

ARGOLID and AIGINA

Social Change and Human Agency: The Argolid at the Onset of the Mycenaean Era

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“Innovation and social change emerge from the dynamic between personal and group agencies rather than from the agitation of a few aggrandising individuals.” (Robb 2010, 504)

Abstract: At the onset of the Mycenaean era the southern mainland undergoes a pervasive transformation. The period sees the introduction of new sumptuary practices, the emergence of elites and regional centres, the redefinition of personal identities and a new receptivity to external influences. It is widely acknowledged that the Argolid, and Mycenae in particular, play a leading role in this process. While this is undoubtedly true, assigning a central position to Mycenae and the Argolid entails the risk of treating Mycenae as representing developments across the entire region, and conversely of seeing the Argolid as a homogeneous entity already during the early Mycenaean period.

In this paper, I would like to present differences and divergences within the Argolid during this period of fluid social relations, political realignments and shifting alliances. My argument will proceed in stages: I will briefly introduce the theoretical debate on agency in processes of change, and address the methodological challenges that arise. I will then discuss the diverging trajectories of different communities across the Argive Plain, and the dissimilar responses by different social parties such as age, gender, status and kin groups. The discussion will be based on contextual analyses of funerary data carried out under the *Middle Helladic Argolid Project*.

The aim of this paper is to reveal the interplay between wider social processes and human agency, as different communities, groups and individuals experiment with new ideas and practices, attempt to carve their position in a changing world and to find a balance between tradition and innovation.

Keywords: Agency, social change, mortuary practices, Mycenaean period, Late Bronze Age, Argolid, innovation, tradition

The Historical Problem: Social Change at the Transition to the Mycenaean Period

The transition from the Middle Helladic to the Mycenaean period (in ceramic terms: the MH III–LH I phases) is witness to rapid and pervasive changes across the entire southern mainland. According to a generally accepted opinion, the kin-based, largely undifferentiated, fairly conservative, introverted and austere MH societies give way to the early Mycenaean competitive, ostentatious and culturally receptive principalities (Tab. 1).² These changes are most visible in the mortuary practices, where the traditional MH practices – single, usually unfurnished inhumations in simple graves inside the settlement area – are replaced by multiple burials in larger, more labour-intensive and richly furnished tombs in extramural cemeteries.³ More recently, the changes in domestic architecture and settlement layout have also been studied,⁴ and they largely confirm the observations on the mortuary record.⁵ The changes in material culture – e.g. the appearance

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² See Wright 2008; Voutsaki 2010b; Voutsaki 2010c.

³ For the development of mortuary practices in the Argolid, see Voutsaki 1995; Voutsaki 2010b; Voutsaki 2010c, and several papers in Schallin – Tournavitou 2015. For a general synthesis, see Cavanagh – Mee 1998.

⁴ Philippa-Touchais 2010; Voutsaki 2010a; Wiersma 2014.

⁵ Voutsaki et al. 2013; Voutsaki – Milka 2017.

Period	Approximate dates	Main developments	Mortuary practices
MH I	2100–1900 BC	Kin-based society	Intramural cemeteries
MH II	1900–1800 BC	Adherence to tradition Austerity Relative isolation	Simple graves Single burials No, or poor offerings
MH III	1800–1700 BC	Intensification of change	Extramural cemeteries
LH I	1700–1600 BC	Increased interaction Emergence of differentiation Appearance of regional centres	Larger graves Richer offerings More complex ritual
LH II	1600–1450 BC	Competition between emerging centres 'Petty kingdoms'	Spread of <i>tholoi</i> and chamber tombs Peak in mortuary display
LH IIIA	1450–1300 BC	Appearance of palatial system	Mortuary display more exclusive to palatial elites

Tab. 1: Chronological chart

of new ceramic styles, the intensified production, importation and imitation of valuable goods, or the introduction of figurative art, etc.⁶ – are too well known to need extensive discussion here.

However, this seemingly neutral and descriptive chronological chart is to a certain extent misleading. To start with, change is presented as taking place exclusively in the MH III–LH I periods, while the early phases of the MH period are presented as static and unchanging.⁷ The nature of social relations in MH I–II has rarely been the object of systematic study, but recent research has revealed interesting differences, asymmetries, innovations and shifts that question the traditional reconstruction of a stagnant society.⁸ This problem has been discussed elsewhere;⁹ it will therefore not be discussed further in this paper, where I will concentrate on the MH III–LH I period.

The second problem is that the sequence presented in Table 1 is largely based on the developments in the Argolid. Indeed the Argolid is often seen as encapsulating Mycenaean social and political changes and representing the entire southern mainland. While recent studies have explored differences between and within regions,¹⁰ they tend to concentrate on political competition and the emergence of the palatial system.¹¹ As a result, even the Argolid, the best documented and most intensively explored region of the Mycenaean world, is often treated as a homogeneous unit¹² with all communities seen as undergoing the same linear and teleological development towards increasing differentiation and palatial centralisation. In addition, no systematic attempt

⁶ However, these changes have received uneven attention: The appearance of new decorative ceramic styles has been heavily discussed – see e.g. Dickinson 1974; Dietz 1991; Mathioudaki 2010; Lindblom – Manning 2011; Rutter 2017; Dickinson, this volume; Lindblom – Rutter, this volume. By contrast, local manufacture (rather than importation) of valuables needs to be studied in its entirety (rather than along artefactual categories), while the introduction of figurative art (Rutter 2001, 141–142; Voutsaki 2010e, 83–88) urgently requires systematic study (see already Mina 2016; Verlaan 2016; Weilharter, this volume).

⁷ Indeed this was my earlier position: Voutsaki 1999, 105–109; see also Dickinson 1989, 133. However, the detailed analyses carried out as part of the *Middle Helladic Argolid Project* have led me to qualify my earlier opinion; see Voutsaki – Milka 2017. The main aim of the *Middle Helladic Argolid Project*, a multidisciplinary project funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), was to explain the social and cultural changes taking place in the southern mainland, and in the Argolid in particular, during the MH period and the transition to the Late Bronze Age. For the research design, see Voutsaki 2005.

⁸ See Spencer 2007 on the ceramic industries; Wiersma 2014 on housing; Voutsaki – Milka 2017 on changes in Lerna between EH III and MH II; Balitsari 2017 on MH I–MH III Argos. For an insightful discussion of social change during the MH period, see Cherry 2017. For a general discussion, but without extensive empirical analyses, see Whittaker 2014.

⁹ Voutsaki – Milka 2017.

¹⁰ Voutsaki 1998; Boyd 2002; Bennet – Galanakis 2005; Phialon 2011. See also papers in Wiersma – Voutsaki 2017.

¹¹ Bennet 1995; Voutsaki 1995.

¹² However, see Voutsaki 2010d and Philippa-Touchais et al., this volume.

has been made to study how different age, gender and kin groups responded to the changes taking place around them.¹³

To conclude, the rate and nature of the changes taking place on the southern mainland in the early Mycenaean period and their impact on different regions, communities and social groups are still imperfectly understood. As a result, and despite many nuanced discussions and interesting debates,¹⁴ change at the onset of the Mycenaean era is still largely conceived as linear, quasi-universal, and irreversible.

The Theoretical Debate: Agency and Social Change

If we want to understand how different communities and subgroups responded to change, we need to move beyond reconstructing the general trends, i.e. the wider processes of differentiation, centralisation, competition, emulation or resistance that underlie social and political change. We need to break down regional trajectories, and to investigate differences between and within communities. We need to understand human choices and motivations both at the level of the social group and at the level of the individual person. To put it differently, we need to address an important theoretical problem: the role of human agency in processes of social change.

Agency has been a central concept in archaeological theory for the last forty years – but it has also been a fashionable term used in a non-explanatory and circular manner. All too often practices or forms are ‘explained’ by simply stating that somebody has chosen to adopt them. On the other hand, when serious attempts were made to understand agency,¹⁵ the discussion was often highly theoretical and opaque, and the concept was rarely operationalised. I have discussed the definitional issues at length in a different paper,¹⁶ and will therefore restrict the theoretical discussion here to some basic observations, which will provide the basis for the methodology adopted.

Agency in archaeology was introduced and conceptualised under the influence of Anthony Giddens’ structuration theory,¹⁷ which defined agency as the intentional choices “knowledgeable agents” make as they take action to realise their goals. Critique was voiced by gender theorists who were the first to point out that “the knowledgeable actor is nominally neutral, but gendered male by association with traditional male behavior striving for power and prestige, and with modern male-associated personal qualities emphasising decisiveness and assertiveness”.¹⁸ Indeed, Giddens’s agent had an uncanny resemblance to the modern individual, the ‘unencumbered self’ who acts autonomously, unhindered by webs of relations, obligations and traditions. In this way, a modern-day perception of agency – effectively an essentialised, abstracted construct – was projected onto the past.¹⁹ In contrast, recent discussions on personhood in pre-modern societies see the self as embedded in social relations and cultural traditions (see Fig. 1).²⁰ This does not mean that individuals passively succumb to obligations, traditions and norms; each person partakes of different networks of sociability, interprets traditions differently, and is unique in their self-actualisation. As a result, neither personal nor group identity are clearly demarcated, as both groups

¹³ Despite the growing interest in age and gender in the Mycenaean world. On gender see Mee 1998; Ruppenstein 2010. On age, see Lebegyev 2009. On age and gender in the MH period, see Voutsaki 2004.

¹⁴ Rutter 2001; Wright 2001; Wright 2004a; Wright 2004b; Dickinson 2010; Petrakis 2010; Wright 2010; Cherry 2017. Stimulating as these papers are, we still need detailed analyses of empirical data, always within a theoretical framework – which is what the *Middle Helladic Argolid Project* has sought to provide.

¹⁵ The bibliography on agency grows by the minute: I single out Dobres – Robb 2000 and Robb 2010.

¹⁶ Voutsaki 2010e. See Bintliff 2015 for an acerbic critique of the specific argument, and of archaeological theory in general.

¹⁷ Giddens 1979.

¹⁸ Gero 2000.

¹⁹ Gero 2000; Robb 2010, 496. Indeed most archaeological studies of agency focus on aggrandising, competitive leaders – see Wright 2004a.

²⁰ E.g. Fowler 2004.

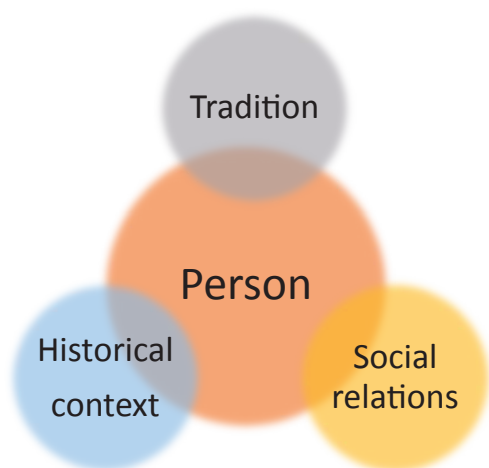


Fig. 1: Relational personhood and agency

and individuals are mixed with what appears to be outside them; therefore both selves and groups contain the potential for their transformation.²¹

Therefore, while agency was seen as an innate quality of human actors in the early stages of the discussions, recently the relational dimension of agency is emphasised.²² As John Robb has argued,²³ human nature is relational, because people develop their capacity for acting by participating in social relations and engaging with past traditions. The focus has therefore gradually shifted from the protagonists to practices and to the mutually constitutive relationships between humans and their material and social contexts.²⁴

The Methodological Problem: Agency in the Mortuary Record

The main question, however, is how we should study human choices and motivations, or detect the operation of agency on the basis of archaeological data. Following on from the discussion above, we can approach agency by studying practices and relations. Mortuary practices are ideal for this purpose as they are foremost a strategy of self-representation, with the self seen as a constellation of relations with the social, natural, supernatural and material world.

Mortuary practices involve subconscious choices, i.e. the filtering of the funerary ideology or cultural tradition, but can also be consciously manipulated to achieve social goals. It is often asked whether these choices were made by the deceased or the mourners. I believe that this ‘either – or’ formulation is symptomatic of our tendency to perceive the relation between the person and the group as antithetic, thereby denying relationality in social life. In mortuary practices in particular, the mourners are restricted by a set of cultural traditions and religious obligations summarised in the notion of proper respect for the dead²⁵ – though, as we will see below, there is room for change and innovation.

In addition, mortuary data are usually abundant and cover if not the entire, at least a wider segment of society; the analysis can be carried out at different levels (the region/the community/the social group/the individual); treatment can be correlated with different aspects of personal identity (age, gender, kin, status, etc.). In particular, the systematic contextual study of mortuary practices allows us to reconstruct interaction across space as well as change through time. I propose to use a new methodology in order to understand human choices in the mortuary sphere, namely, to reconstruct *chains* and *sequences* of human actions (Fig. 2).

We can reconstruct *chains* of human choices by investigating the origin of a new mortuary treatment or tomb type. Mourners may follow local practices, but may also decide to express an affiliation with neighbouring or distant groups – either a group which has different traditions and norms (e.g. an ethnic or cultural group), or a group of higher social status. Social relations and networks may be materialised in burials by the deposition of foreign, imported objects, which denote relations with distant groups. These observations allow us to reconstruct networks of inter-

²¹ This point is discussed more extensively in Voutsaki 2010e, 73–74.

²² Robb 2010; Voutsaki 2010e.

²³ Robb 2010, 497.

²⁴ Robb 2010, 502.

²⁵ Tarlow 2002, 86.

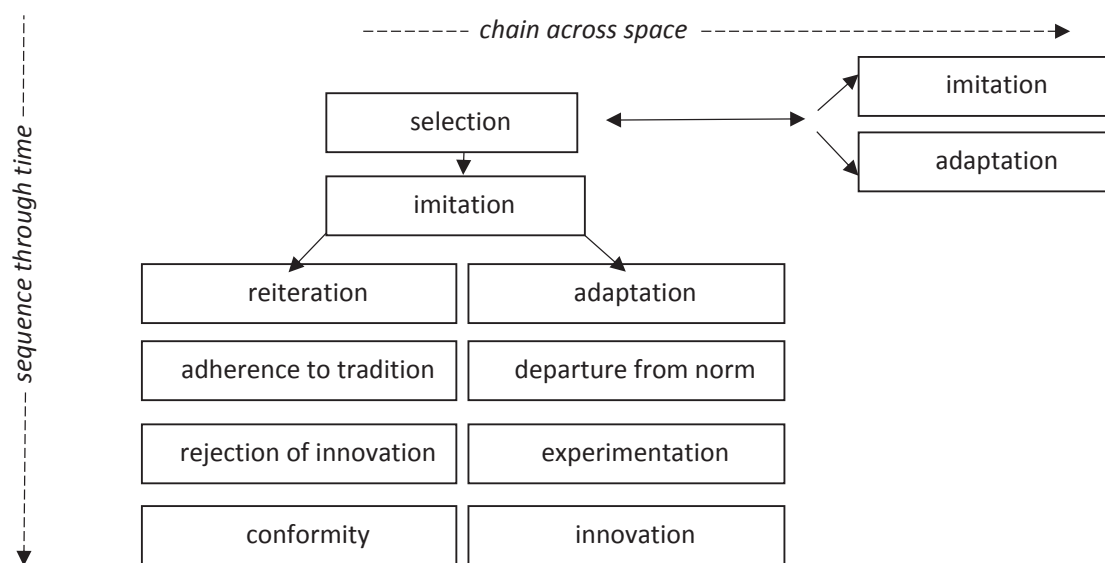


Fig. 2: Sequences and chains in mortuary practices

connections and influences across space, i.e. between regions, communities and social groups. The very act of adopting a distant practice or incorporating a foreign object creates a ‘community of practice’²⁶ and forms individuals into a group with a new collective agency.²⁷

Needless to say, new forms may also arise out of local traditions, therefore internal developments and the temporal dimension also need to be taken into account. We can reconstruct *sequences* of human choices by studying both the adoption of new practices and the adherence to traditional customs through time. Of course, this is only possible if we have close chronological control, i.e. if we can reconstruct the sequence of burials and graves of an entire cemetery or burial precinct in a reasonably accurate way. If this is the case, we can recreate decisions and choices at a new burial, as the mourners have to decide whether to adopt a new practice or to reiterate old customs, to faithfully repeat or to adapt and modify, to endorse innovation or to adhere to tradition, to adopt entire ‘packages’ of practices (i.e. a set combination of type and location of tomb, with a treatment of the body and accompanying ritual) or to select and combine elements out of a wider and ever changing repertoire of forms.

By reconstructing sequences and chains and by studying the different aspects of the mortuary practices, their correlations, and their spatial and temporal variation, we can establish choices taken by individuals and mourners, presumably the kin groups responsible for the funeral and the commemoration. First, we can place these choices within the network of relations and ensuing obligations the deceased and the mourners operated in. Second, we can assess whether the choices made at any one time are in any way restricted by earlier decisions taken by the same community or social group. In this way, we can establish whether there are *micro-traditions*²⁸ – i.e. localised sets of practices adhered to for a long time that may sometimes depart from broader trends characterising the society as a whole. This will enable us to see who innovates, and who adheres to tradition or resists change – in other words, to understand the role of agency in processes of social change.

²⁶ Knappett 2011, 98–123.

²⁷ Robb 2010, 502–504.

²⁸ Chapman 2000, 177.

Choices, Typologies and Mortuary Practices in the Early Mycenaean Period

Let us return to the beginning of the Mycenaean period, a period of rapid and pervasive changes, during which the communities of the southern mainland were confronted with complex dilemmas in the mortuary sphere.

In Fig. 3 we can see some of the choices which the mourners had to make. These choices appear complex enough, especially once we start combining them. The reality, however, was even more complex. This schematic diagram obscures a significant part of the variation, namely the fuzziness and fluidity of mortuary forms and categories in the transition to the Mycenaean period. In many ways, our typologies say more about us and our urge to organise our evidence in distinct and mutually exclusive categories than about the changing funerary ideology and the unstable social reality mortuary practices helped to construct and to undermine.

Let us take the first choice: intramural versus extramural location may appear a straightforward difference – but it is not. It is actually difficult to distinguish between the two, because already in the MH period burials tend to concentrate in ruined houses or abandoned areas of the settlement.²⁹ The new formal extramural cemeteries are located at a small distance from the settlement,³⁰ sometimes in hitherto unused areas, most often in settlement areas recently abandoned³¹ or on the ruins of earlier sites.³² Therefore, while there is a general tendency to abandon intramural burial (or restrict it to infants, neonates and small children) at the transition to the Mycenaean period and to switch to extramural cemeteries, the actual labels ‘intramural’ and ‘extramural’ do not do justice to the complexity of the situation.³³

The best way to see how schematic and almost misleading our own categories are is to examine the tomb types in use in the MH III–LH I period (see Tab. 2). We distinguish between cists and pits, but in reality the two types form a continuum with half-built cists and stone-lined pits as intermediate categories, while the presence or absence of additional features (cover slabs, stone cairns, or pebble floors) complicates distinctions further.³⁴

It is primarily in the new tomb types such as the shaft grave and the built tomb that the problem becomes acute. If we take the shaft grave, for instance, problems of definition arise immediately: do we define a shaft grave by the existence of a shaft, as the term indicates? Indeed, this is a very salient feature of the shaft graves in Mycenae and Lerna. On the other hand, graves with shafts are reported already among the intramural pits in Lerna;³⁵ a shaft is also noted above tombs which are otherwise better described as large cists in Barbouna, Menelaion or Ayios Stephanos in Lakonia.³⁶ Conversely, some tombs described as shaft graves do not have shafts – see, for instance, the so-called shaft grave (Schachtgrab) in Kolonna, Aigina, which was actually built above ground. Or should we define shaft graves on the basis of their size? The graves in Grave Circle A are indeed exceptionally large and deep. However, the ones in Grave Circle B or in Lerna are significantly smaller, and the graves in Barbouna, Ayios Stephanos and the Menelaion mentioned above have the size of a large cist. Resorting to non-architectural criteria, e.g. wealth, does not solve the problem either: while most shaft graves in the Grave Circles are rich or very rich, this is not the case for any of the other graves described as shaft graves. Neither does the introduction of additional

²⁹ Nordquist 1987, 91; Milka 2010; Sarri 2016.

³⁰ E.g. in Prosymna (Blegen 1937), or in Myloi (Dietz – Divari-Valakou 1990).

³¹ E.g. in Argos (Protonotariou-Deilaki 1980), Pefkakia (Maran 1992), Asine-Barbouna (Nordquist n. d.); see also Maran 1995.

³² E.g. in the North Cemetery at Ayios Vasileios, which was established in an area with EH occupation. Ayios Vasileios was probably a new foundation in MH III (Voutsaki et al. 2019). For the association between past and present in the location of MH and LH cemeteries, see Boyd 2016, 205–206.

³³ A point made by Milka 2010.

³⁴ See Voutsaki – Hachtmann, in preparation, for a discussion on this point applied to the North Cemetery at Ayios Vasileios, Lakonia.

³⁵ Blackburn 1970, passim, 15.

³⁶ Barbouna: Nordquist n. d. Ayios Stephanos, Nu 2: Taylour † – Janko 2008, 137–140. Menelaion, Tomb 1: Catling 2009, 188.

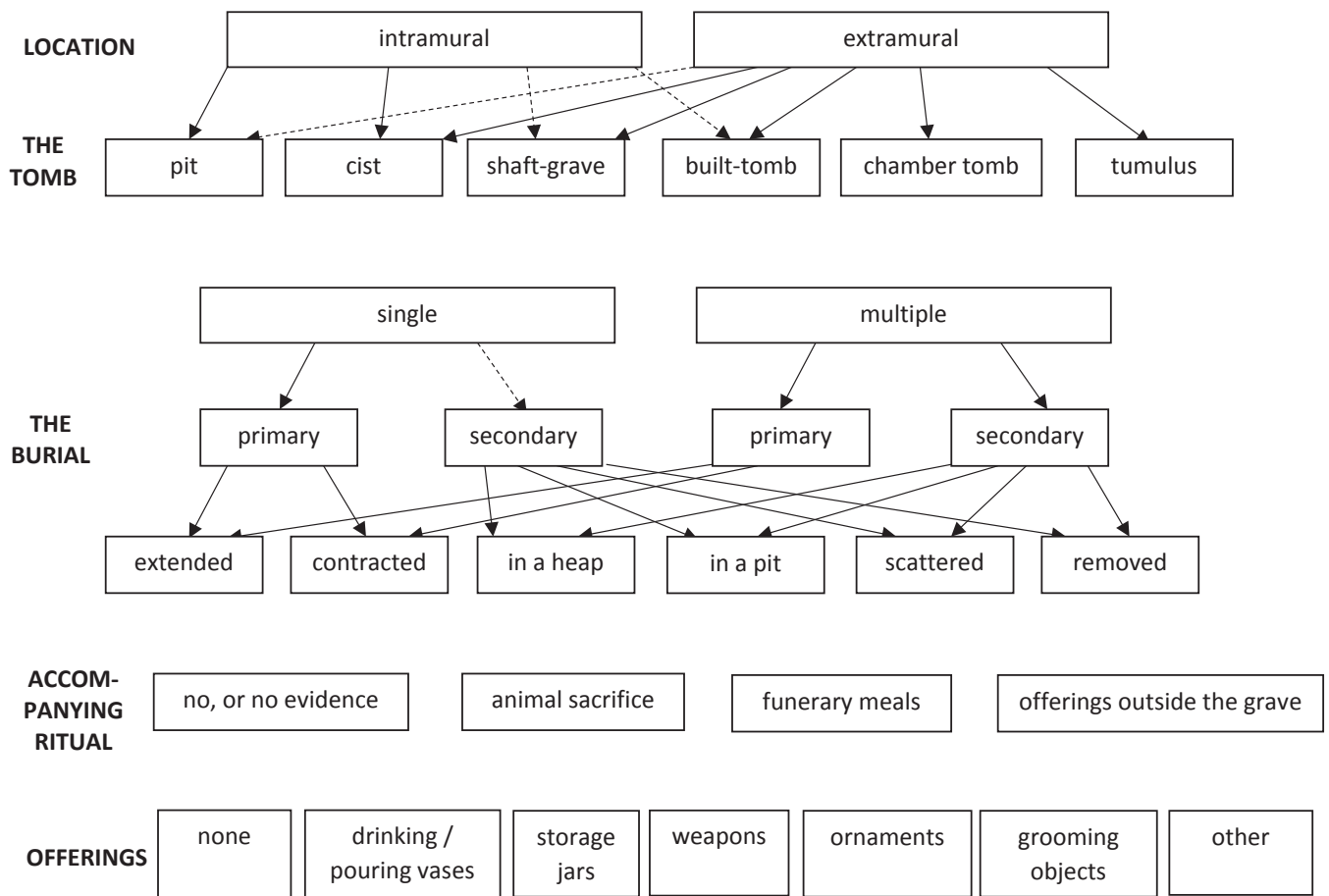


Fig. 3: Choices in the mortuary rites in the MH III–LH I Argolid (continuous arrows indicate regular associations; hatched arrows indicate rare associations)

	pit	cist	shaft grave	built tomb	tumulus	chamber tomb
Mycenae	+	+	+			+
Argos	+	+		+		?
Tiryns	+	+				
Midea	+	+				
Asine	+	+			+	
Lerna	+	+	+			
Myloi	?	+				
Prosymna	+	+				+
Berbati	+	+				

Tab. 2: Tomb types in use in MH III–LH I Argolid

criteria, e.g. location or treatment of the body, help. For instance, the Lerna shaft graves are not particularly large, they are built amidst ruined houses, and reveal evidence for collective feasting rather than the individualised deposition of wealth.³⁷ By contrast, the Shaft Graves of Mycenae are exceptionally large and deep, placed in an exclusive precinct in an extramural cemetery, contain unparalleled wealth and attest to complex rites surrounding the disposal of the body.

The situation is complicated further if we add the built tombs to the discussion. Built tombs come in different shapes, sizes and modes of construction; they are found in different variants in different sites (e.g. the ones in Eleusis with the side entrance),³⁸ and there are many unique examples (e.g. Tomb P in Grave Circle B,³⁹ the built tombs in Vrana, Marathon,⁴⁰ etc.). The dividing line between the shaft grave and the built tomb is not clear;⁴¹ this is illustrated most clearly in the uncertainty surrounding the terminology used for the Kolonna tomb or the Griffin Warrior tomb⁴² – are they built tombs or shaft graves?

Indeed, the two tomb types share important characteristics: both have been designed in order to close the tomb safely and establish a boundary, or liminal area between the dead and the living, and at the same time to be able to cross this boundary (empty the shaft or passage, dismantle the roof, or open the entrance) and reuse the tomb again and again.⁴³ There are also differences between the two types: while shaft graves are entered from above, built tombs are entered from the side – or at least, the idea of a side entrance is experimented with, as in the case of pseudo-entrances that are not really used. The entrance from the side rather than from above is an ingenious solution, which facilitates the reuse of the tomb for more burials over a longer period,⁴⁴ as well as the construction of larger tombs.⁴⁵

However, the discussion should not be exhausted in trying to devise formal criteria and distinct types.⁴⁶ I would like to suggest that shaft graves and built tombs do not constitute types as such, but facets of a process of experimentation, which links the traditional MH types (pits, cists, tumuli) with the classic Mycenaean tomb types such as the tholos and chamber tomb, which are introduced in this period. Therefore, we need to study and understand this phenomenon of innovation and creativity, which the appearance of these new tomb types signals. Here the notion of agency is indispensable.

Variation and Change in the MH III–LH I Argolid

It is now time to look more closely at the mortuary data and to examine patterns of variation among communities in the MH III–LH I Argolid. I will examine only two aspects of the evidence: the use of the different tomb types and the different mortuary treatment.

If we examine the proportional representation of different tomb types across different sites (Fig. 4), we can observe interesting variation. We notice, for instance a preference for shaft graves in the Grave Circles of Mycenae (though pits are also found), while chamber tombs are intro-

³⁷ However, some caution is necessary here as they were robbed and/or emptied. For the evidence of feasting, see Lindblom 2007.

³⁸ Mylonas 1975.

³⁹ Mylonas 1972/1973, 211–225.

⁴⁰ Papadimitriou 2001, 100–101; Pantelidou-Gofa et al. 2016a; Pantelidou-Gofa et al. 2016b.

⁴¹ The dividing line between built tombs and chamber tombs is not fully clear either – see e.g. the term used by Papadimitriou (2001): built chamber tombs.

⁴² Davis – Stocker 2016.

⁴³ On shaft graves, reuse and secondary treatment, see also Boyd 2015, 434–435.

⁴⁴ In the North Cemetery in Ayios Vasileios, most tombs contained one to six burials, but the built tomb with pseudo-entrance (the tomb was still entered from above) contained more than 25 burials in successive layers; cf. Voutsaki et al., this volume.

⁴⁵ Needless to say, the addition of a stomion or a rudimentary dromos introduced the tripartite figure of the tholos and chamber tomb; see Voutsaki 1998, 45; Papadimitriou 2011.

⁴⁶ I am not trying to argue that we should never employ descriptive categories such as shaft graves or built tombs (or for that matter, intramural and extramural cemeteries) – I will myself use them in the analysis below.

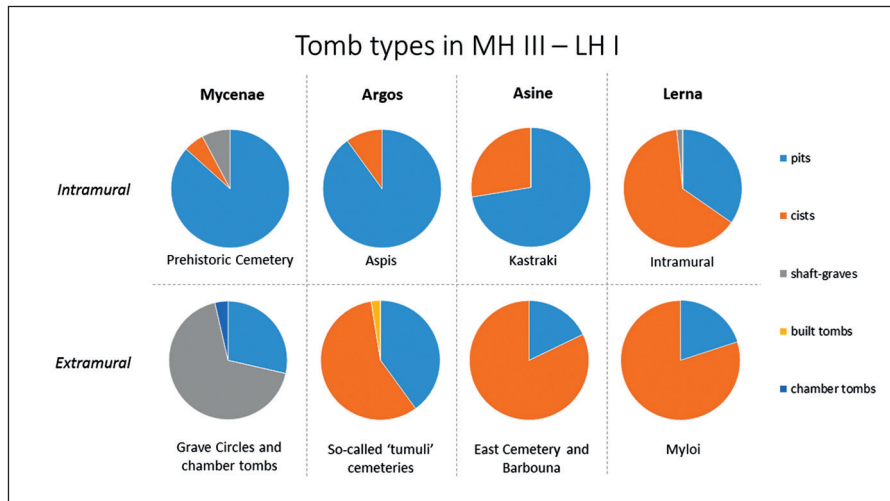


Fig. 4: Tomb types in MH III–LH I sites in the Argolid

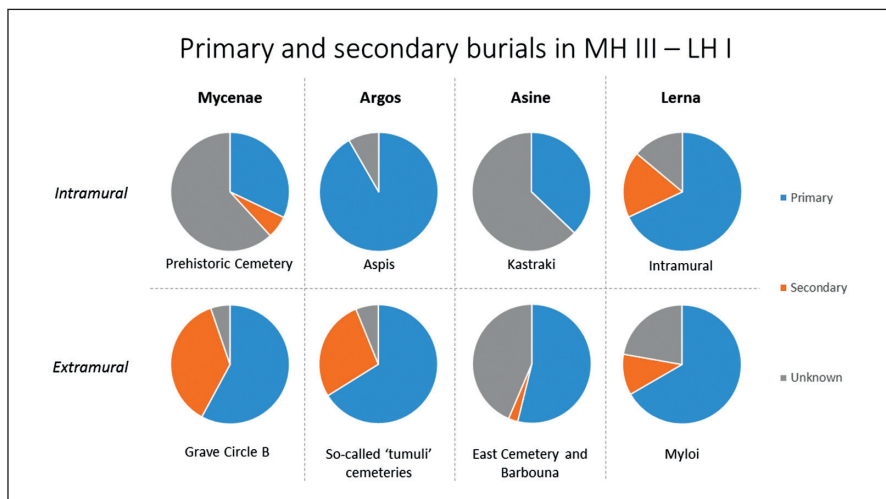


Fig. 5: Primary and secondary burials in MH III–LH I sites in the Argolid

duced already in LH I in Mycenae. In contrast, in Asine (East Cemetery, Barbouna) and in Myloi cists predominate and pits are almost absent. Finally, in the Argos extramural cemeteries (the so-called 'tumuli') both cists and pits are used, with very few built tombs.

At the same time, recurring associations underlie this variation: intramural burial grounds contain mostly simple tomb types (cists and pits), while extramural cemeteries comprise more complex types such as shaft graves and built tombs. While it is important to notice the general trends, it is also imperative to study the exceptions. For instance, the shaft graves in Lerna are opened in the ruins of the settlement, which by that time was at least partly abandoned.⁴⁷ Even more surprisingly, the Built Tomb 73 in Mitrou in central Greece was built in the settlement inside a house that seems to have been in use at the time!⁴⁸ Conversely, in Mycenae shaft graves are also found in the Prehistoric Cemetery, though they are considerably smaller than the ones in the Grave Circles.⁴⁹

Mortuary treatment, and more specifically primary versus secondary burials (Fig. 5), also shows significant variation (but here poor preservation or missing information blur the picture).

⁴⁷ Blackburn 1970, 168–173; Milka 2010, 352. See the discussion above, about intramural versus extramural burials.

⁴⁸ Van de Moortel 2016, 93–94, 100, 102–107.

⁴⁹ Alden 2000; Voutsaki et al. 2009a, 141–142.

Once more, secondary treatment is much more common among extramural than intramural burials. There are also significant differences among formal cemeteries, e.g. between Grave Circle B (many secondary burials) and the Asine extramural cemeteries (Barbouna and East Cemetery, where secondary burials are few).

In order to explore these differences further, I will examine more closely two very well documented and accurately dated sites: the Asine East Cemetery and Grave Circle B at Mycenae.⁵⁰ My aim is not only to note local preferences, but also to reconstruct how these preferences came about and how they evolved over time.

The East Cemetery at Asine

The East Cemetery is the formal cemetery of the contemporary settlement of Asine on the Kastraki Hill and consists of a tumulus and graves opened inside (or on top of) and just outside the tumulus. The cemetery was excavated and published in an exemplary fashion by Søren Dietz.⁵¹ More recently, the human remains were re-examined by Anne Ingvarsson-Sundström.⁵² In addition, radiocarbon analysis has been carried out which allowed us to redate most graves and reconstruct the sequence of use and the history of the cemetery in a more accurate way (Tab. 3).⁵³

The status of the group buried in the East Cemetery has been debated.⁵⁴ There is no question that the move to an extramural cemetery, the use of a tumulus, and, as we will see below, the deposition of a few richer offerings distanced and differentiated the burial group from the rest of the community. At the same time, however, any claims to a higher status were mitigated by the relatively homogeneous and austere mortuary practices.

On the basis of the radiocarbon dates and the ceramic finds, the earliest grave in the East Cemetery is the MH I or MH II Burial Pithos 1971-15,⁵⁵ which was placed (already broken) outside the tumulus containing the scanty remains of two adult men. A bowl covered the pithos, while two cups and a jar were found underneath the bowl, i.e. outside the pithos proper. This burial is exceptional in many respects: it marks the foundation of an extramural cemetery,⁵⁶ a clear departure from the tradition of intramural burials. In addition, the combination of adults in a pithos, the double interment⁵⁷ and the presence of three vases is very rare in this period. Interestingly, it is not unique: another pithos burial (1971-7) of two adult females was found nearby – but contained no offerings and unfortunately produced unreliable ¹⁴C results.⁵⁸ It is tempting to treat these two pithoi as (more or less) contemporary. If this is accepted, the second burial seems to reiterate and continue the new features and their combination. In this case we could see the establishment of a micro-tradition which restricts the choices at a new burial, at least to a certain extent (the two burials differ in some respects, e.g. in the provision of offerings). Admittedly, with only two cases, one of which cannot be dated, the conclusion is somewhat circular.

⁵⁰ See Petrakis 2010, who also undertakes a comparison between the Asine East Cemetery and Grave Circle B, though with different questions in mind.

⁵¹ Dietz 1980.

⁵² This study was carried out as part of the *Middle Helladic Argolid Project*. See Ingvarsson-Sundström et al. 2009; Ingvarsson-Sundström et al. 2013.

⁵³ Voutsaki et al. 2010.

⁵⁴ Milka 2006; Voutsaki et al. 2011; Ingvarsson-Sundström et al. 2013; Milka 2019.

⁵⁵ Dietz 1980, 62–63.

⁵⁶ Unless the earliest grave is 71B, a mudbrick cist containing commingled human remains which cannot be dated (may even belong to the EH period).

⁵⁷ It is not possible to say if the burials were primary or secondary.

⁵⁸ Voutsaki et al. 2010, 36.

Date	Grave			Burial						Offerings
	Grave number	Type of tomb	Construction	Skeleton number	Number	Treatment	Position	Sex	Age	
MH I-II	1971-15	Pithos		49	Double burial. Scanty remains	?	?	M	32	Bowl as cover 2 Cups, jar
				—					27	
	1971-7	Pithos		55	Double burial	?	?	F F	17 40	—
				—						
MH II-III	1971-12	Cist	Stone-built	62	Single	Primary	Contracted	?	11-13	—
	1971-5	Cist	Stone-built	53	Single	Primary	Heavily contracted	F	37	—
	1970-12	Cist	Stone-built	44	Single	Primary	Contracted?	M	25	Gold diadem Iron nail (??)
	1971-11	Cist	Orthostate slabs	61	Single	Primary	Contracted	F	26	—
	1971-10	Pit	Stone-lined?	60	Single	Primary	Contracted	M	21	Bronze knife Gold ear-ring
	1972-5	Cist	Stone-built	66	Double burial	?	?	F ?	30 6 months	—
				67						
MH III-LH I	1971-2	Cist	Orthostate slabs	51	Single	Primary	Contracted	F	18	Double jug with birds Jug
	1970-7/8	Double cist	Stone-built and orthostate slabs	42	Single	Primary	?	?	3-4	—
				47	Single	Primary	?	?	child	—
	1971-1	Cist	Stone-built	52	Single	Primary	Contracted	M	44	—
	1971-14	Cist	Stone-built	—	Single	Primary	Contracted?	?	?	—
1971-13	Cist	Orthostate slabs	63	Single	Primary	Contracted	F	28	—	
LH I	1971-3	Large cist	Stone-built	54	Single	Primary	Extended?	M	33	14 vases (jugs, cups) Bronze dagger, pommel
LH I-II	1970-11	Cist	Orthostate slabs	43	Single	Primary	Heavily contracted	M	27	—
LH II	1972-7b	Burial		58	Remains of child on cover of cist	Primary		?	12-18 months	—

Tab. 3: Graves in the East Cemetery, Asine, listed in approximate chronological order (Graves 71B, 1971-6, 1970-16, 1972-7 are not included, as they cannot be dated accurately)

Interestingly, the combination of tumulus, pithos and ceramic offerings is also found in Argos in ‘Tumuli’ A and Γ.⁵⁹ We see, therefore, that important innovations (extramural cemeteries, the combination of tumulus and pithos, sometimes accompanied by many ceramic offerings) is adopted at more or less the same period at different sites in the Argolid. Where the idea came from, is not easy to say – the question is beyond the scope of this paper, as it opens up the complex discussion of the use and spread of tumuli.⁶⁰ It suffices to say that tumuli with pithoi are used in the early MH period in western Greece, esp. Messenia,⁶¹ but also elsewhere (e.g. Attica, i.a. in Marathon⁶² and possibly earlier in Aphidna⁶³). It is very likely that the sporadic adoption of these practices in the Argolid indicates a process of interaction and imitation. In this particular case, however, we may be able to suggest a ‘chain’, though it is not easy to understand the direction of influences.⁶⁴

The tumulus was already erected in these earlier phases, as, according to the radiocarbon results, cist 1971-12 at the edge of the tumulus was already used in the MH I–II period. The cist contained a single, contracted, unfurnished burial of an 11–13-year-old child. This burial is therefore very different from the pithos burials described above and much closer to the mortuary tradition of the MH intramural burials in Kastraki. We see, therefore, that substantially different practices, if not different traditions coexist in the same cemetery, though we cannot really explain these differences.

The main period of use of the East Cemetery is in the later part of the MH period, MH II–LH I. In this period, the number of graves in the East Cemetery increases sharply, a phenomenon which we can observe across the southern mainland with the decline of intramural burials and the foundation of several new extramural cemeteries. I should repeat that this is also a period of marked changes in the mortuary practices elsewhere: the introduction of large and complex tombs, the adoption of multiple burials, and the increasing deposition of offerings with the dead. Few of these changes seem to reach the East Cemetery, where mortuary practices – after the initial burst of innovation in the earlier MH period – become and remain remarkably homogeneous and stable until well into the LH I period. The pithos burials disappear, and almost all the tombs are cists,⁶⁵ which largely repeat the same choices: the graves are of fairly small size and simple construction (roughly built, or made of orthostate slabs); the burials are usually single, primary and contracted,⁶⁶ and most contain few, if any offerings. There are no shaft graves nor built tombs; as far as we can say, there are no extended burials, no multiple graves, and no secondary interments. We see local preferences emerging and persisting for a long period – or, to put it differently, we see the emergence and crystallisation of a micro-tradition particular to the East Cemetery. Of course, there are differences between the graves – some are inside, and some outside the tumulus; some are built of slabs, some of stones; there is one (stone-lined) pit, etc. There is also interesting variation in the offerings: while most graves are unfurnished, one contains two vases (one with a figurative representation of birds, still a rare occurrence), one a bronze knife and a gold earring, and one a golden diadem and an iron nail, which were valuable and exceptional offerings, probably imported from elsewhere. These innovations imitate similar practices elsewhere; while in

⁵⁹ Protonotariou-Deilaki 1980; Voutsaki et al. 2009b; Sarri – Voutsaki 2011. See also Balitsari 2017, 112–113, 246–247, and 270 for MH I–II pithos burials in other find spots in Argos.

⁶⁰ Korres 1976; Müller 1989; Whittaker 2014, *passim*.

⁶¹ Boyd 2002; Zavadil 2013.

⁶² Marinatos 1972; Pantelidou-Gofa et al. 2016a; Pantelidou-Gofa et al. 2016b.

⁶³ Forsén 2010.

⁶⁴ On interregional exchanges in MH, see Alberti 2013.

⁶⁵ MH II–III: 1971-5, 1970-12; MH III–LH I: 1971-11, 1972-5, 1971-2, 1970-78, 1971-14, 1971-13. Only one pit (1971-10) was found.

⁶⁶ It should be noted, however, that the position of the body could not always be established as the skeletons were found below water level; see Dietz 1980, *passim*.

MH II golden ornaments or weapons are rarely deposited with the dead,⁶⁷ by MH III more examples can be presented.⁶⁸ Even these tombs, however, despite their possible foreign connections, are characterised by a certain traditionalism and conservatism: two of these ‘richer’ burials are placed in a cist and one in the only stone-lined pit; all three are single, primary and contracted. We seem to have here an oscillation between departure from the norm and an attempt at distinction, usually materialised by imported objects, on the one hand, and adherence to the traditions of this specific group on the other. We are actually confronted with human choices, of the attempt of people to position themselves both as individuals and as a group during these changing times.

The situation changes in the case of the LH I Cist 1971-3.⁶⁹ For the first time, a larger cist, an extended burial and a large number of offerings are found in the East Cemetery. The grave contained one dagger, 14 vases, and the usual drinking cup and pouring jug/jar combination that characterises funerary assemblages in the MH III–LH I period, including a bridge-spouted hole-mouth jar imitating Minoan prototypes. But even this burial stands firmly in the local tradition of the single inhumation in a cist – we see that the local tradition is modified, but not radically altered. Interestingly, difference from the local group is denoted with more objects, but not so much with imports.

After LH I, the use of the cemetery declines. This is a general phenomenon across the southern mainland; by LH II the use of the typically Mycenaean tomb types, the chamber tomb and the tholos, spread and these early extramural cemeteries fall out of use. The cemetery is, however, still visited – as can be attested by the discovery of two LH II vases in the northern periphery of the tumulus and the burial of a baby of 12–18 months on top of the slabs of an earlier cist. By that time, the norms are reversed: we can assume that from LH II onwards adults are buried in the newly introduced chamber tombs, while babies are buried in what was by then the traditional burial place: the East Cemetery.

Despite the limitations of the evidence (especially the small number of burials), we can try to go further towards distinguishing individual and group agency. Already among the MH I–II burials, we can observe that age is an important criterion of inclusion in an extramural cemetery – only one 11–13-year-old child was buried in a cist in the tumulus, and no younger children, neonates or infants are found. The exclusion of the youngest age categories has been observed in all extramural cemeteries;⁷⁰ we know that they still received intramural burial well into (if not throughout) the Mycenaean period. Among these earlier burials, we do not observe much differentiation between gender categories – both men and women are buried in double burials and pithoi outside the tumulus, though only men receive clay vases as offerings. Therefore, we can say that innovative practices such as the foundation of the extramural cemetery, the erection of a tumulus, the use of pithoi and double burials were introduced, primarily by – or more correctly for, adults, and for both men and women. The situation in some respects remains the same in MH II–III and MH III–LH I: children are still underrepresented, and the only neonate of six months to be included is buried together with a 30-year-old woman. However, if we look at gender, we observe a subtle, but interesting shift: the majority of those who adhere to traditional burial are women (four individuals – there is also one man and one indeterminate person). By contrast, two men adopt some new practices (deposition with valuables, ornaments, weapons), while one woman is buried with ceramic vases, one of which is decorated with flying birds.

If we want to conclude, therefore, as to which social categories within the East Cemetery group are more likely to adhere to traditions and norms and who is likely to depart from them and introduce new practices, it is becoming clear that the burial of neonates, babies and small children

⁶⁷ E.g. in the Kolonna Grave (Kilian-Dirlmeier 1997; sword, diadem, imported vases), or in Grave J4B in Lerna (Blackburn 1970, 81–82; dagger, imported vases), to give only a few examples from neighbouring sites.

⁶⁸ E.g. in the North Cemetery in Corinth (Blegen et al. 1964, 3–4, 8–9), in Ayia Irini on Keos (Caskey 1972, 385–386), and in Argos Grave E:88 (Protonotariou-Deilaki 1980, 111–112).

⁶⁹ Dietz 1980, 34–55.

⁷⁰ Voutsaki 2004; Lebegyev 2009; Pomadère 2010.

are most conservative – they are less likely to receive extramural burial in large tombs, secondary treatment or richer offerings. Innovation also seems to be more readily endorsed for men than for women. But the difference is marginal – and some caution is needed, as we are dealing with only a small number of cases and indeterminate burials blur any patterns observed.

To summarise the analysis of the East Cemetery: In the early MH period, the group using it departs from the MH norms by opting for an extramural cemetery, a tumulus, and pithos burials with double burials and sometimes offerings. These innovations exist alongside a more conservative tradition which continues the MH practices (single, contracted inhumation in a cist) and seems to prevail until well into the LH I period, even if some variation is observed. Therefore, the East Cemetery group at first avidly endorses innovative or at least non-normative practices, but later opts for reiteration, conformity and austerity – despite the occasional insertion of new features such as the gold diadem, the large cist, etc. We see that a micro-tradition emerges which restricts later decisions, choices and actions – but only to a certain extent. This general conservatism correlates with the relative absence of imports, while we know that in the settlement in Asine ceramic imports from Crete and the Cyclades are found.⁷¹

We see, therefore, that generalising explanations fail to account for the East Cemetery group, who resist the general trend towards multiple burials, re-use and secondary treatment. But generalising explanations also fail to account for variation and different rates of change within the group, with innovative practices being adopted more readily by some sub-groups and individuals than others.

Grave Circle B in Mycenae

Grave Circle B, the earliest (MH III–LH I) elite precinct of Mycenae, is one of the best documented funerary assemblages of the Mycenaean period.⁷² It therefore offers plenty of scope for the detailed analysis which is necessary if we want to understand the interplay between innovation and tradition. As we will see, it also offers a very interesting contrast to the more conservative and introverted attitude, which we were able to deduce at the Asine East Cemetery. The evidence does present some problems, however, as many tombs have been reused, and the earlier burials have been pushed away, scattered or even partly removed. As a result, in a few cases it is not possible to attribute offerings to specific burials, nor to reconstruct the sequence of burials and graves entirely. Here I will only include the (fortunately many) graves and burials that are well preserved and can be accurately dated (Tab. 4).

Thanks to the exemplary publication by Georgios Mylonas, and detailed studies by Oliver Dickinson, Giampaolo Graziadio and Søren Dietz, we can reconstruct the general trends during the use of the Grave Circle.⁷³ Graziadio has observed a steady process of increasing elaboration, seen in the labour investment in tombs, the deposition of valuables and the complexity of the mortuary ritual during his Early Phase (MH III B) and Late Phase I, but also a certain regression in the last stages of use, which coincide with the foundation of Grave Circle A.⁷⁴ My aim in this section is to see how these general trends come about, but also to examine if they were also resisted by individual choices and actions.

⁷¹ Nordquist 1987, 62–67.

⁷² The skeletal material has been restudied as part of the *Middle Helladic Argolid Project* by Sevi Triantaphyllou; see Voutsaki et al. 2007, 91–92.

⁷³ Mylonas 1972/1973; Dickinson 1977; Graziadio 1988; Dietz 1991.

⁷⁴ Graziadio 1991. It should be pointed out that Kilian-Dirlmeier 1986 and Dietz 1991 adopt a different chronological sequence.

The earliest well-dated graves⁷⁵ in Grave Circle B (H, Z in Graziadio's Early Phase) continue in many respects the MH tradition of single primary contracted inhumation in a (stone-lined) pit. However, they are larger than the cists in the East Cemetery. In addition, Grave Z already has a ledge on which the cover slabs rested and wooden posts in all four corners, which imply concern with an adequate and solid cover.⁷⁶ Both contain adults – which is what we would expect at an extramural cemetery. Both contain ceramic offerings (five to seven small vases; in Z they include a Cycladic import), a combination of a drinking cup and a pouring jug/jar, which becomes the new norm in MH III.⁷⁷ The deceased in Z was holding a knife in his right hand, while a bronze sword with an ivory pommel was placed to the right of the male skeleton in H. We see here new norms emerging: first, men are accompanied by weapons.⁷⁸ Second, swords are placed on the right hand-side of the body. Interestingly, this was also the case in the burial that may have been the prototype for the early Grave Circle users, the shaft grave in Kolonna Aigina.⁷⁹ Third, imports are included – again, as in the Kolonna Grave. We therefore already see in the first graves of Grave Circle B that traditional customs (single, contracted inhumation), new norms (ceramic set of pouring and drinking vessels), imports (swords, ceramic vases) and innovative practices are combined. We can reconstruct *chains* leading to Aigina, Crete and the Cyclades as well as a *sequence* of imitation, appropriation, innovation, and the crystallisation of new norms.⁸⁰ But we also glimpse exceptions and deviations: the other early pit, Θ, contains a single contracted female burial accompanied by a knife – the only case in Grave Circle B of a woman buried with a weapon or tool.⁸¹ This grave, however, was partly destroyed, and therefore our observations can only be tentative.

The next grave, Grave I, has a 0.95 m-deep shaft and a roof made of wooden beams, clay and turf; it is therefore a classic, fully-formed shaft grave.⁸² With average dimensions (2.88 m length × 1.68 m width × 1.05 m depth), it is much larger than Pits Z, H and Θ or the cists at the East Cemetery. The type of grave itself constitutes an innovation,⁸³ though one clearly rooted in the cists of the MH period. The burial is extended, with flexed feet, and there is an earlier secondary burial of a child, pushed into a heap (where an amber bead is found); we see here a departure from the single, primary, contracted MH norm. Following the emerging norm, a sword (with an ivory pommel) was placed on the right side of the deceased. In addition, the grave displays a whole series of innovative features rarely or never attested before: there is evidence for a 'funerary meal' above the cover of the grave; four large containers are deposited at the foot of the skeleton (while the usual small drinking and pouring vases had been placed near his head); the deceased was wearing golden bands around his wrists and on his body; two pairs of tweezers were deposited near his shoulder; the sword was decorated with a figurative representation (two anti-thetic butterflies); a silver cup with golden rim accompanied either the male burial or the child.⁸⁴

⁷⁵ Graziadio's Early Phase includes the following graves: Z, H, I, Λ2, Ξ, Ξ1 contained pottery, while A1, A2, Θ, Σ, T, Φ did not and were dated on the basis of stratigraphy and typology. Here there is a certain risk of circularity, as some simple pits may have been dated to the early phases on purely typological grounds. The discussion here is based primarily on the burials, which can be securely dated.

⁷⁶ Graves T and Ξ have walls of mudbrick or rubble lining the sides.

⁷⁷ About the significance of commensality and feasting in this period, see Wright 2004b.

⁷⁸ For 'warrior tombs' on the MH mainland, see Kasimi-Soutou 1986. On the deposition of swords as extensions of the self, see Voutsaki 2010e; Harrell 2014; Boyd 2015, 436.

⁷⁹ See Rutter 2001, 140; Petrakis 2010 on the influence of the Kolonna burial on MH III–LH I elite burials.

⁸⁰ Weapons are found with men and on their right-hand side in Tombs Z, H, I, B, Λ, N, Γ; only in Tomb Δ may a sword have been placed to the left of the deceased, but the association is uncertain.

⁸¹ But see the fish-hook (?) with the woman buried in Grave Y.

⁸² Shaft graves are rare, even inside Mycenae; see Alden 2000, passim.

⁸³ Boyd 2015, 437 n. 32, disagrees that shaft graves are introduced with reuse in mind. However, a close look at the Grave Circle B sequence demonstrates that all early pits were used for single inhumations, and all early shaft graves were reused.

⁸⁴ The silver cup was found among the bones of the secondary child burial. As far as we can say (we have no detailed contextual information for the Grave Circle A burials), there is no other example of a precious vessel deposited with a child.

Tab. 4: Graves and burials in Grave Circle B, Mycenae, listed in approximate chronological order¹

Date	Grave			Burials						Offerings					Remarks		
	Grave number	Type of tomb	Stele	MNI	Skeleton number	Treatment	Position	Sex	Age	Pouring/ drinking vases	Containers	Weapons	Ornaments	Figurative art			
Early Phase	Z	Pit (with post-holes)	–	1	59	Primary	Contracted	M	49	Jugs and cups	–	Sword to right, ivory pommel	–	–	–	–	
	H	Pit	–	1	–	Primary	Contracted	M	28	Jugs and cups	–	Knife, held in right hand	–	–	–	–	
	I	Shaft grave	–	2?	68	Primary	Extended, feet and upper body bent	M	42	Jar, jug and goblets	Amphora, stamnoi towards feet	Sword, ivory pommel, knife	Gold bands around pulses, gold bands near waist	Incised butterflies on sword	–	Funerary meal traces on slabs	
																	–
	Λ2	Oval pit	–	2	133	Secondary	Contracted	M	37	Jar	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
					134	Primary		M	5	Small jug, small cup	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
	Ξ	Shaft grave	(stone cairn above grave)	2	–	Secondary, still partly articulated	Contracted?	Adult?	–	2 jugs, goblets, kantharos, fragments of silver vase?	–	–	Fragments of silver bands?	–	–	Animal bones under stone cairn	
					–	Primary	Extended	F	5?	Askos, jug, goblets	Amphora	–	Golden bands, beads, golden spirals, silver pin golden ear-rings, ring	–	–	Golden rattle (?) near girl	
	Ξ1	Pit	–	1	57	Primary	Contracted	M	2 years	Jugs and cups	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
	Σ	Shaft grave? Pit?	–	2	131	Primary	Heavily contracted	M	55	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	Human bones in fill

¹ Destroyed or emptied (Θ, T, Φ), uncertainly dated graves (A1, A2) and burials where offerings cannot be attributed (two earlier burials in Δ) are not included. Artefacts which cannot be attributed to a specific skeleton are indicated with a ‘?’.

Tab. 4 (continued)

Late Phase I														
B	Shaft grave	–	1	52	1 Primary	Extended	M	30	Jar, goblets	Large jar, possibly wrapped in linen	Bronze knife on right lower hand	Golden ornaments, electron band	–	In fill: NL axe, traces of 'funerary meal'
Γ	Shaft grave	–	(5)	–	Secondary, bones in northern part		?	?	No pottery certainly associated	–	Sword? Dagger? Sword, ivory pommel?	Golden bands?	–	Lots of pottery in fill, removed?
Δ	Shaft grave	–	(3)	61	Primary	Extended	M	33	Alabastron, bronze bowl?	Stamnos, found above secondary burial	Dagger, 4 knives, 2 ivory pommels. Sword? 17 arrowheads? Whetstone?	–	Gold sword handle with lions' heads; incised griffins on blade, man and lion on silver cup	Animal and human bones, ivory fragments in fill
E	Shaft grave		(2?)	53?	Probably secondary, still semi-articulated		?	?		Bronze basin		Golden bands	–	Pottery in fill, goblet with bird bones on roof
Λ	Shaft grave	–	2–3	70a	Primary	Extended	M	38	Jug and cups	Stamnoi	Sword, ivory pommel, dagger, 2 knives, spearhead (all to right of skeleton), 28 flint arrowheads	Golden ornaments (from sword scabbard)	–	Minyan goblets on roof
				–	Secondary		?	?	Goblets, fragments also in fill	Stamnos? (from fill)	Knife, obsidian arrowhead	Golden bands below bones		Extra male bone among bones
N	Shaft grave	–	(2–3?)	66a	Secondary, packed bones		M	28	11 vases above roof? Bronze jug, golden cup	Hydria? Stamnoi? Stamnoi, amphora from roof?	Sword, spearhead, knives, boars' tusks	(inside cup golden foil adornments), golden bands	–	In fill: fragments of golden band, boars' tusks? Child's jaw, animal bones

Tab. 4 (continued)

Date	Grave			Burials							Offerings					Remarks
	Grave number	Type of tomb	Stele	MNI	Skeleton number	Treatment	Position	Sex	Age	Pouring/ drinking vases	Containers	Weapons	Ornaments	Figurative art		
Late Phase I	Y	Shaft grave?	-	1	132	Primary	Extended	F	37	Askos, goblets	Stamnos	-	Golden bands, silver earrings, necklace, bronze hair rings, pins, silver pin?	-	Fish hook (?)	
				2	62	Primary Secondary	Extended	M ?	23 ?	Cups, faience cup		Bronze swords, knives, spearhead, boars' tusks	Golden foil ornaments	Hunting or fighting scene on stele		
Late Phase II	Γ	Shaft grave	Stele	5	-	Secondary		M?	?	Pottery possibly removed to fill, gold cup?			Bronze band, ivory comb?	Both plain stelai and stelai with fighting		
				5	51	Secondary, but still articulated		M	28	Gold cup?		Swords, daggers, spearhead, knives, 1 ivory pommel	Ivory comb?	hunting / fighting scenes	Trephina- tion Frontal wound	
				5	55	1 Primary	Extended	M	33	Jug, jars? Bronze cup? Golden cup?	Hydria		To right side: sword, alabaster pommel, dagger, ivory pommel, knife	Electron mask?	Portrait seal	
				5	58	Primary	Extended	F	36	Jug, jar, kantharoi	Hydria			Ivory comb?	Ivory comb?	Plain stele?
	K	Shaft grave? Pit?	-	1	70	Primary	Extended	M?	45+?	Jug, skyphos	Stamnos, hydria	-			Small ani- mal bones below roof slabs	

Tab. 4 (continued)

Late Phase II															
AI	Pit	–	1	56	Primary	Contracted	M	25	Jug, kantharos						
M	Shaft grave	– (rough stones as marker?)	2	–	Primary	Extended		Girl	Jugs, askoi, goblets, cups, bowl						Stone seal, with palm-like tree
N	Shaft grave	Stele	(2–3?)	66	Secondary Primary	Extended	M	Child 45	Askos, cup 1 bronze bowl near weapons. (Tweezers inside, or under bowl?)	–	1 sword, ivory pommel, 1 inlaid(?) dagger, alabaster pommel	Golden band around neck	Necklace of semi-precious stone and bronze beads	?	In fill: Child's jaw fragment
O	Shaft grave	Stele	3?	–	Primary	Extended	F	?	Askos, jars	Stamnoi, amphora	–	Golden bands, bronze pins with rock-crystal head, silver pin with gold head, necklace of golden spirals, golden ear-rings, hair-rings, necklace of stone beads, amber necklace	Plain stele. Golden rosette ornament, golden beads representing birds, stone seal with cuttlefish	Animal bones (sheep, goat) above roof	
				–	Secondary		?	Adult							On roof
				–	Child bones among secondary		?	Child							many vases, sherds – removed from grave
II	pit	–	1	–	Primary	Extended	?	Child	Jug, goblets						

We see here evidence for accumulation and ostentatious deposition of foodstuffs and valuables, for the importation of exotica (ivory, amber, gold, silver), for ornamentation and body modification, as well as for complex rites accompanying the disposal of the body. What is perhaps even more important is that these practices soon become the new norms in this new social arena. They are attested in the later burials in the Grave Circles in various combinations,⁸⁵ and – though clearly less often – in other elite burials across the southern mainland. But once more, for some burials the emerging norms are not adopted: Among the Early Phase graves there are pits as well as single contracted and/or unfurnished inhumations. In the case of Ξ 1 or Φ we are (certainly or probably) dealing with child burials, but A1, Z, H, Θ , Λ 2, Σ contained adults.

The graves of Late Phase I (which, according to Graziadio, represent the peak in elaboration in Grave Circle B)⁸⁶ are all shaft graves, some of them quite large;⁸⁷ some contain single and some multiple (two to five) burials, as they remain in use into Late Phase II. All primary burials are extended; secondary burials are attested; ceramics include several imports, mostly from the Cyclades, but also from Crete; larger containers are found; weapons accompany some men, and as far as it can be established, they are placed on their right hand-side; men are also buried with golden bands and diadems, but not with earrings or necklaces; once more tweezers are found with a man (Grave N); precious vessels accompany men, but are still rare or uncertain; women are adorned with jewellery, including earrings, necklaces, etc.,⁸⁸ but also with golden bands; women receive clay cups, but no precious vessels; some figurative art is found.⁸⁹ The innovations of the earlier phase become the new norms of this elite group – but further elaboration can be seen, for instance in the deposition of an elaborate inlaid dagger in N.

According to Graziadio, the Late Phase II already sees certain regressive features in building activity, ostentation and complexity of the mortuary rites: While shaft graves with multiple burials continue to predominate,⁹⁰ two pits with single primary inhumations of adults, accompanied only by pottery, are found.⁹¹ The number of valuables, imports, large containers, and weapons seems to decrease, although ornaments seem to increase, especially in female burials.⁹²

However, if we look at individual graves, we see a further increase in elaboration and ostentation, but also a scaling-up in external connections: we have seen that Grave Γ , built and used already in Late Phase I was one of the largest shaft graves in Grave Circle B. The grave contains five burials (three men, one woman, one indeterminate skeleton) of which two have been pushed away into heaps, one while still mostly articulated, and two are primary burials. Despite the problems in attributing offerings to skeletons, we can make some general observations that suggest that earlier Grave Circle B burials are imitated: large containers (several of which imported from the Cyclades, one from Aigina) and golden vessels are found with some of the burials; weapons are placed on the right-hand side of the deceased;⁹³ ornaments and one ivory comb accompany the burials; figurative art is found in the form of a Minoan portrait seal or as pictorial decoration on clay vases. At the same time, the grave shows innovative features: it was among the first to

⁸⁵ Larger containers are found in Tombs I, Ξ , B, Δ , Λ , Y, A, Γ , E, K, N, O; ornaments in I, Ξ , B, Γ , M, E, Λ , N, Y, A, O; evidence for grooming can be found in I, N (tweezers), and Γ , O (combs).

⁸⁶ The following graves belong to this phase: B, Γ (first burial), Δ , E, Λ , N, Y; Graziadio 1991, 438.

⁸⁷ For instance, Grave Γ is one of the largest shaft graves in Grave Circle B.

⁸⁸ Kilian-Dirlmeier 1986; Graziadio 1991, 424.

⁸⁹ Kilian-Dirlmeier 1986. In terms of figurative art, the sword's hilt found in Grave Δ is covered with gold foil ending in lions' heads, while the blade was incised with flying griffins; the silver cup found in the same grave carries the depiction of a man and a lion.

⁹⁰ The following graves belong to this phase: A, Γ (four burials), Δ (last or two last burials), E (later burial), K, Λ 1, M, N (later burial), O, Π .

⁹¹ These are Graves K (? – destroyed) and Λ 1.

⁹² Graziadio 1991, 427–430, 437–440, against Dickinson 1977, 44, and Kilian-Dirlmeier 1986, 162, 164.

⁹³ This is certain for Skeleton 55 and possible for the partially disarticulated Skeleton 51.

be marked with relief stelai,⁹⁴ and it contained the only electron mask⁹⁵ found in Grave Circle B. Interestingly, stelai and masks are also found (in larger numbers) in Grave Circle A which is founded in this period, but are never found again.

Grave O also merits closer description: a shaft grave, with stelai, one primary extended female (?)⁹⁶ burial and two secondary burials. The dead woman (?) was offered large containers and the well-known rock-crystal vase in the form of a duck's head. Her body was adorned with rich jewellery, including gold and semi-precious stone ornaments, and an amber necklace, while fragments of an ivory comb were found on the floor. In this burial we see the horizons expanding, as exotic, coveted goods are acquired, presumably via gift exchange networks among established and aspiring elites, and are deposited with the dead in an act of ostentatious display which simultaneously fixes and for ever commemorates the social network of the deceased or their family.

The rich burial in O raises the issue of differentiation between men and women. It is well known that adult men by far predominate in Grave Circle B.⁹⁷ Most of the burials I singled out in the discussion above (in Z, H, I, N, Γ) are males – but both in the early and the later phases of the Grave Circle there are also men buried in pits with few offerings (e.g. Λ2, Σ, K, Λ1). Female burials also show innovative features: the woman buried in Y was the first to be buried adorned with jewellery as well as golden bands, while the one in O was accompanied by exotic valuables denoting far-flung connections. If anything, innovation in the early phases of the use of the Grave Circle seems to be restricted to men, but in the later phases women seem to enter the innovation race⁹⁸ – though the new features they bring in are limited in range.

Turning to age, no neonates and only very few infants and young children are included among the Grave Circle B burials.⁹⁹ Interestingly, already in the early phases we can find both single, contracted inhumations in pits accompanied by a few small vases (Λ2, Ξ1) and one extended single burial in a shaft grave (Ξ1), which was adorned with golden bands and jewellery. On the other hand, a later child burial (in Shaft Grave M) was wearing a simpler necklace and reiterates some of the features of the Late Phase I–II (shaft grave, extended position, larger containers). While some children received special treatment (unlike in the East Cemetery), their burials do not partake of the constant elaboration we see among adult graves.

During the course of the use of Grave Circle B we therefore see a process of spiralling ostentation, elaboration and innovation despite (or alongside) the regression in the later stages (Tab. 5). We also see that the growing ostentation correlates with expanding networks that draw the rising group at Mycenae into the world of the Aegean elites. While there is a clear trend towards larger and complex graves, and towards richer and composite practices, this is not a uniform, linear and irreversible process. To start with, not all social groups participate equally in this process of innovation, which is to a certain extent restricted to adult men. At the same time, at every stage there are exceptions, oscillations and hesitations; in every burial, some traditional customs or new emerging norms are imitated and reiterated, and others are adapted and modified. But at every stage also, in some burials at least, novel features are introduced, elaborating upon earlier innovations. This constant urge to innovate, to elaborate, to dazzle and to expand the reach of social relations is precipitated and reaches unprecedented heights in Grave Circle A.

⁹⁴ It is worth noting that the Early Phase Graves Ξ, Σ and possibly Ξ1 were marked by a pile of stones. All *stelai* seem to belong to Late Phase II graves (A, Γ, N). *Stelai* were, of course, used in Grave Circle A, whose earlier graves were contemporary with the Grave Circle B Late Phase II graves.

⁹⁵ Of course, more, and more elaborate golden masks were found in Grave Circle A.

⁹⁶ Not examined by John L. Angel, nor by Sevi Triantaphyllou.

⁹⁷ Kilian-Dirlmeier 1986, 176; Voutsaki 2004.

⁹⁸ As noted already by Graziadio 1991, 429.

⁹⁹ Triantaphyllou n. d.

	Grave number	Shaft grave	Multiple burials	Secondary burials	Weapons	Containers	Ornaments	Mask	Stelai	Figurative art
Early Phase	A1									
	Z				+					
	H				?					
	Θ				?					
	I	+	+	+	+	+	+			
	Ξ	+					+	+		
Late Phase I	B	+			?	+	+			
	Λ	+	+	+	+	+	+			
	N	+			+		+			
Late Phase II	A	+	+	+	+	+	+		+	
	Γ	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Δ	+	+	+	+	+		+		+
	O	+	+	+	?	+	+		+	+


Tab. 5: Innovative features in Grave Circle B, Mycenae, over time

Concluding Discussion

The aim of this paper was to examine diverging trajectories and different responses during the pervasive transformation that swept over the southern mainland at the onset of the Mycenaean era. By analysing the burial sequence of two sites, the East Cemetery at Asine and Grave Circle B in Mycenae, I tried to reconstruct human actions and choices taken by different communities and subgroups. I hope that I have demonstrated that each group fashioned its own micro-traditions, which sometimes coalesced and reinforced broader trends (the adoption of extramural cemeteries, larger tombs and more complex ritual across the southern mainland), yet at other times resisted them by adhering to the traditional austerity (single inhumations in simple tombs in the East Cemetery) or exaggerated them by relentless innovation and flamboyance (in Grave Circle B). At each funeral and for each burial decisions and choices had to be made, which were restricted and enabled by these micro-traditions – but also by new stimuli and expanding networks. Each choice became a balancing act between tradition and innovation, between group affiliation and personal distinction, between local obligations and the lure of distant connections.

Both the East Cemetery group and the Grave Circle B group participated in the transformation of the mortuary practices and social relations at the transition to the Mycenaean era. However, they did so in very different ways (Tab. 6): The Asine East Cemetery group chose to depart from normative practices in MH I–II (adoption of extramural cemetery, tumulus, pithoi, double burials, offerings), but in MH III–LH I they opted for the traditional single inhumations in cists despite some variation in the offerings accompanying the dead. The group developed their own micro-tradition, within which subsequent changes and innovations, including modest attempts at distinction need to be understood. Their network – at least as symbolised in the mortuary arena – remained restricted to local interconnections, largely within the southern mainland. The fact that the settlement material shows more diverse connections with the southern Aegean implies that this was a conscious decision.

By contrast, the group using Grave Circle B started firmly rooted in the customary single contracted inhumations in pits, despite the novel extramural setting and the separate enclosure. The first richer burials may have drawn inspiration from the Kolonna Shaft Grave, but soon new,

 Over time	Asine East Cemetery	Grave Circle B
	selection imitation experimentation innovation reiteration rejection adherence to tradition limited innovation	selection imitation adaptation experimentation elaboration creativity virtuosity constant innovation

Tab. 6: Innovation versus tradition in the East Cemetery and Grave Circle B

ostentatious and complex practices were adopted in all aspects of the mortuary ritual, novel practices were swiftly turned into new norms, and additional strategies of distinction were devised. At every stage, networks of interaction expanded and brought with them coveted goods, new stimuli and powerful alliances. But this propensity to experimentation was not an inherent psychological characteristic and was not shared by everyone in the group. It was more a product of the group's growing contacts, exposure to new ideas and success in a network of diplomatic alliances, underwritten by gift exchanges and possibly by strategic intermarriages. Nor was this urge to innovation only and exclusively an individualising strategy – one can almost say that the emerging elite at Mycenae conformed to their own micro-tradition when innovating! Funerals in Grave Circle B must have involved a precarious balancing act between creating distance from the local community and yet consolidating local support, between devising innovations and anchoring them onto the local tradition, between individualising strategies and the formation of new communities of practice.¹⁰⁰ The very rate of innovation and ostentation suggests that the power base must have been fragile and contested by both local rivals (the group, which founded Grave Circle A, of course) and by other emerging centres. But strangely, even in this hotbed of competition, modest and traditional burials were also practised until the very end of the Grave Circle's use; micro-traditions were not binding dogmas.

My analysis has demonstrated that developments in the Argolid were neither uniform nor linear, and that Mycenae was not representative of the entire region, let alone of the southern mainland. Different communities and social groups within them positioned themselves differently vis-à-vis the old customs or the new fashions. The result was almost kaleidoscopic, with different communities, groups and individuals adopting some innovations and retaining certain traditions out of a constantly changing repertoire of forms and practices in all the different facets of the mortuary practices – the location of the cemetery, the size, design and elaboration of the grave, the complexity of the mortuary ritual, the quantity, quality and diversity of the offerings, the use of figurative representation, etc.¹⁰¹ Within this complex and fluid situation micro-traditions emerged, developed and persisted despite (or perhaps because of) the parallel convergence and formation of a collective 'Mycenaean' identity, as attested by the gradual and uneven spread of the new mortuary practices or the LH I ceramic style across regions, communities and social arenas.

Beyond the southern mainland and the Shaft Grave period, this analysis has, I hope, demonstrated that we can disentangle human choices and human agency in wider processes of change. I have argued that agency is not inherent in individual human beings but relational, as it resides in relations with the social and material world. Agency operates precisely at the interplay between tradition and innovation, between belonging and distinction, between the individual and the group.

¹⁰⁰ See also Boyd 2016, 215.

¹⁰¹ This is where I disagree with the otherwise very interesting paper by Petrakis (2010). He distinguishes between only two modes of prestige expression: the construction of monumental tombs and the ostentatious deposition of valuables with the dead. I hope I have demonstrated that the situation was more complex.

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