

The Foundation System at the Palace of Ayios Vasileios, Xirokambi, Lakonia

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Abstract: The recently discovered Mycenaean palace at Ayios Vasileios offers valuable new information about the origins of early Mycenaean palatial architecture. One of the most significant finds of the past years is a large court that was surrounded by unusually wide porticos. The structures at Ayios Vasileios belong to the earliest buildings of that scale on the Greek mainland and mark the beginning of a new social environment in Lakonia with the establishment of an administrative centre. For the construction of the court and the surrounding buildings, not only substantial manpower but also specialised knowledge was necessary. In this paper, we discuss the foundation techniques of the palace as a possible source of information for the building traditions of the engineers engaged with its construction. The designers of the palace were probably familiar not only with Cretan architecture but also with Cretan building methods and construction techniques and it is even possible that the large court was centrally located following the fashion of the Minoan palaces.

Keywords: Ayios Vasileios, Lakonia, foundation techniques, Mycenaean terraces, Minoan architecture

Introduction

The built environment – like any other material group – reflects the social and ideological background of any given society. Through human practice and interaction, the built space emerges as a meaningful space⁴ and represents a (social) product, in which the values, ideas and social meanings of the specific societies are embedded.⁵ It determines human actions but is also defined by these. The formation of the built space is deeply affected by social changes, but it also directs the human practice in its new social role. In this sense, the study of architecture represents a very useful methodological tool for the archaeologist who attempts to reconstruct past societies in their social context.

Among many other examples in human history, the case of Minoan and Mycenaean mortuary and domestic architecture provides excellent cases of how built space is created,⁶ institutionalised and transformed, according to specific needs, conventions and memories that direct performative acts within a very well thought-out and defined space and framework.⁷ A first step towards the understanding of Minoan and Mycenaean architecture as a social product is based on a broad division known in the theory of architecture between complex and simple⁸ or ‘polite’ and vernacular architecture.⁹ According to this, a series of criteria is set for estimating the labour that has been

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⁴ Rappoport 1982.

⁵ Lefebvre 1991; Casey 1996.

⁶ See Wright 2006b, 49–50. According to Wright 2006a, 50, “buildings control movement and the production and reproduction of memory”.

⁷ Wright 2006b, 49, “incorporating practice” as opposed to “inscribed practice”.

⁸ Darcque 2005, 137–138.

⁹ McEnroe 1990, 195.

invested in the construction of a building. These criteria relate to the size of a structure, the type and quality of the building material used (collected or extracted), its origin (transported from far away or local), the variety and complexity of the building tools,¹⁰ and the application of innovative building concepts unknown to previous local traditions.¹¹ Thus, while the construction of simple houses was often a task carried out by small communities based on their experience,¹² the so-called complex architecture was the work of specialised, itinerant or attached workers.¹³

At Ayios Vasileios typical elements of complex architecture¹⁴ have been discovered. The excavated remains suggest the existence of large and imposing buildings, but ashlar masonry is rare and the wall construction is different from what is attested in other Mycenaean palaces (absence of offsets in the exterior walls). The comparative study of the construction methods at Ayios Vasileios could highlight the building strategies of the local elites and whether or to what extent they depended on local or innovative concepts carried out by specialised workers.

Ayios Vasileios

Ayios Vasileios was already known prior to its excavation. The site was identified by Richard Hope Simpson and Oliver Dickinson in their *Gazetteer of Aegean Civilisation* as an important Mycenaean centre,¹⁵ while Emilia Banou suggested its possible palatial function in 1996.¹⁶ However, it was only in 2008 and 2009 that the first excavations revealed the real importance of the site and brought to light finds of a unique character.¹⁷ The main structures discovered so far are the early Mycenaean cemetery to the north (North Cemetery),¹⁸ and Building A with Building B to its east in the central part of the plateau.¹⁹ Further to the south, part of two other building complexes (Buildings Δ and E) and a large court came to light (Fig. 1).²⁰ The court had a northwest to southeast orientation and was bordered by a portico to the south (South Stoa). Part of another stoa was excavated to the west of the court (West Stoa).²¹ The long Wall 112/113 formed the rear wall of the West Stoa. The latter had an upper storey, while on the ground floor a large opening provided access to a rear room that is not yet fully excavated (Building E).

A clay stand with four pithoi was built against Wall 113 (Figs. 1–2). Traces of the rear wall of the South Stoa (Wall 117/110) appeared in two trenches (Fig. 1). From Wall 117/110 only the lower foundations survived the large-scale dismantling during the Byzantine period (Fig. 5).²² The east end of the South Stoa has not been reached so far. The floor of the West Stoa and the rear room (Building E) was continuous and it was at the same level as the floors of the court and the South Stoa (Fig. 2). A 10 cm-high clay band ran across the colonnades, which consisted of

¹⁰ See Shaw 2009 for the completely new spectrum of tools used by the builders of the first palaces suggesting the existence of a specialised workforce; McEnroe 2010, 48. For a detailed analysis of Mycenaean tools or traces of tools, see Küpper 1996, 7–25. The Mycenaean tools were basically the same as in Crete (Küpper 1996, 7).

¹¹ McEnroe 1990, 199, 201, fig. 3; Driessen – Schoep 1995; see Devolder 2012 for the study of the so-called architecture energetics.

¹² Rudofsky 1965 has epigrammatically summarised it as “architecture without architects”; McEnroe 1990; Palyvou 1990, 45; Devolder 2015.

¹³ McEnroe 1990, 195; Devolder 2015, 241.

¹⁴ Preziosi 1983; Barber 1992; McEnroe 2010, 84–86.

¹⁵ Hope Simpson – Dickinson 1979, 110.

¹⁶ Banou 1996, 37–39.

¹⁷ Vasilogamvrou 2013, 65–80, pl. 43.

¹⁸ See Voutsaki et al., this volume.

¹⁹ For Building A see Vasilogamvrou 2013, 72, fig. 3; 74–79; pls. 48β–52; Vasilogamvrou 2014, 64–68, pls. 59–62a; Vasilogamvrou 2015a, 67–70; Vasilogamvrou 2015b, 100–104, pls. 68–70.

²⁰ Vasilogamvrou 2015a, 71–74, pls. 58–59; Vasilogamvrou 2015b, 105, fig. 2; 110–113, pls. 70β–76.

²¹ For attached and free standing stoas, see Hayden 1981.

²² Vasilogamvrou 2015b, 113, pl. 76β.

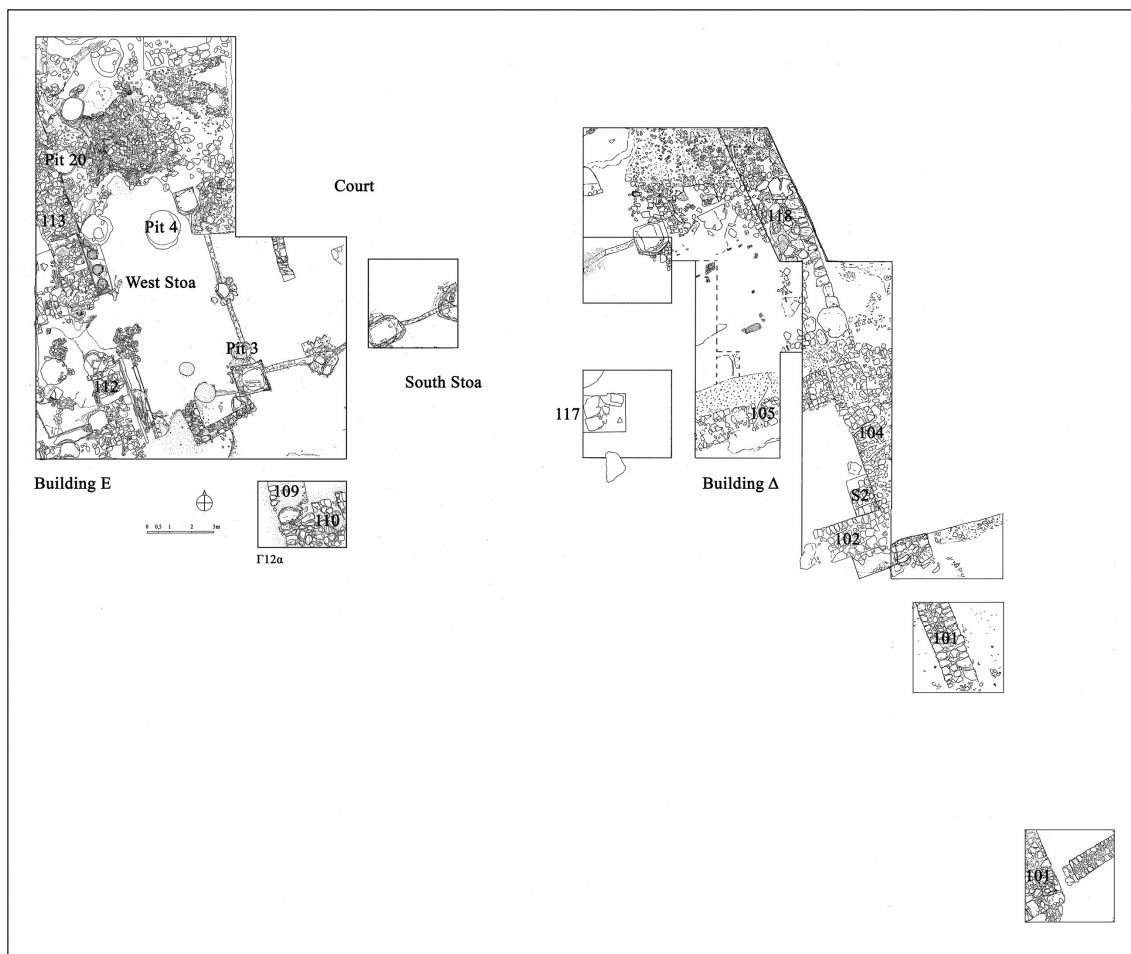


Fig. 1: Building Δ, Building E, West Stoa, South Stoa and the court at the end of the 2016 excavation (plan: K. Minakakis, K. Athanasiou, E. Koulogeorgiou, copyright: A. Vasilogamvrou)

alternating pillars and columns (Figs. 1–2). Behind the South Stoa part of a pebble pathway came to light that runs parallel to Wall 117 (Fig. 2).

The area further to the south (Building Δ) is largely unexplored. It is defined by a long north-west-southeast wall (104/101) and two northeast-southwest walls (105 and 102) that run parallel to the rear wall of the South Stoa and the pebble pathway (Fig. 1). The southernmost corner of Wall 104/101 was also identified. There it bonds with another wall that runs towards the southwest and parallel to Walls 105 and 102. North of Wall 104, Wall 118 was found. The latter was sealed by the floor of the South Stoa with the clay band and may have been part of an earlier structure. In addition, a large limestone block, which may have been another pillar base of the south colonnade and seems to have been exposed to high temperatures, rests on its surface. Currently, there is no obvious connection between Wall 118 and Wall 104. In the area between the south end of Wall 118 and the north end of Wall 104 many mudbricks were found. Further investigation will clarify whether Walls 118 and 104 shared the same foundation or not.

Evidence for a severe fire destruction comes from the area of the court and the stoas. The floor, consisting of pebbles and trodden earth, was heavily burnt – almost vitrified – and burnt masses of mudbrick and mortar as well as carbonised wood appeared in many locations. Moreover, some of the vessels lying in situ on the floor of the stoas had lost their original shape due to exposure to high temperatures.²³ The fire destruction led to the collapse of the first floor of the West Stoa

²³ Vasilogamvrou 2015a; Vasilogamvrou 2015b.



Fig. 2: The West Stoa (state of the 2016 excavation)
(photo: N. Karadimas)

where an archive with Linear B tablets was stored. The plaster floor of the first storey was often found on top of a red layer of varying thickness (30–60 cm). This red layer was probably part of the substructure of the collapsed upper floor and was found lying directly on the floor of the West Stoa (Fig. 3).

The present paper will focus on the foundation system of Buildings Δ, E and the court as well as their dating. Parallels on the Greek mainland and Crete will be investigated in an attempt to place these structures, both in terms of plan and construction²⁴ as well as in terms of their function (mainly the court and stoas), in a wider context. However, it needs to be stressed that only a small part of the buildings has been revealed so far.²⁵ Thus, the plan of the structures is still largely unknown, and how far the West Stoa extended to the north or whether another stoa existed to the east of the court must remain open.

Studies on Foundation Systems

The foundation and terracing systems in Minoan and Mycenaean architecture have been the subject of thorough studies that remain fundamental until today. James Wright studied the Mycenaean

²⁴ The discussion of the upper structures such as timber framing and mudbrick constructions will represent the focus of another study.

²⁵ For geophysical prospections on the hill, see Vasilogamvrou 2014, 60–61, pl. 55α; Vasilogamvrou 2015a, 64–65; Vasilogamvrou 2015b, 98–99, pls. 64–67.

terracing system in detail with a special focus on palatial terraces.²⁶ One of the most important conclusions of his work is that the construction of the palatial terraces that allowed large-scale building in steep areas developed as a system mainly during LH IIIA, but, in reality, it represented an elaborate version of the so-called foundation terraces. The latter are a rather simple form of terracing that was applied already during the Middle Bronze Age and the early Mycenaean period with the terrace of Mansion 2 at the Menelaion providing a good example for this type of foundation. Terraces of this type mainly supported single structures while the bedrock was often cut and processed (rock-cut terraces).²⁷ Vassou Fotou has thoroughly studied the terracing system during the Neopalatial period in Crete.²⁸ According to Fotou there are three systems of terracing: terracing through the cutting of the rock, terracing through filling and, finally, the combination of both.²⁹ The labour involved during levelling and terracing varies greatly from place to place, but in effect, it can be used as additional evidence for the complex nature of the building project.³⁰ In this respect, there are two broad categories of foundation systems. In the first, the natural layout is followed as much as possible, whereas in the second, the bedrock – despite disadvantages emerging from the natural terrain – is incorporated in the envisaged project.³¹ In respect to Mycenaean architecture, Paul Darcque followed Fotou's tripartite system for classifying terraces.³²

Klaus Kilian offered a typology of wall foundations, based mainly on evidence from Tiryns. His second type, the built foundations, was divided into five further types and several subtypes according to the form of the foundation trench and the placement of the wall on soil or bedrock.³³ In the course of his study, Kilian was able to show that elaborate – and time-consuming or expensive – architecture is immediately recognisable on the basis of the type of foundation of the buildings.³⁴ However, both elaborate as well as simple foundations may occur at the same site and during the same period.³⁵ A detailed analysis of the Mycenaean citadel walls and building methods was conducted by Michael Küpper,³⁶ whereas the architecture of the palace of Pylos was thoroughly investigated by Michael Nelson. In Pylos, however, due to the good preservation of the floors, a close examination of the foundations is not always possible.³⁷

The Terraces and the Foundation System at Ayios Vasileios

From the beginning of the excavations, special attention was given to a detailed description of the building methods and the construction material occurring in the wider area of the palace. However, regarding Buildings Δ and E, the excavation reached the bedrock in only very few cases, and almost nowhere were the wall foundations exposed in any greater length than 2 m. In Building E and the court, the good preservation of the vitrified floor prevents a closer examination of the underlying layers. Hence, the most valuable information regarding the foundation of the

²⁶ Wright 1980; Wright 2005; Wright 2006a; Wright 2006b.

²⁷ In these cases the terraces function as the foundation of single structures (Zygouries, House B; Mycenae, House of the Oil Merchant) and do not create a space around them (Wright 1980, 61–64).

²⁸ Fotou 1990; see also Shaw 2009, 54, figs. 111, 115.

²⁹ Fotou 1990, 47, 63–64.

³⁰ Fotou 1990, 73; McEnroe 2010, 96, tab. 9.1; 107, tab. 9.2; Devolder 2012, 172–175.

³¹ Fotou 1990, 72–73; Devolder 2012, 172. As Fotou 1990, 45, has stressed “(L’implantation) c’est la première opération qui précède et affecte le caractère de la construction elle-même”.

³² Darcque 2005, 83–87.

³³ Kilian 1990, 95, 100–112. Kilian's first type, the so-called natural foundations, refers to walls that are placed directly on the floor. This simple method of founding is characteristic for LH IIIC and is best demonstrated in the case of Building T (Kilian 1990, 97; Maran 2001).

³⁴ Kilian 1990, 111–112.

³⁵ E.g. Building VI as opposed to Building A in the Lower Citadel of Tiryns. It has been demonstrated for Crete, too, that not all buildings belonging to ‘polite’ architecture had deep foundations (Zois 1990; Shaw 2009, 55–56).

³⁶ Küpper 1996.

³⁷ Nelson 2001, 96–98.

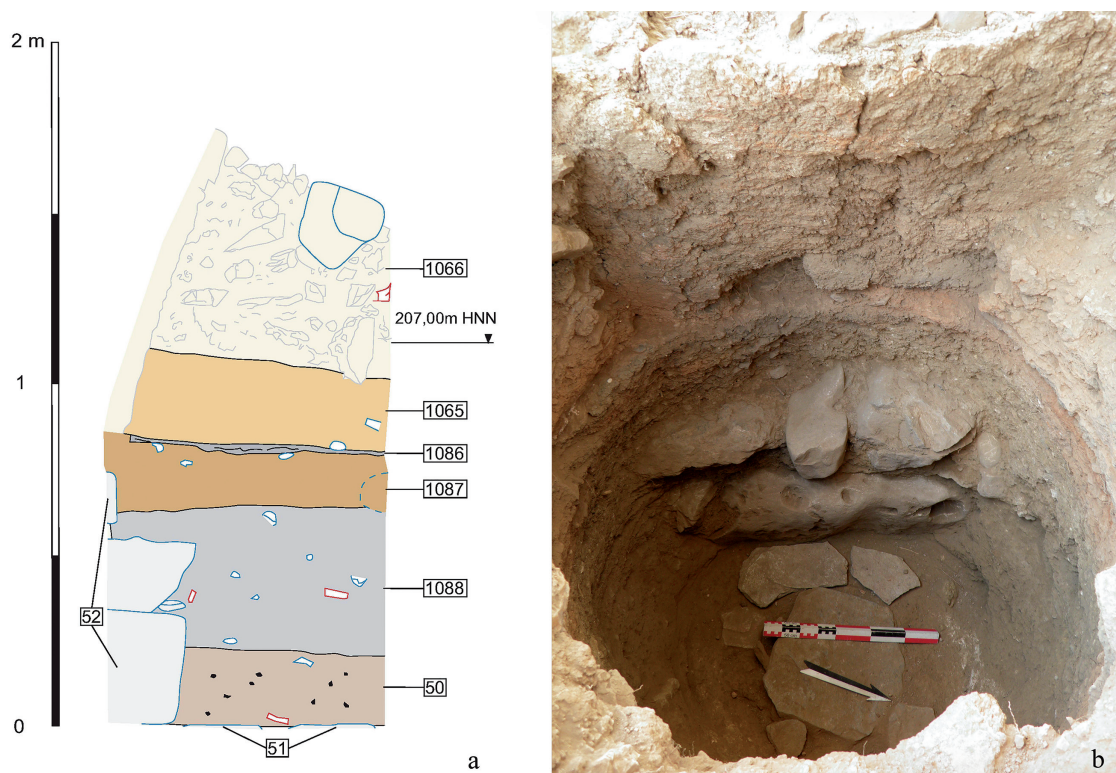


Fig. 3: Byzantine Pit 20 in the West Stoa: a. North section of the Byzantine pit. SU 52: foundation of Wall 113, SU 1086: the vitrified floor of the West Stoa (drawing: A. Buhlke); b. The west baulk of the Byzantine pit (photo copyright: A. Vasilogamvrou)

West Stoa comes from the Byzantine pits that cut the Mycenaean layers down to the level of the bedrock. Byzantine Pits 20 and 4 were opened close to the rear wall of the West Stoa (112/113) and the northernmost excavated pillar base respectively (Fig. 1). In both cases, it is possible to see that the vitrified floor of the West Stoa sealed a deposit that was approx. 80 cm thick (Figs. 3–4).

The upper part of the deposit consisted of a red layer that was approx. 20 cm thick (Stratigraphic unit, hereafter SU, 1087). In Pit 20, the red layer SU 1087 is followed by two layers of grey and greyish/reddish colour respectively (SU 1088 and SU 50). Three layers appear under the red layer SU 1087 in the profile of Pit 4, namely a thin grey layer (SU 1141), another of greyish/pinkish colour (SU 50) and finally, at the bottom, one with a reddish colour (SU 1142). The east face of the foundations of Wall 113 are partly revealed in the west side of Pit 20 (Fig. 3a–b, SU 52). At the east side of Pit 4, under the pillar base, part of another wall came to light (Fig. 4, SU 1143). It probably belongs to Wall 109, parts of which were excavated further to the south in the Byzantine Pit 3³⁸ and in Trench Γ12α (Fig. 1).

A small quantity of sherds was collected from the deposit sealed by the floor of the stoa (SU 1087, SU 1088, SU 50, SU 1142) (see below), but there were no traces of earlier floors under the vitrified floor of the West Stoa. Considering this fact and due to the homogeneity of the red layer (SU 1087), we suggest that the deposit sealed by the floor of the stoa is part of levelled terrace fill, on top of which the floor of the stoa was constructed. In that case, the fill would have been retained to the west by Wall 113 and to the east by Wall 109, which runs under the colonnade.³⁹

Thus, the long foundations in the West Stoa had a double function: to retain the fill of the terrace and, at the same time, to support the rear wall of the stoa (Wall 113) and the colonnade

³⁸ Vasilogamvrou 2015a, pl. 59.

³⁹ Vasilogamvrou 2015b, 105.

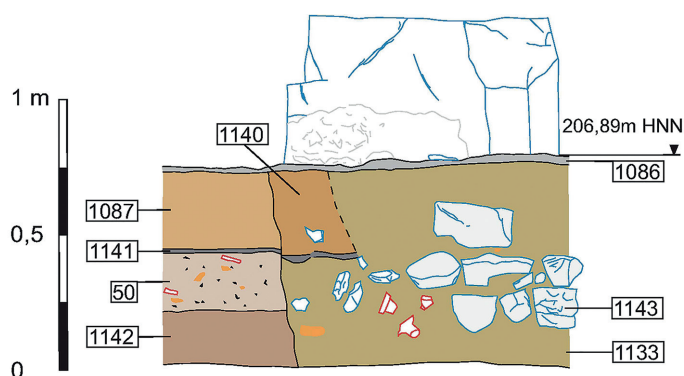


Fig. 4: Byzantine Pit 4 in the West Stoa. Northeast section of the Byzantine pit. SU 1143: Wall 109, SU 1086: the vitrified floor of the West Stoa (drawing: A. Buhlke)

(Wall 109). Both foundations are built in rubble masonry and rest on the bedrock.⁴⁰ Wall 113 is 1.40–1.50 m thick.⁴¹ Its foundation consists of three courses and is 0.80 m high. The two lowest courses (0.54 m high in total) are built with larger, roughly worked blocks that protrude approx. 25–30 cm into the upper course of the foundation (Fig. 3a–b).

For the foundation of the colonnade, a less common system was adapted at Ayios Vasileios. Instead of building individual platforms for the pillar and column bases,⁴² a 1.60–1.70 m-thick wall (109) was constructed. Wall 109 joins with the rear wall of the South Stoa (Wall 110/117) (Figs. 1, 4). It is possible that Wall 118 to the east of the court and the South Stoa had a similar function to Wall 109. Wall 118 is one of the thickest walls of the area (2 m) and, as mentioned above, a large limestone block that could have been part of a pillar base rests on its surface. Foundations of this type, constructed as long platforms that resemble wall foundations, probably betray a great concern for stability and are known from Crete⁴³ and, more rarely, from the Greek mainland (see below).⁴⁴

Although the South Stoa is largely unexcavated, a similar terrace fill as in the West Stoa must have existed there as well since the foundations of Wall 117 that have been only partly exposed lie at least 80 cm under the floor of the stoa (Fig. 5). Due to the sloping bedrock, a terrace platform retained by Wall 117 would have been necessary here.

Evidence for a second terrace in a lower level exists to the south, in Building Δ (Fig. 1). South of the pebble pathway, Wall 104 joins Walls 105 and 102 to the west. Walls 105 and 104 are of particular interest as they show interstices, which indicate pier construction with the use of timber reinforcements (Fig. 6).⁴⁵ The foundations at the corner of Walls 102 and 104 as well as the south face of Wall 102 have been excavated down to the level of the bedrock. Wall 102 is built with rubble stones of considerable size. For the exterior face of the wall larger stones have been used. In the north face of Wall 102 the lowest three courses of the foundations protrude and are built as steps (Fig. 7).

⁴⁰ See Nelson 2001, 170, for types of rubble construction (shell rubble walls, uniform rubble walls and rubble slab walls in Pylos). The majority of the walls at Ayios Vasileios belong rather to the first and second type.

⁴¹ Vasilogamvrou 2015b, 105, 113, for Walls 112/113 and 117.

⁴² Cf. Kilian 1990, 110, fig. 6; Nelson 2001, 103–108, fig. 39; Shaw 2009, 55, figs. 155–156.

⁴³ See Shaw 2009, 55, fig. 153, for the western stylobate in Phaistos.

⁴⁴ In Room 65 in Pylos two bases rest partly on early walls (Nelson 2001, 107, fig. 39).

⁴⁵ See Nelson 2001, 75, 154–169, figs. 94–98, for a discussion of the use of wood in the palace of Pylos. Real evidence for the use of wood in the walls of the palace is seen in Room 6 only in three interstices that were empty. The other gaps had a fill of lime mortar that suggests another type of construction and much less use of wood than originally thought. For a thorough discussion, see Wright 2006a, 28–33.



Fig. 5: The foundations of the rear Wall (117) of the South Stoa (photo copyright: A. Vasilogamvrou)



Fig. 6: Building A. Walls 105 and 104. In the corner of the room, a Byzantine pithos (photo copyright: A. Vasilogamvrou)

The whole area between Walls 105 and 102 was reused during the Byzantine era (c. 9th–10th century). The mixed layers, containing Byzantine and Mycenaean pottery, went approx. 15 cm deeper than the pier masonry, thus disturbing the Mycenaean floor. The Mycenaean floor of the building defined by Walls 105, 104 and 102 would have been at the level of the wall chases or slightly lower. In a sounding opened in 2012 and 2016 in the corner of Walls 104 and 102 (Sounding 2 [(S2)]) undisturbed Mycenaean layers came to light (Fig. 8). A deposit of approx. 1.20 m thickness was excavated, which contained soil with a large amount of sherds as well as three almost fully preserved vessels. It should be stressed that the fragments of a fully mended goblet were found in different levels of the deposit, from the top to the bottom. This suggests that the deposit emerged in the course of a single event and most probably represents the fill of a terrace.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ A pit recognised on the west section of S2 may relate to the construction process of the terrace (Catling 2009a, 45–49, for various structures within the terrace fills of Mansion 2 that relate to the construction process. Kilian 1990, 102 n. 37).



Fig. 7: Building Δ. The foundation of Walls 104 (top) and 102 (right) (photo copyright: A. Vasilogamvrou)

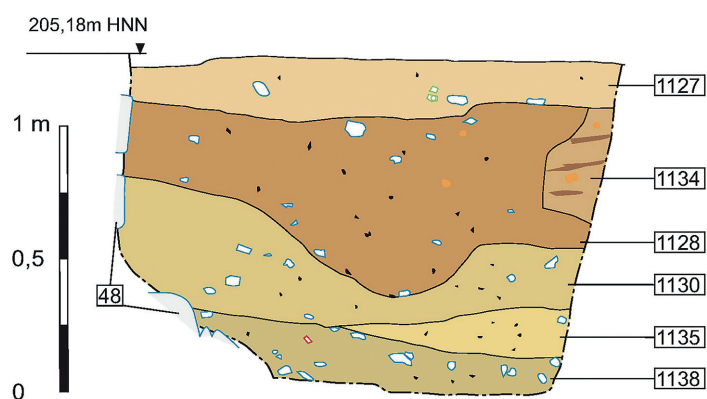


Fig. 8: Building Δ. West section of Sounding 2 (S2) at the corners of Walls 104 and 102 (SU 48) (drawing: A. Buhlke)

Finally, the area further to the south, between Walls 102 and 101, is still too poorly investigated to allow any conclusions for the existence of a third terrace.

Based on the present evidence it seems possible to suggest that the West Stoa, the court and Building Δ to the south were constructed on top of two terrace platforms that consisted of soil. The terrace fill was enclosed in rectangular compartments created by the long and thick foundations that rested on the bedrock and which were also used as structural walls (for the foundation of the walls of the buildings) or as bases for the colonnades. Due to the sloping terrain towards the south, the heavier load must have been retained by the walls (117/110, 105 and 102) running east-west, which is why Wall 102, and probably also Wall 117, had deeper foundations than the others. It is possible that a stone platform similar to that under the colonnade of the West Stoa (Wall 109) also existed under the colonnade of the South Stoa but this needs to be confirmed by future excavation. In some cases, larger blocks, roughly worked, were placed at the exterior corners of the walls (109 and 118).⁴⁷ However, the continuation of Wall 109 further to the south is uncertain. Likewise, it is unclear if the east Walls 104/101 and 118 share the same foundation or not. Thus,

⁴⁷ Cf. Shelton 2009, fig. 4.

the terraces of Ayios Vasileios seem to represent an elaborate version of the foundation terraces. One crucial aspect here refers to the lack of earlier floors within the fill of the terraces, at least in the areas investigated so far. This point is of some importance as it relates not only to the building process itself, but also to the habitation history of the area. There are two possible explanations for the lack of earlier floors.⁴⁸ Either the area occupied by the buildings was previously uninhabited or – what is most likely – the earlier remains were razed down to the level of the bedrock. This is a time-consuming process, but it is a common practice in the course of terracing works as it allows the easier cutting and general processing of the bedrock where it is considered necessary.⁴⁹ However, as the area under discussion is large, it cannot be excluded that earlier floors and walls exist in as yet uninvestigated areas and were incorporated in the fill.⁵⁰ At present, it has to remain open whether the foundation of the walls and the colonnades of the stoas were all built at the same time with the court or whether they belonged to an earlier phase and were reused.

The Construction Date of the Ayios Vasileios Terraces

The dating of the deposit sealed by the floor of the West Stoa is based on a small group of sherds that was collected from the profiles of the Byzantine pits.⁵¹ In terms of quantity, the material is restricted, but it contains some characteristic sherds. By contrast, the sounding (S2) at the corner of Walls 104 and 102 in the lower terrace (Figs. 1, 7–8) yielded a rich pottery deposit and three almost fully preserved vessels: one plain kylix (FS 267), one conical cup (FS 204) (Fig. 9.12) and a linear-painted one-handled goblet (FS 263) with monochrome interior and reserved exterior. In S2 the open shapes are much more frequent than the closed shapes, the latter being a characteristic feature of settlement deposits. Regarding the painted pottery, the material is dominated by monochrome vessels, but linear-painted pottery is also well represented. On the other hand, pattern-painted sherds are rare. The most common open shape is the goblet (FS 254 and FS 263) (Fig. 9.1–6). Goblets may have tall everted rims, occasionally hollowed in the interior (Fig. 9.3), but medium-tall and short everted rims (Fig. 9.2, 5) occur as well. The monochrome semiglobular kylix (FS 264) (Fig. 9.7), as well as the shallow kylix and kraters with vertical handles FS 7–9 are also attested (Fig. 9.8–9). Among the very few motifs identified are rock pendant (Fig. 9.10), papyrus (Fig. 9.8), argonaut and rosettes. One wall sherd with a rosette probably belonged to an Ephyræan goblet (Fig. 9.6). From the group of the closed vessels, worth mentioning are sherds from an alabastron with rock pattern (Fig. 9.10), or sherds from other closed vessels decorated with argonaut (Fig. 9.11), vertical stripes and net pattern. The fine plain pottery is very frequent. The conical cup FS 204 is the most common shape (Fig. 9.12). The latter is followed by kylikes and goblets (Fig. 9.13–15), whereas carinated kylikes FS 267 and angular bowls FS 295 are well attested (Fig. 9.16–17). The material collected from the Byzantine pits under the floor of the West Stoa (Fig. 10.1–6) resembles the pottery from Sounding 2.

In both deposits representing secondary fills, a mixture of earlier material (e.g. the Ephyræan goblet, Fig. 9.6) and sherds from the time of the construction of the walls have to be expected.⁵² The diagnostic sherds seem to reflect a LH IIIA1 tradition, as is shown by the presence of goblets.⁵³ However, in both cases – Sounding 2 and the deposit under the floor of the West Stoa – the monochrome kylix FS 264 is attested (Fig. 9.7), a shape that either appears for the first time or

⁴⁸ Vasilogamvrou 2015a, 72.

⁴⁹ Fotou 1990.

⁵⁰ Cf. Catling 2009a, 40–45; Catling 2009b, fig. 12.

⁵¹ For discussion see Kardamaki 2017, 111, and fig. 20.313–317.

⁵² Mountjoy 1983.

⁵³ The pattern-painted and linear-painted goblet is a popular type in the group of vessels found in situ on the pebble subfloor of the Menelaion (LH IIIA1) (Catling 2009b, 89, fig. 93.ET69–ET71). For one-handled goblets with a solidly painted interior from LH IIIA2 Early contexts, see Thomas 2011, 195–196, fig. 10. Goblets with similar rims (short and triangular) as these from Tsoungiza occur also at Sounding 2 at Ayios Vasileios.

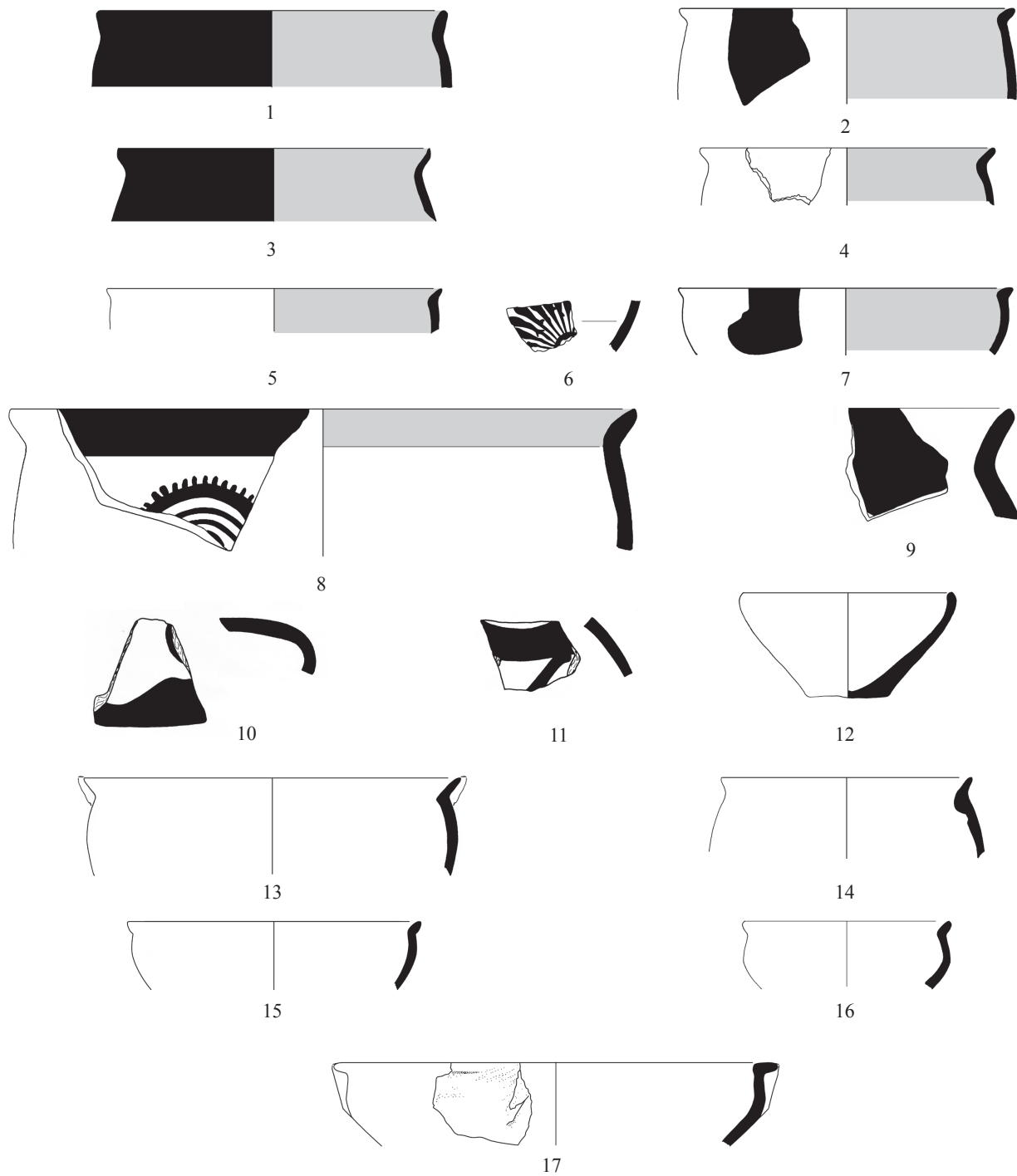


Fig. 9: Pottery found in Sounding 2 (S2) at the corner of Walls 104 and 102. Scale 1:3
(drawings: A. Poelstra)

rather becomes more common during LH IIIA2.⁵⁴ One shape that is generally accepted as beginning in LH IIIA2 and which is identified in both terrace fills is the monochrome stemmed bowl (FS 304) (Fig. 10.4).⁵⁵ However, monochrome and pattern-painted stemmed bowls are rarely

⁵⁴ Thomas 2011, 198–201; Vitale 2011, 341. See also Kardamaki 2017, 113–114.

⁵⁵ Shelmerdine 1992, 495, 538, no. P3649, fig. 9.39; Thomas 2011, 204, fig. 16.169; 226; Vitale 2011.

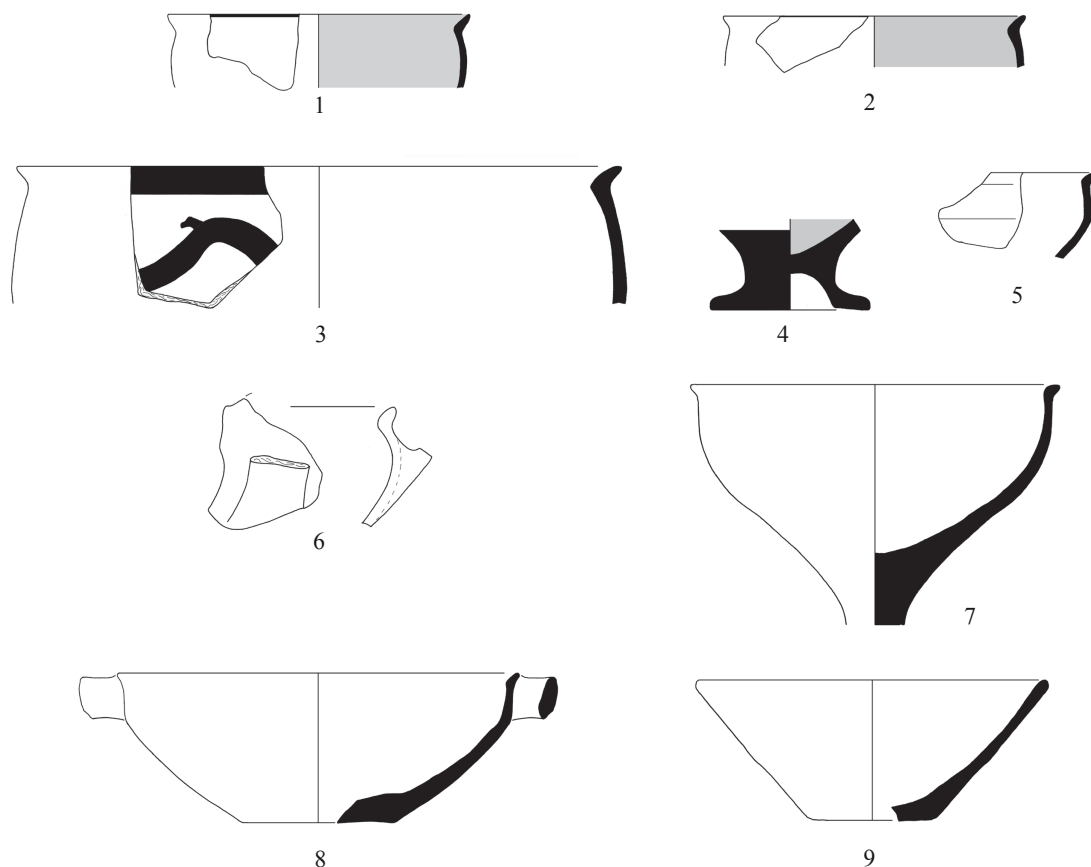


Fig. 10: 1–6. Pottery from the deposit sealed by the floor of the West Stoa (collected from the baulk of Byzantine Pit 20); 7–9. Pottery in situ on the floor of the South Stoa. Scale 1:3 (drawings: E. Kardamaki)

reported from earlier, LH IIIA1 contexts.⁵⁶ Thus, the presence of the monochrome semiglobular kylix and the monochrome stemmed bowl suggests that the latest pottery from the terrace fills dates to LH IIIA2. Since other characteristic shapes of the latter phase such as kylikes FS 256/257 and small stirrup jars FS 171–173 – to name the most important – are absent,⁵⁷ the material from the fills probably dates to the beginning of the period. LH IIIA2 Early settlement contexts have been identified at only a few sites, such as Tsoungiza, Nichoria and Mitrou.⁵⁸ The LH IIIA2 Early pottery is still largely tied to the LH IIIA1 tradition. However, a simple or tripartite division of the phase is still under discussion.⁵⁹ For Mitrou it has been argued that an early stage of LH IIIA2 existed, which is characterised by the absence of decorated semiglobular kylikes (FS 256).⁶⁰ At Ayios Vasileios, however, the beginning of the decorated semiglobular kylix does not seem to represent a very useful criterion, as the shape seems to be very rare there in general.⁶¹

⁵⁶ French 1964, 246, fig. 2, 6; 250, 257; Martin 1992, 490.

⁵⁷ Thomas 2011, 226. Cf. Kardamaki 2017, fig. 12.199.

⁵⁸ Shelmerdine 1992; Thomas 2011; Vitale 2011.

⁵⁹ Shelmerdine 1992 suggested the existence of three subphases in LH IIIA2. RMDP and Thomas 2011 follow a division in an early and late phase.

⁶⁰ Vitale 2011. In Mycenae, there is no evidence for an intermediate stage between LH IIIA1 and LH IIIA2 (French 1965, 160).

⁶¹ Kardamaki 2017, 114.

Terraces in Mycenaean Greece

The terraces of Ayios Vasileios differ significantly from the palatial terraces at Tiryns, Mycenae, Pylos and Glas. While in both cases these are built as wall compartments that largely reflect – and ultimately determine – the plan of the buildings, the construction method is different. The palatial terraces are built in the so-called Cyclopean way and, with the exception of Pylos, had a defensive character. The walls of the palatial terraces often have one face and are built as different compartments that abut one another. This is characteristically seen on the vertical joints of the exterior faces of the walls (offsets). The terrace fill consisted of soil but also large stones.⁶² There is a great debate regarding the origin of the palatial terraces. While some of their typical features seem to derive from Crete (offsets), a local development cannot be excluded.⁶³ In this regard, two questions arise: first, whether the terraces at Ayios Vasileios, constructed at an early stage of LH IIIA2, reflect a mainland tradition, and second, whether they represent a forerunner of the palatial terraces. The second question, however, exceeds the scope of the present paper. In the following, we will examine the available evidence that concerns foundation techniques in the early Mycenaean period on the Greek mainland and on Crete.

Late Middle Bronze Age and early Mycenaean terraces are found in Malthi in Messenia⁶⁴ and Kiapha Thiti in east Attica.⁶⁵ They have a defensive character and seem to have reflected the social needs of rivalling elites during this period.⁶⁶ Thus, between the terraces at Ayios Vasileios and these early Mycenaean terraces there are many differences and only some general similarities. Among the general similarities one can name the construction of rubble walls, that in the case of Kiapha Thiti, however, rarely rest on the bedrock,⁶⁷ or the fact that the terraces in Malthi and the terraces of Ayios Vasileios are low.

Mansion 2 at the Menelaion provides a closer parallel for Ayios Vasileios. The construction fill of the building was dated by Hector Catling to LH IIIA1,⁶⁸ but part of this material seems to fit well in LH IIIA2⁶⁹ suggesting that the terraces of both central Lakonian sites were built roughly at the same time. Mansion 2, the floor of which was excavated without proper documentation, extended across two terraces. The Lower Terrace was an artificial platform. Its fill – like at Ayios Vasileios – consisted mainly of soil and was approx. 1.30 m thick (East and South Terrace). At Ayios Vasileios the terrace fills are of similar or lesser thickness, namely 0.80 m under the West Stoa and approx. 1.20 m in the corner of Walls 102 and 104 (Figs. 3–4, 8) in Building Δ. Prior to the placement of the construction fill, the debris of the early Mansion 1 was cleared away and its walls were either dismantled or reused as foundations or as additional support to retain the fill. A pebble surface interpreted as the subfloor of the early Mansion 1 was preserved and used as a base for the fill of the terrace.⁷⁰ The new Mansion 2 walls, built in rubble masonry, usually rest on bedrock and, like at Ayios Vasileios, they were used both as foundations as well as retaining walls.⁷¹ Unlike at Ayios Vasileios, the wall foundations of Mansion 2 are rarely wider than 1 m and

⁶² Wright 1980; Wright 2006b.

⁶³ Wright 1980.

⁶⁴ Wright 1980, 60; Wright 2006a, 10, fig. 1.1a–b; 11.

⁶⁵ Lauter 1996, 79–91, and Wright 2006a, 9–11, for early Mycenaean citadels with defensive walls (Brauron, Peristeria). See also Küpper 1996, 27–28, 54.

⁶⁶ Wright 2006b; Eder 2010, 13–15.

⁶⁷ Lauter 1996, 22–21; Küpper 1996, 27–28. Only the walls of the towers are built with very large unworked blocks.

⁶⁸ Catling 2009a, 53, 87.

⁶⁹ Catling 2009b, 88 and fig. 92.ET62. See Kardamaki 2017, 77.

⁷⁰ Catling 2009a, 30, 40, assumed that slabs that formed the original floor of Mansion 1 covered the pebble layer. In very few cases, such slabs were lying in situ on top of the pebble floor (Room 8), and for the rest Catling suggested that they must have been cleared away during the dismantling of Mansion 1. In any case, such slabs that were small and thin and thus would have been inappropriate for the building of a wall, were found in many secondary contexts. In another case, Catling reports slabs lying approx. in situ in association with two poros slabs that could have been a feature of Mansion 1 or the construction period of the terrace.

⁷¹ Catling 2009a, 39–40; Catling 2009b, figs. 37, 40 (Section C–C), 41 (Sections I–I, J–J).

there is no evidence for the use of broader or ‘stepped’ foundations (cf. Figs. 3, 7–8).⁷² Instead, the terrace walls of Mansion 2 were strengthened on their exterior side by the so-called buttresses.⁷³ The latter is a building technique well attested at Crete during LM I.⁷⁴ At Ayios Vasileios and the Menelaion the terrace walls had two faces and functioned both as structural as well as retaining walls. Likewise, the thickness of the terrace filling, which was generally not very large, was similar in both places. However, the volume of the material processed, transported and levelled at Ayios Vasileios must have been greater due to the larger size of the structures there. Although the wall remains in the Upper Terrace and the southern part of the Lower Terrace in Mansion 2 are very scarce, Catling has postulated the existence of very long walls that bring to mind the long walls of Ayios Vasileios (Walls 118 and 104/101).

In Pylos there is remarkable evidence for the use of Minoan building methods during LH I and LH II that even seem to follow contemporary stages of development at Crete.⁷⁵ The construction of the first palatial terrace is identified in the Southwestern Building, the earlier part of which was built in LH IIIA.⁷⁶ Use of rubble masonry⁷⁷ is extensive there, and in steep areas, the foundations are described as stepped. The latter term refers to foundations of different levels according to the inclination of the bedrock. Moreover, the inner corner of the walls was supported by an additional stone fill.⁷⁸ Although the foundations of the long northwest-southeast Walls 118 and 104/101 at Ayios Vasileios have not been fully recovered, it cannot be excluded that these too were built in the same ‘stepped’ way as the bedrock rises towards the north. The terrace walls of the Southwestern Building in Pylos are used both as retaining and as foundation walls, but these are otherwise very different from the walls of Ayios Vasileios: their exterior face shows the typical offsets,⁷⁹ the terrace fill consists not only of soil but in large part also of stones⁸⁰ and, last but not least, the rubble foundation supports an ashlar façade.⁸¹ The differences between Ayios Vasileios – and Mansion 2 at the Menelaion – on the one hand and the Southwestern Building at Pylos on the other hand may be of chronological significance but could also relate to different building traditions.

Iklaina may serve as a further example of early terracing. A very long rubble wall that was constructed in LH IIIA1 or LH IIIA2 supported the fill of a terrace upon which a court was placed.⁸² Other walls, perpendicular to the long wall of north-south direction were built as additional support for the terrace.⁸³

Crucial evidence for the history of the palatial architecture derives from the Upper Citadel of Tiryns.⁸⁴ Kilian’s original suggestion of a hiatus during LH I and LH II in the area occupied later by the Great Megaron and the Little Megaron was revised by the new excavations conducted in 1998 by Joseph Maran. The new excavations provided evidence for an uninterrupted building history that goes back to LH I – rather than MH III as Kilian first suggested. But most important, they allowed a more precise dating for the construction of the first megaron in LH IIIA1 or LH IIIA2⁸⁵ and brought to light a previously unidentified building under the portico of the Great

⁷² Catling 2009a, 34–37, figs. 8, 17. They are rarely 1 m or over 1 m.

⁷³ Catling 2009b, 37, pls. 24, 25b.

⁷⁴ Shaw 2009, 58, 261, fig. 79 (Pseira).

⁷⁵ Nelson 2001, 201–203, figs. 79–80; Rutter 2005; Wright 2006a, 21.

⁷⁶ Wright 1980, 65–68, 83; Nelson 2001, fig. 81.

⁷⁷ See Nelson 2001, 48, 101, for bedrock, built and stepped foundations. In general, 90% of the walls at Pylos are built in rubble masonry.

⁷⁸ Nelson 2001, 102–103, figs. 45, 39 (southwest inner corner of Room 65).

⁷⁹ Wright 1980; Wright 2005; Wright 2006b.

⁸⁰ Wright 1980, 70.

⁸¹ Nelson 2001, 99, 101–103, 150–152, figs. 47–48 (e.g. Section 10 of the Southwestern Building).

⁸² Skewed phase. Cosmopoulos 2013, 38–40; 39, figs. 4–5. There is evidence that adjacent rooms were built in LH IIB or LH IIIA1.

⁸³ See also Shelmerdine 2015, 243–248, figs. 2–3, and Cosmopoulos, this volume, for the building phases at Iklaina. The Cyclopean terrace to the north is later and its construction has been dated in LH IIIA2 or LH IIIB1.

⁸⁴ Kilian 1987; Maran 2001; Maran 2015.

⁸⁵ Maran 2001, 23–25.

Megaron. This building represents the direct predecessor of the first megaron and was dated to LH IIB or LH IIIA1, but due to later levelling, it was heavily destroyed. From this LH IIB/LH IIIA1 building only small parts of the walls and a staircase were preserved.⁸⁶ The walls were built in rubble masonry and were not very thick (52–58 cm), but one of these had a much wider foundation (1 m).⁸⁷ Based on the evidence from the new excavations, Maran suggested that this building extended across two terraces that were connected through a staircase and thus belonged to a completely different building type than the later megaron. The building under the first megaron rather paralleled Mansion 2 suggesting that when the first megara were constructed in LH IIIA2 a real break with the pre-existing building traditions took place at Tiryns.⁸⁸ Thus, it is perhaps possible that the first Cyclopean terraces of Tiryns, the construction of which is closely linked with the first megara, was also connected with a new architectural design and construction method without any evident or direct forerunners.⁸⁹

Evidence for early terraces also exists in the Petsas House at Mycenae. The building was constructed in LH IIIA1⁹⁰ and its foundations were built in rubble masonry and rested directly on the bedrock. Some walls were 1 m thick, and where the bedrock was steep they retained a 1–2 m thick fill containing soil and small stones.⁹¹ The bedrock was previously cut and levelled and a stone fill was occasionally placed at the bottom.⁹² As pointed out by Kim Shelton, the Petsas House was built by applying a combined system of foundation and rock-cut terraces that predates the LH IIB massive terraces of Mycenae, for which massive stone fills were used (e.g. House of the Oil Merchant and Cyclopean Terrace Building).⁹³

The above discussion suggests that foundation and rock-cut terraces were widely applied during LH IIIA1 and LH IIIA2 in various regions of the Peloponnese. It is, however, unclear whether they all continue a local line of development from the Middle Bronze Age and the early Mycenaean period reflecting the same or similar building methods with local variations, or whether they appear in LH IIIA to serve the needs of a more complex architecture. The earliest palatial terraces with the typical offsets at Pylos and Tiryns could have been roughly contemporary with or slightly later than the foundation terraces at Ayios Vasileios. Some of the building techniques seen at Ayios Vasileios, such as wider foundations, anticipate later examples described by Kilian as being characteristic for LH IIB2 elaborate architecture.⁹⁴ The use of wall-like foundations for colonnades is also found in later buildings from the Upper Citadel of Tiryns. The colonnade from the south stoa of the Great Court and the west colonnade of the East Court XXX in the east wing of the palace rest on top of wall-like foundations. In the case of Court XXX, Müller assumed that the wall under the colonnade must have been part of an earlier structure.⁹⁵

⁸⁶ Maran 2001, 25–27, fig. 1.

⁸⁷ Maran 2001, 25, 27, fig. 1 (LXI 54/24–25, 34–35), pl. 3.4.

⁸⁸ Maran 2001, 28–29.

⁸⁹ For the construction of the Cyclopean terraces/walls in Tiryns, see Iakovidis 1973, 9. The first Cyclopean terrace that was characterised by the typical offsets on the exterior face of the wall was structurally connected with the north wall of the Little Megaron and the citadel wall to the east (Kilian 1990, 213, fig. 7). For a discussion on the origins of the throne rooms, see also recently Maran – Thaler 2017.

⁹⁰ Shelton 2009, 635.

⁹¹ Shelton 2009, 639.

⁹² Shelton 2009, 639, 645, fig. 5, for stone packing in Room E.

⁹³ Shelton 2009, 639–642.

⁹⁴ North wall of Corridor XV, north, west and east wall of the Great Megaron: Kilian 1990, fig. 7 (LXII 52/52); fig. 8; 110.

⁹⁵ Müller 1930, 165, pls. 5–6.

Terraces in Crete

In Crete, the so-called built and filled terraces are very common.⁹⁶ Prior to the construction of a terrace, the rock was often levelled and processed and it has been argued that this was often a time-consuming process.⁹⁷ The terrace walls had a single or two faces and the foundations were frequently built in rubble masonry.⁹⁸ The thickness of the retaining walls is often considerable, whereas the terrace fills contained mainly soil, but stone fills appeared as well.⁹⁹

Building T located in the south part of Kommos offers an example of a Neopalatial terrace that may also provide some parallels for the terracing system at Ayios Vasileios. The whole structure of Building T, including rooms and a court with porticoes, was situated on a large artificial platform that was probably built for the first time in MM IIB (Building AA). The fill, consisting of soil, was retained by very long walls of considerable thickness that, at the same time, were used for the foundation of the structures.¹⁰⁰ The foundations, probably representing the reused walls of Building AA, were wider than the walls. Unlike in Ayios Vasileios, where the wide foundations begin approx. 15 cm below the floor, those from Building T start directly below the floor. It is worth noting that the construction of wider foundations was applied elsewhere in Crete and is also known from the terrace of the second palace at Phaistos.¹⁰¹ Regarding the foundation of the colonnades in Minoan architecture these often consisted of individual large blocks (e.g. Building T in Kommos)¹⁰² but wall-like, long foundations are also known.¹⁰³

Thus, it seems that the occurrence of specific building techniques for the construction of large structures at Ayios Vasileios suggest some influence from Cretan architecture. This assumption is strengthened by other features attested at the site that are typical of Minoan architecture, and for which mainland parallels are still missing. The design and size of the South and West Stoa serve as good examples to demonstrate such influences. Both stoas are 5.50 m deep¹⁰⁴ and seem to reflect a rather rare Cretan prototype that goes back to the Protopalatial period. There are three well-known examples of porticoes, whose depth varies between 5 and 5.30 m. The first and earliest is represented by Tomb II at Mallia-Chryssolakkos, the second is the north and south porticoes of Buildings AA/T (MM II–LM I) at Kommos and the third – again from the western Mesara – is the freestanding Stoa FG at Ayia Triada.¹⁰⁵ The latter example dates to LM IIIA2, but according to Joseph Shaw it may have continued a LM I tradition.¹⁰⁶ Another point may be of some interest. The South Stoa of Ayios Vasileios does not seem to have had rear rooms. Instead of this, a pebble pathway runs behind it at its east end, and further excavation will confirm whether this was the case for the whole length of the stoa. This arrangement brings to mind again the stoas of Building T from Kommos that had no rear rooms. In addition, along the north stoa of Building T a road was built. Finally, the use of alternating pillars and columns is well documented in Minoan ‘polite’ architecture (e.g. in the eastern portico at the palace of Mallia), with some examples even dating to LH IIIA2, such as the ‘Stoa del Mercato’ in Ayia Triada.¹⁰⁷

⁹⁶ Wright 1980, 85. Followed by Darcque 2005, 87.

⁹⁷ Devolder 2015.

⁹⁸ Fotou 1990, figs. 14–15; 63. See Puglisi 2007 for the system of six terraces in the Villaggio, Ayia Triada (LM I).

⁹⁹ Shaw 2009, 54–55.

¹⁰⁰ See Fotou 1990.

¹⁰¹ Shaw 2009, 55, fig. 111. See also Darcque 2005, 90.

¹⁰² Shaw 2006, 12–13, 1027, pl. 1.117.

¹⁰³ The stylobate in the palace of Phaistos, see n. 102.

¹⁰⁴ Measure taken from the interior face of the wall to the centre of the column bases.

¹⁰⁵ La Rosa 1997; Hayden 1981; Shaw 1987, 109. Ayia Triada, Stoa FG: depth 5.00 m, intercolumniation 2.45 m. Ayios Vasileios: depth 5.50 m, intercolumniation 2.50 m.

¹⁰⁶ Shaw 2006.

¹⁰⁷ Di Vita – La Regina 1984; McEnroe 2010, 137. The eastern portico in Mallia probably had a low wooden balustrade, see McEnroe 2010, 85.

Social Space in Lakonia

The LH IIIA buildings and the stoas at Ayios Vasileios do not represent the first examples of monumental architecture in Lakonia but rather the culmination of a process that had started earlier. Monumental buildings existed during LH II in a radius of 5 to 12 km north of Ayios Vasileios and probably also at Ayios Vasileios itself. Here we only need to name the tholos tomb of Vapheio, one of the most dominant features on the west bank of the Eurotas River,¹⁰⁸ and the LH II Mansion 1 at the Menelaion with a plan that anticipates the later megara.¹⁰⁹ Certainly by LH II, perhaps even earlier, the use of specialised building techniques (ashlar masonry and timber framing)¹¹⁰ and of exclusive material that was symbolically charged (e.g. the conglomerate lintel of the Vapheio tholos) was applied.¹¹¹ However, the scale of labour investment and manpower mobilisation during the construction of the palace in LH IIIA must have been unprecedented in Lakonia.¹¹² This must have been a crucial time that marked the beginning of a new social environment in Lakonia.

The evidence presented above seems to support the idea that the construction of the palace was conducted by specialised workers, who were perhaps attached to the palaces and who used innovative building techniques and architectural designs (porticoes, cut blocks for pillar bases) or elaborate versions of earlier methods (foundation terraces).¹¹³ The court, the stoas and Buildings Δ and E were constructed on top of artificial platforms founded on different levels. These were supported by a system of very long walls. One may argue that the construction of very long walls was perhaps possible due to the local terrain that was not very steep at Ayios Vasileios. However, it cannot be excluded that the whole or a very large part of the building project – artificial terraces with long walls, the use of specific foundation techniques (broad foundations, stepped foundations) – is based on an innovative concept most probably borrowed from Crete.

The exact way in which some of the new architectural concepts arrived at Ayios Vasileios (through a direct transfer of ideas and technology, or through processes of emulation and transformation) is not clear at present. Until further excavations and detailed analyses and comparisons of the building materials and methods are made, there can be no definite answer to this. We need to stress, however, that a number of elements, typical of elaborate Cretan architecture, are not encountered at Ayios Vasileios. The use of ashlar masonry so common in Crete is restricted at Ayios Vasileios.¹¹⁴ Cut blocks were used only occasionally, e.g. for the pillar bases. For these blocks, different types of stones were chosen, such as marble from the Taygetos Mountains, limestone and conglomerate. It is possible that these stones carried a symbolic meaning, as was the case in the later palaces (Tiryns and Mycenae).¹¹⁵ Another difference to Minoan architecture is the absence of stylobates to prevent the water from entering the stoas. Instead of the stylobate, the builders of Ayios Vasileios had another solution. They applied a 10 cm-high and 10 cm-thick clay

¹⁰⁸ Chapin et al. 2014.

¹⁰⁹ Hiesel 1990. According to Catling 2009a, 21, 31, the construction of Mansion 1 must have demolished buildings of earlier phases that existed there.

¹¹⁰ See also Catling 2009b, figs. 345–348.AS17, for cut-stone slabs and blocks from the Mansion that were mainly assigned by Catling to the construction of Mansion 1. For reused ashlar blocks at Ayios Vasileios, see Vasilogamvrou 2015a, pl. 55.

¹¹¹ Maran 2006; Chapin et al. 2014.

¹¹² The list of complex architecture contains only rooms and buildings (see Darcque 2005, 137–143, fig. 33), but Darcque 2005, 137, stresses that the elaborate foundation indicates complex architecture.

¹¹³ The presence of craftsmen working in the same tradition – as part of the peer polity interaction – becomes even more apparent in later construction methods (e.g. the similarity in ashlar masonry at Mycenae and Thebes) (Wright 2006a, 36–37, fig. 1.15).

¹¹⁴ For cut blocks in the wall masonry but in secondary use, see Vasilogamvrou 2015, pl. 55β.

¹¹⁵ Maran 2006, 82, pl. 16. Blocks of conglomerate were employed as bases for columns, pillars and as thresholds on the way towards the throne room to mark liminal zones. They are characteristically situated in the Great Megaron, the main gate, the Great Propylon, the Great Court and the court of the Little Megaron.

band between each pillar and the next column base.¹¹⁶ However, the best parallels for this rather unusual feature again come from Crete. A 10 cm-high plaster band, set next to the column base, was discovered in the North Stoa of Building AA at Kommos, and it has been assumed that its function was to prevent water running into the stoa.¹¹⁷

Finally, besides some specialised construction techniques, Minoan influence is evident in the architectural design of the palace at Ayios Vasileios and perhaps in the function of some spaces. It is even possible that the envisaged architectural concept followed Cretan prototypes with a large rectangular court as a central feature that was surrounded by rooms and deep stoas, one of which did not have rear rooms (South Stoa).¹¹⁸ That some of the early Mycenaean palaces may have looked more ‘Cretan’ is convincingly demonstrated on the basis of the LH IIIA building remains at the palace of Pylos.¹¹⁹ Moreover, the deep porticoes of Ayios Vasileios represent a striking new feature in Lakonia that introduces a completely new concept in architecture. The use of porticoes is much debated in Crete. They represented protected spaces, from which a group of people could have attended ritual performances and activities that were held in the court. Based on this, it is even possible that some porticoes were constructed on a larger scale to allow more people to be present, as has been argued for Stoa FG at Ayia Triada.¹²⁰ In the North Stoa of Building T in Kommos, one permanent installation, a clay larnax-like basin, was discovered, but its exact use remains unknown.¹²¹ However, in the area of the stoas of Building T, or close to these, drinking sets and exclusive vessels – often imported from far away, e.g. Cyprus – were excavated. Moreover, cooking installations found in the rooms directly to the north of the court provide evidence for consumption activities and feasting in this area.¹²² In other cases, the Minoan – and later Mycenaean – stoas had rear rooms with openings on their long sides and Elisabetta Borgna has pointed out that these rooms could have been used for the gathering of people and feasting (e.g. Southeastern Building in Pylos [LH IIIB] and the stoas at Glas).¹²³ This arrangement brings to mind the partly excavated room behind the West Stoa of Ayios Vasileios (Building E) that also had an opening in its long side. While there were no finds in situ on the floor of this partly excavated room, a group of heavily burnt drinking vessels such as cups, kylikes and angular bowls was found directly outside of it on the floor of the West Stoa. The vessels were lying in situ across the rear wall of the West Stoa, close to the opening to the rear room and the built-in pithoi. A similar set of drinking vessels was found in situ in the northwest corner of the South Stoa (Fig. 10.7–9). Based on these finds it is possible that consumption of food and drinking was part of the activities which took place in the West and South Stoa of Ayios Vasileios, in the course of which the clay stand with the built-in pithoi may have had a relevant use.

The combined evidence from the new and old excavations seems to suggest that LH IIIA1 and early LH IIIA2 were a period of intense building activity in central Lakonia. During the latter phases the palace at Ayios Vasileios was constructed and Mansion 1 at the Menelaion was abandoned and rebuilt. Moreover, the layout of the palace at Ayios Vasileios – as far as can be seen

¹¹⁶ A pebble floor was at the same level in the South Stoa and the court of the Building AA (MM II) in Kommos and there was no stylobate. However, Shaw 2006, 12, 58, assumed that the original floor of the stoa, destroyed by later activities, would have been higher to prevent water from accumulating in the stoa. From the LM I phase no floor is preserved. The feature of the plaster band was not identified in the South Stoa (Shaw 2006, 105 n. 108).

¹¹⁷ Shaw 2006, 28, 989, pl. 1.57. The plaster band was smoothed against the floor of the stoa. Later, when a new pebble floor was laid down in the court, a stylobate consisting of slabs was built partly on top of the plastic band, thus raising the level of the floor of the stoa.

¹¹⁸ Graham 1987; Driessen 1989/1990; Driessen 2002. For the role of the court in Mycenaean palatial ideology, see Wright 2006b, 55–56.

¹¹⁹ Nelson 2001.

¹²⁰ Cucuzza 2001, 172–173; McEnroe 2010, 131. A similar but smaller stoa (again with columns) was excavated by Nikolaos Platon in Tyliisos (LM III) (McEnroe 2010, 131, fig. 10.16).

¹²¹ Shaw 2006, 27, 30, 96, left open whether the stoa was installed there in the next phase (Room 16 with metallurgical activities).

¹²² Rutter 2006, 410, 411–412, cf. also pl. 3.22 for the location of find spots.

¹²³ Borgna 2012.

so far – between LH IIIA2 and the time of its destruction in LH IIIB Middle seems to contradict the assumed uniformity in the architectural design of the Mycenaean palaces.¹²⁴ Why Mansion 1 was remodelled remains unresolved. Although Catling did not exclude natural causes and static problems, at the same time he emphasised the fact that Mansion 2 was constructed in a new and completely different orientation than Mansion 1. According to Catling the remodelling of Mansion 1 could imply a political change.¹²⁵ Whether the rebuilding of Mansion 1 relates to the political expansion of Ayios Vasileios is difficult to answer at the moment, but it is beyond any doubt that it coincides with the emergence of a new social environment in Lakonia and establishment of a central administrative power at Ayios Vasileios. Without overseeing any other parameters that are probably related to the pre-existing cultural traditions, influence from Crete played a crucial role. These influences start with new building techniques and end with the adaptation of Minoan practices. Social space did not transform suddenly in Lakonia – as elsewhere – but this only became meaningful under one very specific condition:¹²⁶ the will of the elites but also of the ordinary people to adopt new roles and perhaps a new identity.

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¹²⁴ Kilian 1987 argued that after LH IIIA2 a new architectural concept existed at Pylos. He suggested that this concept derived from the spread of an Argive prototype realised in the palaces of Mycenae and Tiryns.

¹²⁵ According to Catling, a large court probably also existed in front of Mansion 2. Catling 2009a, 22–23, 26–27, assumed the presence of a court already in front of Mansion 1, but this has to remain open. See also: Hiesel 1990, 134. A similar process with buildings constructed in new orientations is also seen at Nichoria and Iklaina at the end of LH IIIA2 (Shelmerdine 2015).

¹²⁶ Wright 2006a, 13. For the period between LH II and LH IIIA Wright assumed that “at this time architecture assumed a new importance for it was a natural display of the ability of a leader to command many resources: labour for construction, the specialized labour of crafts persons, and local and exotic material”.

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Illustrations

Fig. 1: Building Δ, Building Ε, West Stoa, South Stoa and the court at the end of the 2016 excavation (plan: K. Minakakis, K. Athanasiou, E. Koulogeorgiou, copyright: A. Vasilogamvrou)

Fig. 2: The West Stoa (state of the 2016 excavation) (photo: N. Karadimas)

Fig. 3: Byzantine Pit 20 in the West Stoa: a. North section of the Byzantine pit. SU 52: foundation of Wall 113, SU 1086: the vitrified floor of the West Stoa (drawing: A. Buhlke); b. The west baulk of the Byzantine pit (photo copyright: A. Vasilogamvrou)

Fig. 4: Byzantine Pit 4 in the West Stoa. Northeast section of the Byzantine pit. SU 1143: Wall 109, SU 1086: the vitrified floor of the West Stoa (drawing: A. Buhlke)

Fig. 5: The foundations of the rear Wall (117) of the South Stoa (photo copyright: A. Vasilogamvrou)

Fig. 6: Building Δ. Walls 105 and 104. In the corner of the room, a Byzantine pithos (photo copyright: A. Vasilogamvrou)

Fig. 7: Building Δ. The foundation of Walls 104 (top) and 102 (right) (photo copyright: A. Vasilogamvrou)

Fig. 8: Building Δ. West section of Sounding 2 (S2) at the corners of Walls 104 and 102 (SU 48) (drawing: A. Buhlke)

Fig. 9: Pottery found in Sounding 2 (S2) at the corner of Walls 104 and 102. Scale 1:3 (drawings: A. Poelstra)

Fig. 10: 1–6. Pottery from the deposit sealed by the floor of the West Stoa (collected from the baulk of Byzantine Pit 20); 7–9. Pottery in situ on the floor of the South Stoa. Scale 1:3 (drawings: E. Kardamaki)