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THE MYCENAEAN ACROPOLIS
OF ATHENS



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Plan 38. The Acropolis during the final years of the Mycenaean period.

EPILOGUE

THE ACROPOLIS OF ATHENS
IN RELATION TO THE OTHER MYCENAEAN CITADELS

The remains of the Acropolis of Athens are few and in poor condition. Yet the picture they present is clear and comprehensible. It is completely reminiscent of the citadels of Mycenae and of Tiryns both in general and in detail. As were they, it too was inhabited without a break from very early times, well before it became a fortress. After that, during LH times, it saw more systematic and intensive use. Apart from the remains of the room N of the Erechtheion,⁴²⁵ nothing is left of the first periods of this era. Until the construction of the terraces, there is an intervening gap of centuries. Yet there are ceramic finds from the first great excavation of the rock, as well as evidence provided by the graves found and excavated by the American School of Classical Studies in the Ancient Agora.⁴²⁶ These, dating from Early LH II to the final years of LH III, show that the area immediately around the Acropolis and, to be sure, the Acropolis itself continued to be inhabited throughout this time.

Building activity at Mycenae falls into three phases, including both the fortification wall and the palace. The first phase belongs to the LH IIIA period. Dating to that time are the N Cyclopean wall and the first palace construction, including the Pillar Room. During the second phase, in LH IIIB, the SW wing of the palace was renovated and the N Postern Gate, the Lion Gate and the section of the fortification that included Grave Circle A were added to the fortification wall. Later on, during LH IIIC times, the grand staircase of the palace was built and the small extension taking in the Perseian fountain was added to the fortification.⁴²⁷ The acropolis of Tiryns likewise has three building phases, all three Late Helladic⁴²⁸ as at Mycenae.⁴²⁹

425. Supra, pp. 73-75.

426. Furtwängler-Löschke, *M.V.* p. 35, fig. XVI, Graef-Langlotz I pp. 6-22 and pls 2-7, Travlos, *Πολεοδ.* fig. 7, Shear, *Hesperia* IX, 1940, pp. 274-291, E. Townsend Vermeule, *Hesperia* XXIV, 1955, p. 188, and n. 4, with relevant information and bibliography. Also Mountjoy p. 16.

427. For the various building phases of

Mycenae and their chronology see Mylonas, *EpistEpētAth* 1955/1956, pp. 167-177, *Ancient Mycenae* pp. 37-38, 64-66, and *Ephemeris* 1958, pp. 153-207, *Ergon* 1959, pp. 93, 96-97; 1961, pp. 149-150, 154. See also Wace, *Mycenae* pp. 86-90.

428. Müller, *Tiryns* III pp. 205-209.

429. Mackeprang, *AJA* 1938, pp. 556-

559.

In terms of building development, the Acropolis of Athens has much in common with these two citadels, especially during the last two phases. Indeed the second period of the Athenian Acropolis, the time of the terraces, coincides, with some delay, with the second phase of Mycenae and Tiryns. The third period of the Athenian Acropolis, when the fortification was erected, coincides with the third phase at the other two citadels. After that, only the houses and graves were added. In other words, some time after Mycenae and Tiryns had constructed fortification walls for the first time, the Acropolis of Athens acquired a series of terraces, constructions which preceded the fortifications and the purpose of which was not defensive. The Athenians of that time clearly felt no need of protection. Perhaps they were not important enough to be in any serious danger. Be that as it may, by the time they arrived at their first building phase, the other two sites had gone beyond this phase and had become citadels. Soon, however, either in anticipation of some specific danger, or because power politics was on the rise, Athens too built a fortification system complete with bastion, thus copying the developed phase of the fortifications of her two models. This was the time when Mycenae and Tiryns extended their fortifications and built the first bastions, and Gla in Boeotia was fortified.⁴³⁰ The third phase was not followed by Athens, evidently because there was no reason, since at Mycenae the extension was made specifically to include Perseia,⁴³¹ whereas at Athens the corresponding North Fountain, constructed after the wall, lay within the fortification. The purpose of the

430. See *Γλας* I (Athens 1989) 256-258.

431. In his introduction to the Greek edition, Professor Marinatos rejected this view with the argument that since the pipe through which the water of the spring flows ended so close to the fortification wall, rather than adding such a length of wall, it would have been simpler just to lengthen the channel a few more metres, thus bringing the water within the already existing wall. The morphology and composition

of the citadel hill of Mycenae, however, preclude this apparently simple solution. Indeed, the pipe runs underground as close as possible to the base of the rock, but it cannot be taken any further because the limestone was too hard for the tools and technical means of the time, which were inadequate for opening the channel required. Thus, because of the gradient of the rock, the underground cistern where the channel ended and the water was collected,

extension at Tiryns, which by now is being systematically explored, appears to have been to increase the fortified area, whereas at Athens the wall already included all the available space.

Thus the Acropolis of Athens, with initial delay, reached the same state of fortified strength as that achieved by the other two great citadels at about the same time, around the end of LH IIIB. In the course of this period, the characteristically Mycenaean principles governing the construction of fortifications were finally worked out and applied, according to which the fortifications, that is the Cyclopean wall, were built adapted to the rock formation, thus creating a protected but accessible area. The invention and building of bastions for protecting the entrances form part of this same concept. In Athens, all this was carried out as part of a fully-fledged program without preliminary stages of development and without the possibility of subsequent changes.

In the other citadels, the fortification systems show a long, inherent development, crystallised after changes and experiments which we can see applied from stage to stage. Despite a slow beginning, the Acropolis of Athens shows a sudden application of these principles in fully developed form, at almost the same time as the others. There is thus no doubt that they found these principles ready, and they imitated them. This conclusion is supported also by chronological facts; for the fortification of Athens belongs chronologically to the final years of LH IIIB, whereas at the other sites, the second phase goes back to the advanced years of the same period. Thus it is somewhat – but only slightly – earlier. The imitation is indeed worthy of the prototype. In some details it may be even better.

had to be built a few metres beyond and lower than the brow of the rock (on which the fortification wall was founded), and therefore outside the fortified area. So, using a natural crevice in the rock at the foot of the NW corner of the original fortification wall, the Mycenaean technicians made a stepped descent to the spring, the beginning of which was protected by the

NE extension of the wall. The further course of this extension was suggested by its adaptation to the somewhat lower brow of the little hollow plateau east of the old fortification, so that by adding almost 140 metres of wall, a small area was adjoined to the citadel, which obviously cannot be characterised as a “lower citadel”.

The material remains on the Acropolis are, admittedly, very few and it is therefore not possible to draw completely firm conclusions from comparisons with the details of the other citadels. Even so, on the basis of what is preserved, it can be seen first of all that the Acropolis has more in common with Tiryns than with Mycenae, from which it borrowed the form of its entrance. For the rest, the diameter of the column base agrees with the diameters at Tiryns and the stones of the fortification wall show the same careful choice and workmanship. At Mycenae, except for the Lion Gate and the N Postern Gate, where the conglomerate stones of the façade are regular and the surface is the result of the type of stone used,⁴³² the limestone blocks of the Cyclopean wall of the second, and even the third, phase, are practically unworked. At Tiryns, however, both on the preserved sections of the first wall and on the remnants of the second, we may observe the same quality of work as at Athens.⁴³³ The fortification wall at Athens, made up of large but not enormous stones, placed lengthwise like stretchers, with a few spaces between them, shows similar dimensions in its construction and the same arrangement of the stones as that of the first wall at Tiryns.

As for the architect, the man who undertook the entire work and made the decisions about its details, it is impossible to pick out and determine precisely the origin of the influences to which he will have been exposed. We would say, however, that the technicians who carried out the work in all likelihood learned their trade, directly or indirectly, at Tiryns.

The massive and overwhelming sight presented by the fortifications of the Acropolis of Athens fully justifies the veneration shown by the ancients, who recorded that they were built by beings of supernatural strength, to whom they referred with the suitably invented names Hyperbios (the all-forceful) and Agrolas (huge boulder).⁴³⁴ It explains too the outlook of the vase painter who represented Athena leading a giant who carries on his shoulder a huge stone destined for the wall.⁴³⁵ Its construction bears witness to the capability and

432. Marinatos-Hirmer, *Κρήνη και Μνηναϊκή Ἑλλάς* p. 58.

433. See Müller, *Tiryns* III pp. 55-57.

434. Paus. I 28, 3.

435. See Hauser, *Strena Helbigiana* pp. 115-121, fig. p. 116.

high technical level of its builders, whose work is preserved in few and barely accessible remains so that it is difficult to appreciate it fairly. To conclude with the words of Blegen⁴³⁶: "The regal magnificence of the walls themselves, which places them on a qualitative level with those at Mycenae, has seldom been adequately recognized."

436. *HSCP* 1940, suppl., p. 1, n. 1.