

ACHAIA and ARKADIA

The Foundation and Rise to Local Prominence of the Settlement on Mygdalia Hill, near Patras

*Lena Papazoglou-Manioudaki*¹ – *Constantinos Paschalidis*²

Abstract: The ongoing excavations on the hill of Mygdalia near Patras give us the opportunity of a comprehensive study of domestic and tomb material and provide means of understanding early Mycenaean western Achaia. Mygdalia was founded in the transitional MH III/LH I period and became a local centre in the early Mycenaean period. The settlement was built on three successive terraces. The lower terrace was supported by a massive enclosure and retaining wall that seems to be part of the original plan. Substantial architectural remains, including a large building, floor deposits, pottery and metal finds as well as a tholos tomb of LH IIB–IIIA1 date testify to the rise of a local elite. The transition to the Palatial period was troubled, as witnessed by the abandonment of buildings and the plundering of the tholos tomb.

Keywords: Achaia, Mygdalia, enclosure wall, monumental building, domestic pottery, metal finds, tholos tomb

The Mycenaean Settlement of Mygdalia

Mygdalia hill lies to the southeast of the city of Patras and its fertile plain. It is an extension of the foothills of the Panachaikon Mountain range and rises to 386 m. It is a naturally fortified site with particularly steep slopes, covered by low vegetation and some almond trees, hence the name Mygdalia. The coastline is less than 5 km away, but, besides fishing, the area provides ample



Fig. 1: Map of Achaia (P. Feleris)

¹ Curator emerita of the Prehistoric Collection, National Archaeological Museum, Athens, Greece; e-mail: papazoglouman@hotmail.com.

² Prehistoric Collection, National Archaeological Museum, Athens, Greece; e-mail: conpascalgr@yahoo.com.

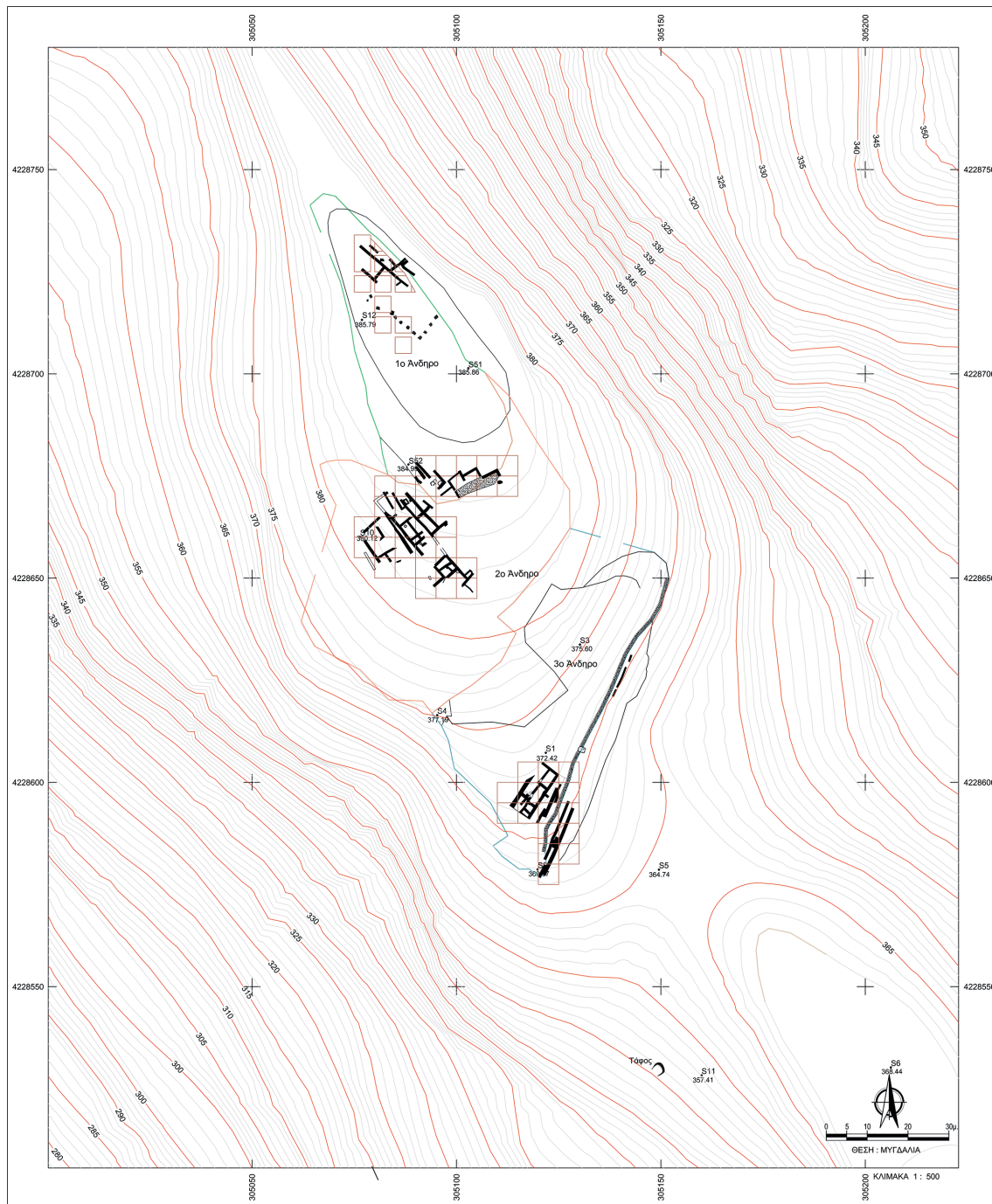


Fig. 2: Topographical plan of the excavation on Mygdalia hill (2017) (L. Marinopoulos)

means for subsistence: arable land, hilly areas for herding and two streams that run along the west and east side of the oblong hill and supply fresh water all year long. From the top, there is an excellent view of the extended plain of Patras as far to the west as Teichos Dymaion and the Ionian Islands, and to the Aitolian coast across the straits to the north (Fig. 1). The Mycenaean settlement spreads across an area of 6500 m² (0.65ha) in three successive terraces (numbered 1, 2 and 3) on the summit of the hill (Figs. 2–3).



Fig. 3: Aerial view of the excavation on Mygdalia hill. Terraces 1, 2, 3 (2017) (photo: P. Feleris)

Mygdalia I

The beginnings of the settlement go back to the transitional period of MH III/LH I or to LH I early. The building of a strong enclosure/retaining wall that supported the lowest terrace from the southeast, where the settlement is still more accessible, was an act of the first settlers. It seems part of the initial planning and required communal effort to secure the boundaries of the settlement and solidify the claims of the inhabitants on the land.

The wall is built of roughly cut large and medium-size stones, readily available since the limestone bedrock of the hill provides ample material for building. It is now partly covered by a modern dry-wall, built of stones from destroyed Mycenaean houses, which runs in exactly the same direction. The latter is a boundary of land property, still acknowledged by the shepherds herding their goats in the area. The wall is 4.00–4.10 m wide and runs from east to west following the edge of the terrace. We were able to follow it for 50 m, but the excavation is far from complete. The exterior face is well built, but the interior face is not clear, so we tend to look at it more as a retaining wall than a defensive wall (Fig. 4).

There is evidence that the area of the wall was apparently used as a communal open space, where collective outdoor activities like food preparation and consumption could take place. A makeshift 'kitchen' used a space measuring 1.30 × 0.60 m on the wall, close to its interior face. An assemblage of domestic pottery was excavated there in 2015. Some of



Fig. 4: Exterior face of the wall on Terrace 3 (photo: L. Papazoglou-Manioudaki)



Fig. 5: a. Cooking pot; b. Matt-painted pottery (photos: A. Manioudakis)



Fig. 6: Unpainted hydria with burnished surface (photo: A. Manioudakis)

the pottery is typical of Achaia like a cooking pot of western Achaian type³ (Fig. 5a) and a matt-painted stemmed jar, decorated on the body and the foot with solid triangles (Fig. 5b), a motif common in Achaia and also known in Aitolia.⁴ The body fragment of another jar has a wavy line at the base of the neck and panels on the shoulder, the vertical elements consist of black lines framing a net pattern.⁵ This jar and the unpainted hydria with burnished surface (Fig. 6) belong to mainstream wares with wide distribution and suggest a MH III/LH I or rather a LH I early date. It is at this time that we witness walled settlements on the mainland that continue to flourish in the early Mycenaean period,⁶ while Mygdalia is the first settlement which has been documented as fortified in early Mycenaean Achaia.⁷

On Terrace 2 we have an array of densely built houses with rectangular rooms and semi-open places and courtyards. They occupy different levels, following the mild slope of the hill, just like a modern Greek village. A floor deposit has been preserved in these rooms (Fig. 7, marked in blue). There were numerous shattered vases and small finds, among them a local matt-painted stemmed goblet with pointed handles, decorated with solid triangles, goblets with burnished surfaces and wishbone handles (Fig. 8) of types common in Achaia (Aigion, Pagona)⁸ or Aitolia (Thermon,

³ Papadopoulos 1978/1979, 65, fig. 50 (Drakotrypa, Pharai region).

⁴ Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2010, 135–136, fig. 11, with references.

⁵ Papadopoulos 1978/1979, 65, fig. 51b (Drakotrypa, Pharai region, the pattern is hardly visible).

⁶ Phialon 2011, 151–157; Philippa-Touchais 2016, 647.

⁷ For excavated settlement sites in Achaia, see Rizio 2011.

⁸ Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2010, 137, fig. 17, with references.

Chalkis),⁹ fragments of large jars or hydrias decorated with matt paint,¹⁰ hand-made monochrome jugs and unpainted amphoras, cooking pots and fragments of small grey-ware jugs with burnished surfaces. Fragments of a Vapheio cup (Fig. 9) decorated with a stylised foliate band belong to a common type in LH I/IIA, known from settlements sites, and may have originated in Messenia or Elis.¹¹

A rectangular grave was opened in a small courtyard next to the LH I room, to the north of the wall made by a block cut out of the bedrock.¹² The grave, measuring 0.93 × 0.48 m, was lined with stone-walls at four sides and was covered by four heavy slabs. It contained the remains of an infant and neonates without burial gifts. The preliminary report of the study of the bones by Olivia Jones suggests that there were at least three individuals buried in the grave, an eight- to fourteen-month-old infant (a case of infant mortality) and two unborn children, four to five and seven to nine lunar months old, the result of miscarriages. It is interesting to note the reaction of the living to these deaths. Infants or stillborn/premature-born children were considered to deserve a proper burial within the precincts of the family dwellings. What is of interest is that the infant was placed along one side of the tomb, while both the stillborn/premature babies were deposited at the opposite end, in other words, the burials were distinguished according to who had seen the light of life and who had not. Samples of the bones were processed through AMS (Accelerator Mass Spectrometry) by Olivia Jones and Johannes van der Plicht, and the preliminary results give us dates ranging from 1680 to 1530 BC that correspond roughly to a LH I/IIA date.

On top of the hill, on Terrace 1, the soil deposits range from 5 to 10 cm in depth. The extensive construction work for the building of an important LH IIIC mansion and later of an early Greek temple (Mygdalia IV and V)¹³ virtually extinguished all traces of earlier habitation. Remnants of a wall and fragments of pottery such as the foot of a local stemmed jar decorated with solid triangles, provide a terminus ante quem for habitation on Terrace 1, contemporary to the finds from the Terraces 2 and 3.

The founding of the Mygdalia settlement coincides with a period of settlement growth and an era of expanding habitation in the Mycenaean world. The settlement at Pagona, known through rescue excavations in this Patras suburb, was certainly inhabited in the same period.¹⁴ A cluster of rectangular built or cist graves in the area of Psila Alonia, in downtown Patras,¹⁵ has produced

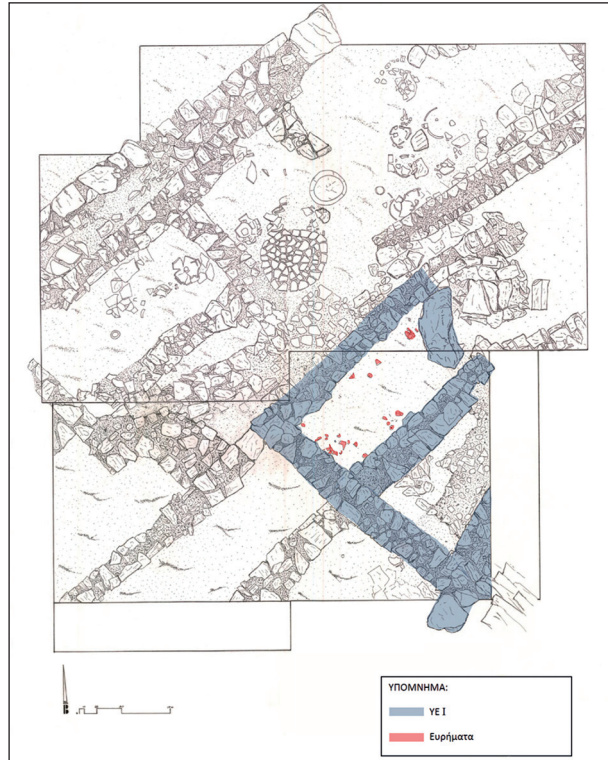


Fig. 7: Terrace 2. Plan of LH I house and intra muros grave (drawing: A. Manioudakis, 2017)

⁹ Dietz 2007, 86–87, fig. 2.

¹⁰ Papadopoulos 1978/1979, 65, fig. 51a (Drakotrypa, Pharai region).

¹¹ Lolos 1987, 434, fig. 497 (Samikon in Elis); Moschos 2000, 13, fig. 5 (Portes in Achaia); Wardle – Wardle 2003, 149–150, fig. 2 (Thermon in Aitolia).

¹² For the intramural burials of neonates, infants and children at Mygdalia, see Papazoglou-Manioudaki et al. 2019, 199–202.

¹³ Papazoglou-Manioudaki – Paschalidis 2017, 454–455, pl. 175; Papazoglou-Manioudaki – Paschalidis, forthcoming.

¹⁴ Dietz – Stavropoulou-Gatsi 2010; Rizio 2011, 15, 53–54.

¹⁵ Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2010, 133–134.



Fig. 8: Matt-painted and unpainted burnished pottery (photo: A. Manioudakis)

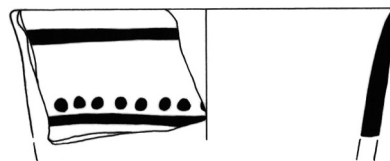


Fig. 9: Fragment of LH I/IIA Vapheio cup. Scale 1:2 (drawing: N. Petropoulos)

poor furnishings, the base of a stemmed jar and a simple cup, both with matt-painted decoration of solid triangles. They betray the existence of a settlement of MH III/LH I date in the Patras Plain. Beyond Patras, built graves dated to LH I were also found in nearby Thea,¹⁶ whereas LH I tumuli with built graves were excavated at Portes, close to Elis.¹⁷ The pottery of Mygdalia seems to be of the same chronological horizon as the long-known finds of the first phase of the settlement at Drakotrypa in the area of Pharai, southeast of Patras.¹⁸ The substantial architectural remains at Drakotrypa are still virtually unpublished and there is an ambiguity over the dating of its two main architectural phases. Though a MH date was originally suggested for the foundation of the settle-

ment, a LH I date has also been put forward by Oliver Dickinson,¹⁹ and this is certainly supported by the recent finds at the settlement of Mygdalia. The domestic pottery such as the cooking pots or the matt-painted jars from Drakotrypa now find exact parallels in the Mygdalia settlement material. There is a marked difference to the LH I assemblage from Aigion in eastern Achaia, which participated in the commercial networks of the Corinthian Gulf and where the pottery included matt-painted, Mainland Polychrome, Aiginetan ware, Lustrous Decorated Minoanising ware and Argive Mycenaean pottery.²⁰

Mygdalia II

Extensive architectural remains, pottery and metal finds of the LH IIB/IIIA1 period define a period of floruit at Mygdalia. On Terrace 2, immediately below a large LH IIIC storeroom,²¹ a spacious rectangular house with complex architectural plan (Fig. 10 marked in green) is only partly excavated. Its central elongated rooms measure 5.5 × 2.0 m and 5.5 × 2.5 m; doors (their thresholds are still visible) facilitated the circulation between the rooms. Building activities in

¹⁶ Papazoglou-Manioudaki 1999, 272–273, figs. 14–19.

¹⁷ Moschos 2000, 9–20.

¹⁸ Giannopoulos 2008, 46–48, figs. 11–12, with references; Rizio 2011, 49–51.

¹⁹ Dickinson 1977, 23.

²⁰ Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2010, 134–141.

²¹ Papazoglou-Manioudaki – Paschalidis 2017, 456–457, pls. 180–182.

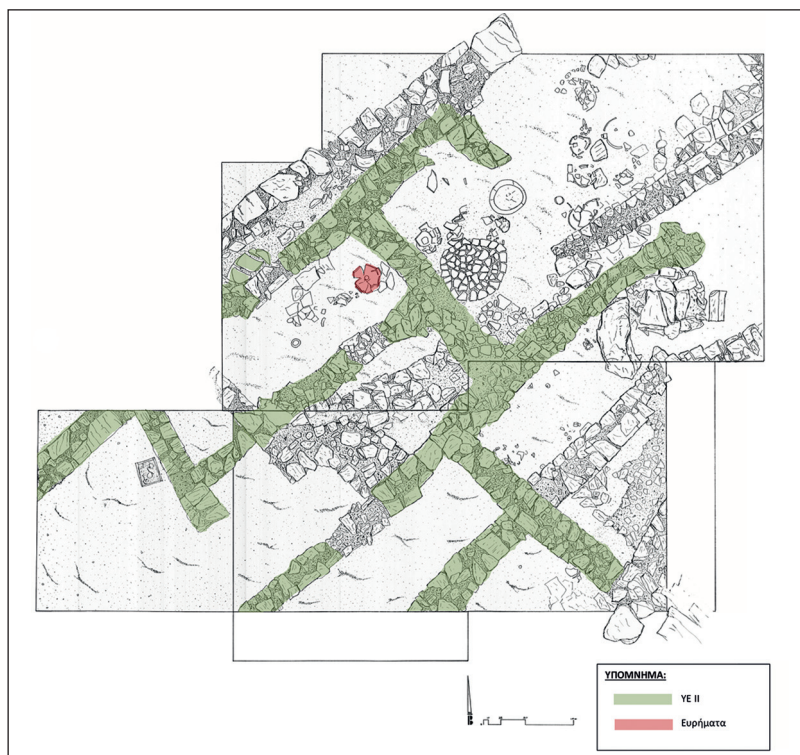


Fig. 10: Plan of the LH II house (drawing: A. Manioudakis, 2017)

LH IIIC have left little room for stratified deposits, but an unpainted LH IIB goblet has survived in a corner and a pithos was found in situ in the main room. An almost intact LH IIB Vapheio cup with flaring upper body and foliate band decoration²² has survived beneath the paved floor of the LH IIIC storeroom (Figs. 11–12).

Two cist graves built of vertical slabs and a covering slab, containing the remains of small children and infants, were excavated in open spaces near this building in 2015 and 2016 and one more 10m to the south. No gifts were found with the burials, as in the case of the above-mentioned built tomb of the infant and the stillborn/premature-born children. The bones are currently being studied by O. Jones,²³ but the interments seem to have the same date as all the *intra muros* child burials of Mygdalia I, that is LH I/IIA.

Painted pottery has been found in refuse fills in nearby trenches on Terrace 2: Vapheio cups, shallow cups, high-swung handles, and a jar decorated with wavy stems that finds parallels in the settlement strata at Aigion²⁴ and is close to material decorated with “flammas”, typical of the Krisa settlement in Phokis.²⁵ A rectangular construction made of vertical slabs near a wall was meant for the storage of household ware. It was found filled with pottery, including a monochrome goblet, painted red inside and out. Points of interest are the fragments of misfired vases recovered in a LH IIB/IIIA1 fill, such as a baggy alabastron with rock pattern, suggesting a pottery kiln and local pottery production.

In July 2016, on Terrace 3, in the area of the wall, we started excavating a building with strongly built walls. The width of the northwest wall reaches 1 m.²⁶ Its southeast wall runs parallel to the enclosure wall. The distance between these walls is about 1.60 m. It seems that this corridor could serve as a road or a communal place, but the excavation is still in an early stage in

²² Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2003, 436, fig. 19; Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2011, 508, fig. 12 (Mygdalia tholos).

²³ Papazoglou-Manioudaki et al. 2019, 199–202.

²⁴ Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2015, 316, fig. 4.

²⁵ RMDP, 744, fig. 287a.

²⁶ Cf. Van de Moortel 2009, 360 (Building D).



Fig. 11: LH IIB Vapheio cup beneath the later floor (photo: C. Paschalidis)



Fig. 12: LH IIB Vapheio cup. Scale 1:2 (photo: A. Manioudakis; drawing: N. Petropoulos)

this area. The excavation proceeded in investigating a quite large interior space measuring 4.5×5.0 m. There is a partition wall in the middle, and the two rectangular rooms measure 5.0×1.85 m and 5.0×2.20 m respectively. Though the excavation is still in progress, the evidence at hand allows us to speak of an impressive building with a complex architectural plan and an upper floor. (Figs. 13–14).

The room was covered by a destruction level that has remained undisturbed by subsequent rebuilding or later intervention. In the destruction fill, among massive blocks of stone, an assemblage of bronze objects and stone jewellery was found. They were located in the stone and earth rubble and at slightly varying depths from the present surface, suggesting an upper floor and a small box that had fallen from the floor above, scattering its contents. The majority was dispersed in a small area of 2.0×1.50 m in the eastern corner of the room, while a few pieces were found further to the north along the wall. A curved bronze plate looks like the sheathing of a wooden box that may have contained at least part of this assemblage. Some parts of hinges have also been recovered. The bronzes include more than 15 knives of various types (Fig. 15), five tweezers of the open spring type with flattened ends, a bronze ring or earring with attachment (a thin broad



Fig. 13: Aerial view of the House of the Bronzes and the wall. Terrace 3 (2017) (photo: P. Feleris)



Fig. 14: Plan of the House of the Bronzes and the wall (2018) (drawing: A. Manioudakis)



Fig. 15: Bronze knives (photo: A. Manioudakis)



Fig. 16: Bronze projectile
(photo: A. Manioudakis)



Fig. 17: Bronze 'arrow point'
(photo: A. Manioudakis)

strip bent into a knot), known from a LH IIIA1 context at Ayios Stephanos,²⁷ five needles and numerous other fragments.

A projectile (Fig. 16) with a pyramidal head and rectangular shaft can be added to the list of projectiles known from Nichoria (MME tholos tomb and settlement),²⁸ the Menelaion in Lakonia,²⁹ the latter of LH IIIA1 date, and from the fill of the LH IIB/III A1 chamber tomb south of Grave Circle B at Mycenae.³⁰ Initially classified as a type of arrowhead, use as a wood or ivory carving tool has been suggested for the piece at LH IIIC Lefkandi.³¹ Contrary to the more common projectiles, the leaf-shaped 'arrow point' (Fig. 17) has few parallels on the mainland (Mycenae, Thebes) or the islands (Phylakopi on Melos, Thermi on Lesbos) and is considered a rare type with affinities to Cyprus.³²

Two rings of seashell; stone, faience and seashell beads, as well as stone buttons or spindle whorls are also part of the finished artefacts recovered in the rubble of a single room, along with bronzes. There are also stone tools including two grinders, one of heavy dark-greenish stone, two small polishing tools, whetstones, flakes of flint and obsidian along with a fragment of white quartz that provide material evidence for a workshop, though we do not have any unfinished products nor any secure evidence yet for bronze working at Mygdalia. The clay spindle whorls, a sherd modified as a loom weight and, more interestingly, the fragment of a bowl with inner handle, which could represent a so-called 'spinning bowl', known from tombs and settlements in Messenia and recently also found at Kakovatos in Elis,³³ suggest spinning and weaving activities.

The pottery comprises closed and open vessels such as the tall hydria (over 30 cm) decorated with bands and splashes on the handles (Fig. 18), a fairly large shape usually found in fragments in

²⁷ French – Janko 2008, 447, no. 7012, fig. 10.1.

²⁸ Wilkie 1992, 273–277, 307; Catling – Hughes-Brock 1992, 621–622, figs. 5.106, 10.7–8.

²⁹ Catling 2009, 268, 270, fig. 321, pl. 115.

³⁰ Konstantinidi-Syvridi – Paschalidis 2015, 420–421 (NMA 18514b).

³¹ Evely 2006, 282–283, fig. 5.9.3.

³² Avila 1983, 112–113, pl. 28.

³³ For spinning bowls found in Messenia and Triphylia cf. Eder – Hadzi-Spiliopoulou, this volume.



Fig. 18: Painted hydria (photo: A. Manioudakis)

settlement strata, which was used for storing and carrying rather than pouring.³⁴ A large rounded alabastron is decorated with net pattern on the shoulder and concentric circles on the base.³⁵ The open shapes include a monochrome-painted shallow spouted cup and unpainted ware, goblets and a two-handled cup. They had fallen from the second floor where the assemblage of bronzes and minor artefacts was also originally stored. They suggest a date for the destruction of the building at the very end of LH IIIA1 or early in LH IIIA2, the beginning of the Palatial period.

An assemblage of pottery of LH IIB/III A1 date has been reported from the settlement at Pagona in the Patras Plain.³⁶ Also the inland settlement at Pharai may represent an equivalent to Mygdalia. Judging from the published plans, both Ayios Athanasios and Drakotrypa, mentioned above,³⁷ feature houses with complex plans and intra muros graves, but the question of their date and their association with Tholos Tombs A and B at Pharai remains open. Based on a monochrome krater, the second phase of habitation of Drakotrypa was originally dated to LH IIIB,³⁸ though a LH IIIA date has also been suggested; this assumption is based on the parallel of a similar krater from Ayios Stephanos in Lakonia.³⁹ The argument for a LH IIIA2 early date for the second phase of Drakotrypa is strengthened by other finds from the settlement strata such as an unpainted shallow angular bowl.⁴⁰ The study and re-evaluation of the settlement material from Drakotrypa and the nearby settlement of Ayios Athanasios, which is closer to the tholos tombs, seems long overdue, and there is currently a new investigation of the area in progress.⁴¹ The situation is again different at Aigion in eastern Achaia, where LH IIB/III A1 material from settlement

³⁴ Mountjoy 2008, 303 (Ayios Stephanos); Thomas 2011, 192, no. 44, fig. 8 (Tsoungiza).

³⁵ Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2003, 437, fig. 18 (Mygdalia tholos); cf. Thomas 2011, 187–188, no. 42, fig. 7 (Tsoungiza).

³⁶ Stavropoulou-Gatsi 2001, 36, pl. 2.2; Dietz – Stavropoulou-Gatsi 2010, 122.

³⁷ Above n. 18.

³⁸ Papadopoulos 1978/1979, 240, figs. 174b, 264a.

³⁹ Mountjoy 2008, 312, no. 3108, fig. 6.8.

⁴⁰ Papadopoulos 1978/1979, 116, figs. 178g, 268b; cf. Thomas 2011, 215–216, fig. 24 (Tsoungiza).

⁴¹ Aktypi et al. 2019, 324–325.

deposits includes a high percentage of imported Argive pottery.⁴² An early Mycenaean settlement has recently been investigated in the area of Helike.⁴³

The sheer number of metal objects and minor artefacts found at Mygdalia in 2016 more than doubles the number of early Mycenaean bronze objects known from Achaia.⁴⁴ Otherwise, they come almost exclusively from elite tombs: gold spirals, bronze knives and pins from the Mygdalia tholos tomb; a bronze pin, a knife and tweezers from the Kallithea tholos, both in the Patras area; and the hoard of bronze vases and weapons, including a silver vessel, found outside Tholos B at Pharai (Katarraktis, locality Rhodia), which is unique in Achaia. The fragmentary vases recovered around the hoard date within the LH IIIA1 period.⁴⁵ In respect to settlement material, we know that a bronze chisel and a sickle come from Drakotrypa, but their exact context is not known.⁴⁶ In eastern Achaia there is a marked absence of metal finds in the early chamber tombs of Aigion, but an elite burial of LH IIB–IIIA1 date in the chamber tomb cemetery at Vrysari near Kalavryta was furnished with bronzes (dagger, razor, pin with double spiral terminals) and glass beads.⁴⁷

On the mainland, metal hoards in domestic contexts are not common at the end of the early Mycenaean period. A number of bronzes have been found in settlements like Nichoria in Messenia and Ayios Stephanos or the Menelaion in Lakonia. The case is different at Ayios Vasileios in Lakonia, which early acquired palatial status. In Room 3, excavation has unearthed a wooden case containing type A swords, which had been left to rot when Building A was abandoned early in LH IIIA2, a date close to the abandonment of the House of the Bronzes near the wall at Mygdalia. Apparently, neither their symbolic value as heirlooms nor their actual value meant enough to the people to retrieve the swords. The same applies to the bronze vases, which were found in the area of the feasts,⁴⁸ and that all points to a critical situation that signified the decline of the settlement. The troubled transition to the Palatial period is attested in settlements from the Peloponnese to the Euboian Gulf.⁴⁹ The beginning of LH IIIA2 was marked by destructions at important newly excavated early Mycenaean sites such as Ayios Vasileios in Lakonia, Iklaina in Messenia⁵⁰ or Mitrou (Building D) in East Lokris.⁵¹

At Mygdalia, the House of the Bronzes near the wall permits us to have a glimpse of an early Mycenaean dwelling, occupied in LH IIB/IIIA1 and early LH IIIA2 that remained undisturbed by later occupation of the site. It now measures c. 20m in length and 7m in width, following the northeast/southwest axis. It is divided into six main spaces, while a structure with partition walls, in the southwest corner, could represent the remains of a staircase that led to the upper floor. Its entrance had been on the narrow west side. It seems that the retaining wall was reinforced, and a pillar was constructed to support the exterior wall of the building. Its contents have remained un plundered, so we have an unexpected hoard of bronzes and other small finds that have been safely placed in space and time along with almost intact domestic pottery. The floor deposits in the rooms consisted of decorated and undecorated pottery that comprised goblets, kylikes, cups, jugs, hydrias and kraters, i.e. drinking and pouring equipment, appropriate for a communal feasting.⁵²

⁴² Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2015, 315–320, figs. 7–11.

⁴³ Kolia 2011, 201–204, fig. 3.

⁴⁴ Kayafa 2008, 220–223, tab. 6.

⁴⁵ Papazoglou-Manioudaki 1999, 278–279, with references; Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2011, 514–515, fig. 19; Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2020, 132–137, fig. 7.2–9.

⁴⁶ Papadopoulos 1978/1979, 153–156, figs. 305c, 307d, 338c, 341a.

⁴⁷ Papazoglou-Manioudaki 1999, 276–278, figs. 28–33; Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2015, 321; Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2020, 137–138, fig. 7.10.

⁴⁸ Vasilogamvrou 2013, 76–78, pls. 50a, 51a.

⁴⁹ Papazoglou-Manioudaki 1999, 279; Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2015, 320; Kramer-Hajos 2008, 125–128; Niemeier 2016, 305–306.

⁵⁰ Cosmopoulos 2015, 41.

⁵¹ Vitale 2008, 229–230; Van de Moortel 2009, 360; Van de Moortel – Zahou 2012, 1135–1146.

⁵² Papazoglou-Manioudaki et al. 2019, 205–206, fig. 90; Papazoglou-Manioudaki – Paschalidis, forthcoming.

An earthquake may have been the cause of the destruction, and earthquakes are always a possibility in Achaia, but not sufficient cause for the abandonment of a building. It is intriguing that the inhabitants did not bother to clear the debris and recover the bronzes and the jewellery. They seem to have left in haste and the actual value of the items was not so significant to possibly endanger themselves. If we consider the plundering of the Mygdalia tholos tomb in the same period, then we can speak of a moment of severe crisis in the life of the settlement and of a troubled transition to the Palatial period. It seems that LH IIIA2 early marks the end of the early Mycenaean period at Mygdalia and the same applies for Mitrou in East Lokris.⁵³ The lack of evidence suggests that occupation of the site was on a small scale in Palatial times (Mygdalia III) until its new floruit in LH IIIC (Mygdalia IV).⁵⁴

A complex architectural plan and evidence of rich domestic strata indicate a level of sophistication at Mygdalia towards the end of the early Mycenaean era. The extra muros cemetery provides additional information on its social complexity.

The Tombs of Mygdalia

A built apsidal tomb (estimated height 2.75 m, max. d. 2.80 m) was located at a distance of 60 m from the retaining wall to the west on the western slope of the hill. Though completely plundered and to some extent destroyed, it was already partly visible before excavation, its structure betraying an early Mycenaean date. Traces of the tumulus covering the tomb, using pebble stones are still in place.⁵⁵

A tholos tomb has been excavated on the northwest slope, near the western end of the oblong hill and at about 500 m distance from the settlement. It has a circular chamber approx. 4.30 m in diameter, the second largest in Achaia after Tholos B at Pharai (5.20 m in diameter). The Mygdalia tholos and the other known tholoi in Achaia, the Kallithea tholos in the Patras region, two at Pharai, and two at Portes, the latter an inland location on the way from Elis to Achaia,⁵⁶ belong to the group of tombs in northwest Greece that are of relatively small size. They do not feature a stomion, but their dromoi, which are partly covered with slabs, lead directly to the chamber. They are built of roughly cut, rectangular stones of local limestone, placed in irregular rows. Patterns of construction and size seem not to be the only common traits. There is strong evidence that their main use dates to the LH IIB–IIIA1 period, and then the funerary remains were severely plundered and disturbed.

In the case of the Mygdalia tholos, the skeletal material and the finds from the floor deposit were shattered and scattered all around. A pit, dug in the floor, was also disturbed, and fires had been kindled on the floor. The pottery (115 partially preserved pots) dates to LH IIB–IIIA1, a few pieces may be of LH IIA and LH IIIA2 early date. The vessels comprise decorated pottery including closed shapes such as piriform jars, baggy alabastra, squat jugs, jugs, handleless jars, a stirrup jar, and a straight-sided alabastron, and open shapes such as Vapheio cups; shallow cups; Ephyraean, monochrome or undecorated goblets; grey-ware and cooking pots. A clay figurine of proto-Phi type has painted arms and hands. Some small metal objects include gold hair ornaments, two bronze knives and a pin ending in spirals. A stone pendant and a whetstone, along with amber beads, semi-precious stone, glass, and faience beads complete the picture.⁵⁷

The anthropological material is currently being studied by O. Jones. The main floor deposit contained at least 26 individuals, among whom three males, one female and a child of about

⁵³ Vitale 2012, 1148.

⁵⁴ Papazoglou-Manioudaki – Paschalidis 2017.

⁵⁵ Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2011, 502–504, figs. 2–3.

⁵⁶ Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2011, 514–517, with references.

⁵⁷ Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2003; Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2011, 504–513, figs. 4–19; Papazoglou-Manioudaki et al. 2019, 202–205, pls. 85–89.

five years were identified. There was not enough material for the identification of the sex of the remaining individuals. The later use of the tomb for unfurnished burials or as an ossuary was rather dishonouring to the dead and this is a situation attested in many tholoi in the Peloponnese.⁵⁸ For a long time, there was no way to date the rather hasty and unfurnished burials that were nevertheless deposited in successive strata above the main floor. Nor was it possible to measure the time span that elapsed between the primary use of the tomb as an elite burial ground of the Mygdalia settlement and the later burials of rather undistinguished individuals. Even the date of the robbing of the tholos tomb, as was also the case at Nichoria,⁵⁹ could not be more accurately determined than by a terminus post quem.

Recent radiocarbon dating obtained by AMS (Accelerator Mass Spectrometry) in Groningen has finally shed some light on the obscure later history of the tomb.⁶⁰ The plundered and disturbed main floor was found covered with a thin layer of earth and small stones. On it an almost intact burial was deposited, the deceased was laid on his back with his knees bent in opposite directions. Other human and animal bones were deposited on the same level that can now be dated to the early 14th century BC, that is, almost immediately after the plundering and abandonment of the main floor. AMS has also provided evidence for dating the final burial level to the 12th century BC, thus the intriguing afterlife of the tomb also took place within the Mycenaean period.

The AMS dating supports the argument that the transition from the Prepalatial to the Palatial period witnessed incidents and casualties. There is compelling evidence that early Mycenaean tholos tombs in Achaia and elsewhere were heavily disturbed and plundered after their main period of use, but the specific date and the party responsible have remained obscure.⁶¹ We now have solid evidence that, at least in the case of the Mygdalia tholos, this intriguing course of events took place in the early Palatial period. The destruction and abandonment of the House of the Bronzes was not an isolated incident in the troubled transition to a new society emerging in the Patras area, whose members were now buried in chamber tomb cemeteries.⁶² The two monumental LH IIIA1 chamber tombs at Voudeni,⁶³ which coexisted for some time with the Mygdalia tholos, document the rise of another centre, while the Palatial period seems to be a time of recess for Mygdalia.

The early Mycenaean era in western Achaia is a period of a fragmented political landscape and of the dispersion of power in local centres that had the means of accumulating wealth. These are located all the way from Elis through Portes (literally the gateway) to the inland plain of Pharai and the seaside area of Patras. Their internal hierarchy and their individual response to the challenges of the time remain to be determined by further research and study. The excavation and the study of the material at Mygdalia are still ongoing, but it has already given us a sense of understanding an important and underestimated period in western Achaia.

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⁵⁸ Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2003, 449–450; Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2011, 514–517; Papazoglou-Manioudaki et al. 2019, 203–205, figs. 86–88.

⁵⁹ Wilkie 1992, 257.

⁶⁰ Jones et al. 2018; Papazoglou-Manioudaki et al. 2019, 203–205.

⁶¹ Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2011, 508–517.

⁶² Wright 2008, 147–178.

⁶³ Kolonas 2009; Papazoglou-Manioudaki 2020, 138–140.

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