

by

The period covered by this paper is, of course, the formative period of Mycenaean civilisation.¹ It is meant to incorporate the material classified variously as Middle Helladic III, Late Minyan, or Late Phase, equivalent to the greater part of Middle Minoan III and Late Minoan IA. The end of the Late Helladic I pottery phase is a convenient terminus, though it is not marked by any clear stratigraphical break such as separates Late Minoan IA and IB, and equivalent phases, at several sites in the Aegean. Admittedly, Shaft Grave I contains at least two Late Helladic IIA vases, but I do not believe that these indicate any significant extension of the Shaft Graves' period of use into that phase, which is marked at Mycenae by the large-scale adoption of the tholos tomb for the most important burials. In absolute terms, the period of the Shaft Graves themselves may not have lasted much more than a century, for I find it difficult to believe that they covered more than four or five generations.

In the course of this century or so, many of the characteristic Mycenaean features became established on the mainland, principally new forms of tomb, innovations in the pottery, and a great many new types of artefact. It now seems quite clear that these did not spread all at once from a single centre, but were adopted or developed at different times in different parts of the Peloponnese, then spread and mingled with one another and with surviving Middle Helladic cultural elements to form a relatively homogeneous complex, a process which had largely been completed by Late Helladic IIA.

Most of the new features are closely associable with the historical process detectable in this period, the establishment of petty states ruled by a class that displayed its status in costly possessions and increasingly elaborate tombs, and attracted to the mainland far greater quantities of foreign goods than had appeared there before. The new decorated style of pottery can be found in quantity at sites where early Mycenaean strata are well preserved such as Korakou, Ay. Stephanos, and Nichoria, and the decorated pottery commonly appears in more ordinary tombs of the period; to this extent, this innovation at least had a wide spread socially, though it should be noted that the sites mentioned are large local centres, not ordinary villages, and the graves may be

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those of relatively prosperous persons. The social changes involved in the establishment of the states are likely to have affected the average farming settlement and family more than any artistic or technical innovations; I have a feeling that they may have brought about or at least helped an improvement in the general level of prosperity, but it is difficult to find really hard evidence to support this. Against this view, it could equally be suggested that warfare and the attendant insecurity increased.

At any rate, we are mainly considering the material to be associated with the upper strata of society, particularly the ruling élite. Their display of wealth is one of the most notable features of the period, which continues to be a Mycenaean characteristic later; it is hard to parallel elsewhere, partly because of the lack of material, though the "Aegina Treasure" and remains from some Cretan graves suggest that comparable display might be expected if intact tombs associated with Aegean centres were to be found. The Shaft Graves provide a fine sequence to span the period, from relative poverty to extraordinary wealth, but this is still without parallel elsewhere; although between them several Messenian sites, particularly Pylos and Peristeria, provide many points of similarity, none seem as early as the earliest Shaft Graves, and elsewhere there are only a few graves containing some similar items, mostly jewellery.

Analysis of the rich material from these contexts has always been hampered by the lack of comparable material from the Aegean, which has not prevented confident attributions to mainland or Cretan craft-traditions. But it is becoming increasingly clear that there are other possibilities. Work in pure Minoan or Minoanising style, and also good work that did not depend on Minoan models, could have

¹ Essentially this paper summarises much of my argument in *The Origins of Mycenaean Civilisation* (SIMA 49), Göteborg 1977, particularly in Chapters III, IV, and V; I have expanded and updated my comments on tomb-types in 'Cist Graves and Chamber Tombs' (forthcoming in *BSA* 78, 1983, pp. 55–67). Full references for my statements will be found in these sources; my comments on the earliest Mycenaean pottery are based on intimate knowledge of the material from Nichoria as well as the research summarised in my article in *BSA* 69, 1974, pp. 109–20, and in pp. 25–6 of my book.

been made in Kea, Thera, probably Melos, Aegina, even Kythera, all of which had their own contacts with relevant parts of the mainland, and could probably have provided craftsmen trained in Minoan techniques, if not imported works. In these circumstances, a broad division between material in Minoan and apparently non-Minoan style seems most appropriate, without attempting to define closely the origin of an object or of the craftsman who made it; discoveries like the West House frescoes on Thera are a reminder that themes thought in the past to be more appropriate to mainland than to Minoan taste may prove to have a perfectly acceptable Aegean ancestry. The Minoan element in the Shaft Graves seems strongest in the precious vessels, naturally enough since there is no reliable evidence for the manufacture of any sort of precious vessel on the mainland in Middle Helladic, and weakest in the pottery, with only a handful of Late Minoan IA imports and some Minoanising light-on-dark vases that probably derive from the long tradition identifiable throughout Middle Helladic Lerna. Among the weapons it is also strong, for I am convinced that the Type A sword, socketed spear, and various dagger types were introduced from Crete, but there is clearly a local element, seen especially in the development of the massive knives and, as I believe, the Type B sword. In the jewellery and dress-ornaments it is easier to detect Minoan patterns and themes than close parallels for particular types, and much seems to be an elaboration of traditions already established, such as the gold ornaments of plate and wire, and probably the pins. Direct imports are likely to include all the rare classes, such as the stone vases, sealstones, ostrich egg rhytons, inlaid gaming board in Shaft Grave IV, and much if not all of the faience work; they could also include most of the much commoner silver and copper or bronze vessels, but there seems no reason why such work in Minoan style could not have often been made locally, as stone vessels were on Kea and Thera. Generally, the earliest examples of new types like metal vessels or weapons might be expected to be imports; but it has been argued in the case of the earliest gold and silver cups that they are too clumsily made to be anything but local products—I would agree, with the proviso that this need mean only that their makers had no previous experience in making metal vessels, not that they have to be natives of the mainland. Many of the finest pieces, such as the Lion's Head Rhyton, Siege Rhyton, silver krater with a battle-scene, inlaid daggers, and best relief-decorated swords are so individual that they might also be local products, but they must have been made by craftsmen of skills equivalent to those available in Cretan palaces and potentially deriving from such a context.

The material found elsewhere, including minor Argolid graves, the Messenian series, and a thin scatter in Attica and Boeotia, includes nothing very individual or remarkable but compares with the commonest types of the Shaft Graves: gold drinking vessels, plate and wire ornaments, and cutout dress-attachments, weapons, especially Type A swords and daggers, and some vessels of silver and copper or bronze are represented. Really elaborate pieces such as inlaid work and relief-decorated swords, and imports like stone vessels, do not appear until Late Helladic IIA, but the presence of im-

ported amber links Pylos, Peristeria, and reportedly Orchomenos to Mycenae.

This rich material certainly indicates a considerable degree of Minoanisation in arts and crafts, which probably involved the migration of craftsmen from the Aegean. Some influences, but only some, may be noted in the ordinary pottery industry. Here well-known Cretan shapes of obvious practical use were produced, but in small numbers, the tripod cooking pot and lamp, which may include the few conical cups, and the Minoan-derived Late Helladic I style eventually drove the fine Matt-Painted wares off the market; but the bulk of the material produced continued Middle Helladic traditions. But what more can we deduce, except that the ruling elite was rich enough to import and have made articles of great value and quality, perhaps important enough to be presented with them as diplomatic gifts, and generally in close contact with Cretan civilisation? It might be argued that the adoption of Minoan types of weapon revolutionised mainland warfare, but we know little about actual Cretan practice in this field, and there are non-Minoan features such as the few fortifications, the apparent popularity of the bow, and arguably the use of the chariot, which is not Cretan in origin though it might have reached the mainland via Crete. It would be even more rash to argue, from the presence, in the Shaft Graves alone, of types of ritual vessel, especially rhytons, and a few clearly religion-linked symbols such as the shrine and goddess dress-attachments, that Cretan religious ideas or practices had a marked influence; it would be better to confess our total ignorance of mainland religious practice.

We come back, then, to the tombs themselves and the burial customs, the only field in which evidence is quite abundant apart from arts and crafts. It was normal Middle Helladic custom to bury the dead singly in small pits and cists; occasionally a second, very occasionally further burials were made in the same grave, and it was common practice to bury several individuals, up to a dozen or more, in separate graves in one burial tumulus, a type of grave which is becoming increasingly well-represented, and seems to be used for leading groups in the community. In the Shaft Grave period the incidence of grave-reuse increases, and new types of grave are introduced which seem intended from the start for a series of burials. The use of a single grave for multiple burials seems characteristic of Crete from early in the Bronze Age, and the most prominent new types of tomb, the chamber tomb and tholos, have been related to Cretan prototypes. But can we assume that Cretan customs were being directly adopted or imitated, which would presumably involve the adoption of a whole complex of ideas about death and burial? Once again, as with arts and crafts, the Cycladic dimension is largely lacking and could be very important. The Phylakopi rock-cut tombs, which I believe to have been still in use at this time, provide as good parallels for chamber tombs as the cemeteries of the Knossos region and Kythera, which in fact include extremely few examples closely similar to the common mainland types. Moreover, the types of chamber tomb adopted at various sites on the mainland are so individual that a single source of influence can hardly explain them all. I

would rather see mainland chamber tombs as inspired by the Aegean tradition, but essentially local developments related to social factors such as the demonstration of status and hoped-for stability in a new order; the practice of multiple burial, it may be noted, occurs equally in tomb-types of Middle Helladic ancestry such as the earliest tomb at Peristeria, the Marathon sequence of built graves in tumuli, and the large rectangular graves found at Eleusis and elsewhere.

The tholos tomb has always received more attention than the chamber tomb, and has often been considered separately from it; yet they share the same structural components, an open dromos leading, often through a narrower roofed passage, the stomion, to a roofed-over chamber, largely or completely underground; the tholos is distinctive because of its normally circular plan and vaulted chamber, often imitated in smaller stone-built tombs and some chamber tombs. The case for relating the tholos to the circular tombs of Crete has been argued in various ways by many. It is often related to the claim that Messenia, where it is generally agreed that the earliest tholos tombs occur, was especially close to Crete culturally. It is true that Mycenaean features appear there as early as in the Argolid; but there is no long prior tradition of Minoan links, to judge from the evidence from Nichoria, merely a short phase in which Minoan pottery types were sometimes imitated, just before the adoption, not, I would stress, local evolution, of the Mycenaean pottery style. None of the specific evidence cited is very convincing: the jar-burials in the Pylos "grave circle" and Peristeria South tholos 1 are more reasonably related to the long Middle Helladic tradition of pithos burial in tumuli, and the Minoan connections of Peristeria T.1 are irrelevant, since they fall well into the Late Helladic IIA phase. So the argument rests on the tombs themselves. Let me remind you that we are expected to believe that a local adaptation, for which there are no contemporary parallels in Crete, was made in Messenia of a type that was still current in Crete, but mainly in the south, and was very rarely being built, if at all, at this time, an adaptation which involved considerable changes in plan and function—the tholos seems intended for few burials of high-status personages over a relatively short period, the circular tomb for very many burials of personages of varied status over a very long period—and the tholos has no ancillary buildings of the kind commonly attached to the Cretan tombs. The architectural link often assumed, which predicates that Cretan methods of partly corbelling the circular tombs would have been needed, has been denied in Cavanagh and Laxton's study of the mechanics of building a tholos tomb;² they argue for important differences in concept and approach. In the circumstances, might it not be better to cut the link altogether and derive the tholos from a local combination of some features of the tumulus with the plan of a chamber tomb, to create a monumental tomb? The dating of the earliest chamber tombs

and tholoi in Messenia is not so tight that this is impossible—on the contrary. Moreover, a functional link between tumulus and tholos seems likely from their occurrence in the same context, at Voidhokoilia even one on top of the other, and is supported by the occurrence of jar-burials in some early tholoi.

I do not, then, see much evidence for specifically Cretan influence in the field of burial customs. Settlement and house-plans I have left until last because there is so little evidence; what there is suggests no essential change from Middle Helladic in the case of the ordinary houses—indeed, the evidence from Mycenaean Greece as a whole suggests that towns of blocks divided by streets of the Aegean type never developed on the mainland. Equally, the few early fortifications are rudimentary compared with those of Ay. Irini or Aegina. The scraps of evidence relating to palaces suggest that buildings at least partly stone-built and with some fresco-decoration may have stood at Mycenae, Tiryns, and the Menelaion by the end of Late Helladic IIA; but they do not seem to have been substantial enough to leave many traces, unlike the earlier palaces and other buildings in Crete, and I question whether they were as sophisticated as the Minoan villas. In the material with the early fills below the palaces at Mycenae and Tiryns, not a scrap of evidence for the administrative use of the seal or of writing has appeared, to my knowledge; I doubt if these early rulers had any need for bureaucratic book-keeping, and so am quite unable to accept that Linear B could have been developed on the mainland at this time.

In fact, the general impression is of a society much simpler than that of Minoan Crete and the Cycladic towns, whose Minoanisation at this time extended to the use of Linear A and in some cases architectural features. The relationship of the mainlanders at this time to the Aegean civilisations might well have resembled that of the barbarian neighbours of the Greeks to them in Classical times, which also involved economic ties and the importing of much fine work, and led in some cases to a considerable degree of Hellenisation. But we look in vain for the equivalent of the Greek colonies. Could this have been the case if a Cretan power had dominated part of the mainland politically, or adventurous Cretans carved out principalities for themselves? Would they not have left an archaeological record of something more like home, as they seem to have done in Kythera and Rhodes?

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² BSA 76, 1981, pp. 109–40.