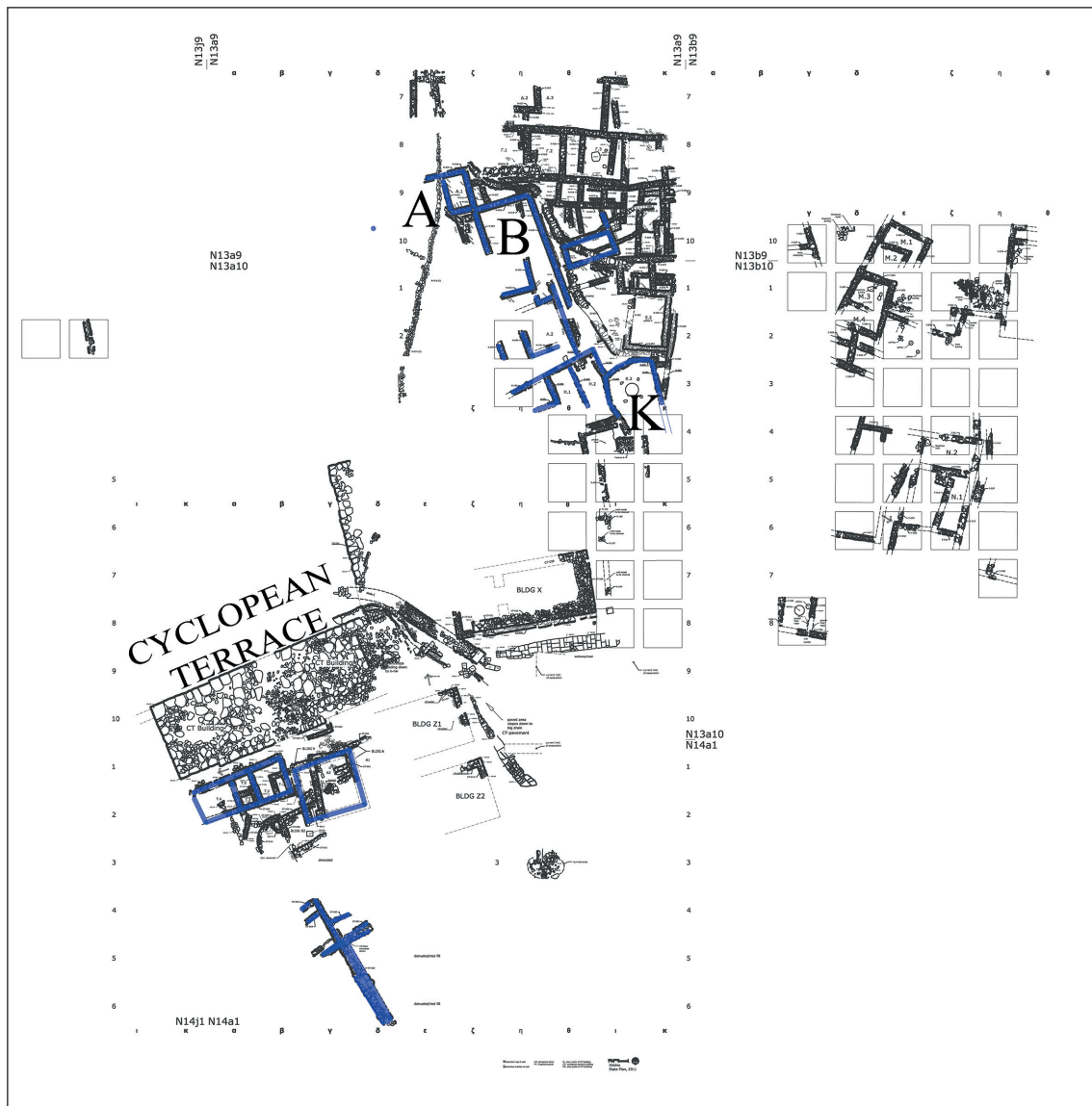


Fig. 3: State plan of the Iklaina site (M. Nelson)

however, that it was constructed sometime in LH IIIA2–IIIB. Based on the date of the destruction layer mentioned above, it seems that it was destroyed violently in the LH IIIB period.

Another large structure, Building X, exists to the east of the Cyclopean Platform (Fig. 7). The earliest phase of this building seems to date to LH IIIA2 early, when the inner south wall (CT-025) was constructed. At a later stage, within LH IIIA2 or early LH IIIB, this wall was encased by a row of orthostates, on top of which an ashlar wall was built. In its final form the building was about 15 m long and 8 m wide. The function of this building is not clear, as its north half, if it ever existed, is not preserved. Soundings in the interior of the building did not yield any artefacts, which also suggests that either the building may have never been completed or that it was only meant to have a south face.

In front of Building X passes a paved road, made of rectangular limestone blocks; the quality of construction of this road is remarkable, as shown by the fact that in the spots where it is well preserved, the joints between its blocks are barely visible (Figs. 7, 8). The road has been followed to a length of 17 m, at which point it seems to turn towards the north and to continue between two





Fig. 4: The north face of the Cyclopean Platform



Fig. 5: View of indentation and of the slabs along the north face of the Cyclopean Platform



Fig. 6: Ashlar blocks from the Cyclopean Terrace Building



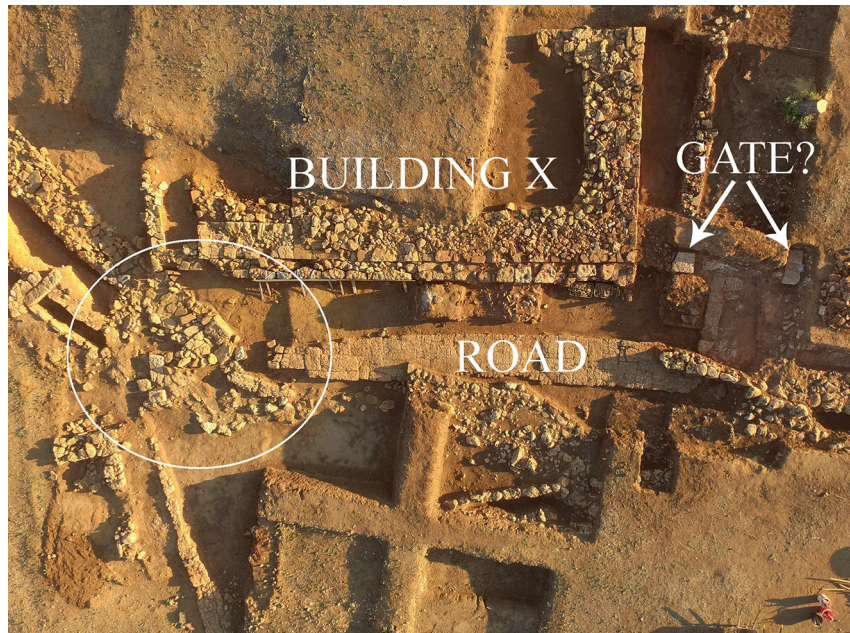


Fig. 7: Aerial view of Building X and the road



Fig. 8: The north face of Building X, the marker, and the road

large blocks of stone, which may have belonged to an entrance gate (Fig. 7). An upright slab, possibly a sort of *horos*, is lined up with the east side of Building X (Fig. 8).

Towards the west, the road ends in a paved piazza (indicated with a circle in Fig. 7), which unfortunately has suffered extensive damage by ploughing. The extent of the piazza cannot be reconstructed, but it seems to have spanned the area between Building X and the east end of the Cyclopean Terrace Building. The piazza was drained by a massive built stone drain (Fig. 9). From the piazza a second road starts, which seems to lead in the direction of a possible open-air shrine.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Cosmopoulos 2015.





Fig. 9: The built stone drain from the southeast

Building X, the roads, and the piazza seem to have been destroyed sometime in LH IIIB, when the Cyclopean Terrace Building and the Houses Beta, Alpha, and Kappa of the north sector were also destroyed. The preliminary analysis of the stratigraphy suggests a site-wide destruction sometime in LH IIIB.

### The Post-monumental Phase

Building activity after the destruction was restricted in the construction of industrial rooms to the north of the Cyclopean Platform (Fig. 3, marked with I in Fig. 1). Given the chronological focus that this conference has on the early Mycenaean period, a detailed discussion of these rooms is outside the scope of the present paper, but I should mention two important characteristics:

1. they date to the final period of use of the site, LH IIIB; and
2. their orientation differs significantly from that of the earlier buildings, on top of which they sit.

### Conclusions

On the basis of the preliminary analysis of the stratigraphic and architectural sequence it appears that at Iklaina we can distinguish the following phases:

Phase 1 (LH IIA–IIIA1). Building V with its staircase; early Building T; early Building X; Buildings Beta, Alpha, Kappa in the north sector.

Phase 2 (LH IIIA2–IIIB). The Cyclopean Terrace Building, Building X main phase, roads, piazza, Buildings Beta, Alpha, Kappa in the north sector (continued use).

Phase 3 (LH IIIB). Industrial workshops.

It is noteworthy that there does not seem to be a destruction horizon between Phases 1 and 2, with the exception of sporadic localised deposits with rubble. In fact, the builders of the monumental buildings seem to have taken into consideration the pre-existing structures and in at least two cases the monumental buildings appear to expand those pre-existing structures: the Cyclopean Platform extended the flat area initially supported by Building V; and the external façade of Building X encased the earlier inner core of Wall CT-025. In Phase 3 industrial installations were

erected in the north part of the site, with a different orientation than the Cyclopean Platform and the buildings of Phase 2. Both the erection and the destruction of monumental buildings are seminal points in the life of the settlement and require explanation. There are two possible scenarios:

1. The first is based on current models that date the annexation of second-order centres by the Palace of Nestor to the end of the early Mycenaean period.<sup>8</sup> In this scenario, given the lack of a destruction horizon until LH IIIB, annexation was peaceful and the emergence of monumental architecture at the site must have been initiated or allowed by the Palace of Nestor. Possible reasons for which the Palace of Nestor would invest in such a large-scale building programme at another site include:
  - that Iklaina may have been ruled by a relative of the ruler at the Palace of Nestor;
  - that the architectural expansion indicated by the monumental architecture could have been a form of reward for support rendered by the rulers of Iklaina to the Palace of Nestor;
  - that Iklaina could have been of special economic significance to the Palace.

The destruction of the monumental buildings in LH IIIB and the change in the function of the site to industrial during a period in which Iklaina remained under the Palace of Nestor could have been associated with the architectural changes observed at the Palace of Nestor in this period (construction of the Wine Magazine and the Northeast Building), which could reflect restructuring in the administration and acquisition networks of the Palace.<sup>9</sup>

2. In the second scenario Iklaina experiences continuous and uninterrupted growth from the early Mycenaean period to LH IIIB, culminating in the construction of monumental buildings. During this long period, such aspects of Iklaina as monumental and formal architecture, elaborate decorative projects (frescoes), advanced urban infrastructures (public places, paved streets, large stone drains, water distribution works), administrative records (Linear B), and clear separation of activity areas, make Iklaina look more similar to the Palace of Nestor than to the other known second-order centre of Nichoria. These characteristics could indicate internal development of complex administration without interference or forced annexation by the Palace of Nestor. In this scenario, it is possible that Iklaina may have developed into a primary centre before its annexation by the Palace of Nestor. In this case, the destruction and abandonment of monumental buildings in the course of LH IIIB with the subsequent erection of industrial workshops may indicate deep changes in the architectural organisation and the function of the site. Such changes are compatible with the demotion of Iklaina from an administrative to an industrial centre. Such an event could have been the result of a forced takeover by a new political authority (presumably the Palace of Nestor), which could have turned Iklaina into an industrial centre. This would agree with the picture of *\*a-pu<sub>2</sub>* as an important industrial centre, that we have from the Linear B tablets from the Palace of Nestor.<sup>10</sup>

It is hoped that the continuation of the excavation and the completion of the stratigraphic analysis at Iklaina will help us test these theories and illuminate this important aspect of the emergence of the Pylian state.

<sup>8</sup> Bennet 1998; Bennet 2002; Bennet – Shelmerdine 2001; Shelmerdine 2001; Shelmerdine 2006; Wright 2006; Bennet 2007a; Bennet 2007b; Galaty – Parkinson 2007; Bennet 2008; Shelmerdine – Bennet 2008; Wright 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Nelson 2001, 214–215.

<sup>10</sup> Cosmopoulos 2019.



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### Illustrations

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