

MYCENAEAN BURNT ANIMAL SACRIFICE AT ELEUSIS

Summary. Burnt animal sacrifice is well attested in Greek historical times, but whether it was practised in the Mycenaean period is debated. Until now, the lack of architectural structures suitable for the ritual burning of animals and the ambiguity surrounding the interpretation of burnt faunal assemblages have been used as arguments against the occurrence of such sacrifices in the Late Bronze Age. In this paper, it is proposed that the platform in front of the Mycenaean Megaron B at Eleusis was an altar used for burnt animal sacrifices and that a group of burnt pig bones found in a drain in front of this platform was burnt ritually on the platform and then swept into the drain.

INTRODUCTION

Burnt animal sacrifice, defined as the ritual burning of whole or parts of animals or of animal bones as an offering to the gods, is well attested in Greek historical times (review of the bibliography in Isaakidou *et al.* 2002, 86), but its practice in the Mycenaean period has been the subject of a long debate. About 60 years ago, Yavis (1949, 41) argued against it on the basis of the absence in Mycenaean sites of architectural structures suitable for the ritual burning of animals. A different view was taken by Jameson (1958, 223), who suggested that burnt animal sacrifices took place in the hearths of the megara of Mycenaean palaces; and Şahin (1972, 7–13), who proposed that the Mycenaeans practised burnt animal sacrifice on altars made of perishable materials or in open spaces. The discovery of a large platform with a thick layer of ash, burnt soil and burnt bones at the Sanctuary of Apollo Maleatas at Mt Kynortion (Lambrinoudakis 1980; 1981) seems to be the first tangible evidence for burnt sacrifices in a Mycenaean sanctuary, but Bergquist (1988) has raised the possibility that the burnt bones found there could have been incinerated waste from food consumption; the matter will be settled with the final publication of the material. Bergquist (*ibid.*) also cautioned that the concept of burnt animal sacrifices in the Mycenaean world was an anachronistic extrapolation from later Greek practices. Along the same lines, Hägg (1998a, 101; followed by Nikoloudis 2001, 20) pointed out that altars that could have been used for such sacrifices are not known from the Mycenaean period, and related the presence of burnt animal bones in a ritual context to banquets rather than burnt animal sacrifice. The faunal remains from the LH IIIC–Geometric sanctuary at Kalapodi (Stanzel 1991) contained few burnt bones and dated to the post-palatial period.

The publication of the faunal assemblage from the Mycenaean shrine at Ayios Konstantinos at Methana (Konsolaki 2002, 28; Hamilakis and Konsolaki 2004; Konsolaki-Yannopoulou 2004) and of stratified groups of burnt animal bones from the 'Palace of Nestor' at Pylos (Isaakidou *et al.* 2002; Halstead and Isaakidou 2004; Stocker and Davis 2004) has rekindled the debate. Burnt animal bones found in these two sites have been interpreted as evidence for burnt animal sacrifices: piglets in a domestic shrine at Methana and cattle in a public setting at Pylos. These cases have been challenged recently by Whittaker (2008), who returns to Bergquist's original position and highlights the methodological inadequacies surrounding the identification of bones from burnt animal sacrifice.

In these recent discussions, occasional mention has been made of a small group of burnt animal bones found in a drain in front of the building known as 'Megaron B' at Eleusis. These bones and their context were briefly reported in an earlier paper (Cosmopoulos 2003, 11), but have never been fully published. The purpose of the present article is to present these bones in detail, along with their architectural and stratigraphic context and associated ceramic finds. It is argued that this findgroup constitutes the earliest published case for burnt animal sacrifices in the Mycenaean period. Furthermore, this findgroup is considered within the wider methodological framework used to identify burnt animal sacrifices with the view of offering a better understanding of the workings of such sacrifices in the Greek Late Bronze Age. The question of continuity of ritual practices from the Mycenaean period to the Dark Age is a separate issue and is discussed elsewhere (Cosmopoulos 2014b).¹

REMAINS OF BURNT ANIMAL SACRIFICE IN THE MEGARON B COMPLEX

Excavations at the Sanctuary of Demeter at Eleusis (Fig. 1) were conducted at the end of the nineteenth century and continued with interruptions until the end of the twentieth century. From 1930 to 1933 a rectangular building known as 'Megaron B' was excavated by Konstantinos Kourouniotes and his colleagues George Mylonas and Ioannis Threpsiades (Kourouniotes 1930–1, 20–3; 1931–2, 2–5; Mylonas 1961, 35–49). Megaron B (Fig. 2), which took its final form in Late Helladic (abbr. LH) IIB, consists of a rectangular room measuring approximately 6 by 9.70 m and a portico of equal width and a depth of approximately 2 m. The portico leads onto a platform, 2.90 m wide and approximately 2.50 m deep, whose floor rises about 1.30–1.40 m above the paved courtyard that extends in front of the building (Fig. 3). Access to the platform and the portico was provided by two flights of steps built on either side of the platform. Megaron B and the platform continued to be used in LH IIIA1 and LH IIIA2 and a suite of three rooms (B1/B2/B3) was added in LH IIIB1. The entire Megaron B Complex (abbreviated here as 'MBC') with its courtyard was enclosed by a peribolos wall with the entrance on its north side.

An open channel starts from the south-east corner of the platform and runs towards the south-east (Fig. 4). The apparent purpose of the channel was to collect waters from the interior

¹ The article stems from the project for the publication of the Bronze Age finds from the excavations at Eleusis, which has recently been completed (Cosmopoulos 2014a). Many thanks are due to the Board of the Athens Archaeological Society, especially the Secretary General, Dr Vasileios Petrakos, for the permit that made this project possible. Financial support for the project has been provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Institute for Aegean Prehistory, and the Hellenic Government-Karakas Foundation Professorship in Greek Studies at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

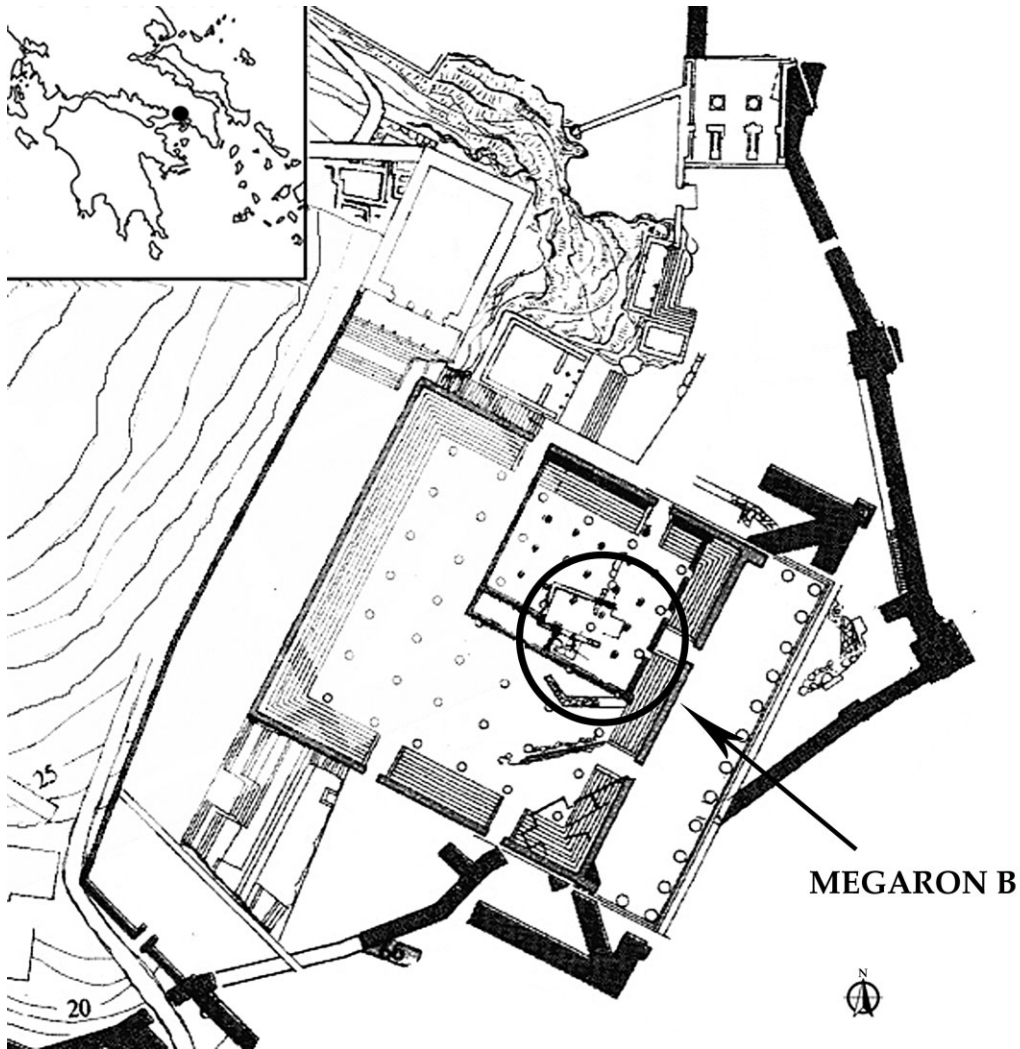


Figure 1
Plan of Eleusis showing the location of Megaron B.

of Megaron B and from the platform and to direct them into a built drain (called drain D2; Figs. 5 and 6), which exits under the south wall of the peribolos (wall T1 in Fig. 2) at a distance of 1.90 m from the east end of the wall (Notebook 1931, 15–16; 1932, 2–4). The sides of this drain are carefully built with three courses of stones reaching a height of 0.43 m at the east and 0.52 m at the west end (Fig. 6a). The width of the drain on the south side of wall T1 is 0.46 m at the base and 0.38 m at the top. The top of the drain is covered with two large slabs (0.30–0.40 m wide, 0.15–0.20 m thick, 0.75–0.80 m long) with their long axis aligned with the slope; the space in between (about 0.15 m wide) is filled with small stones (Fig. 6b). The floor of the drain is formed

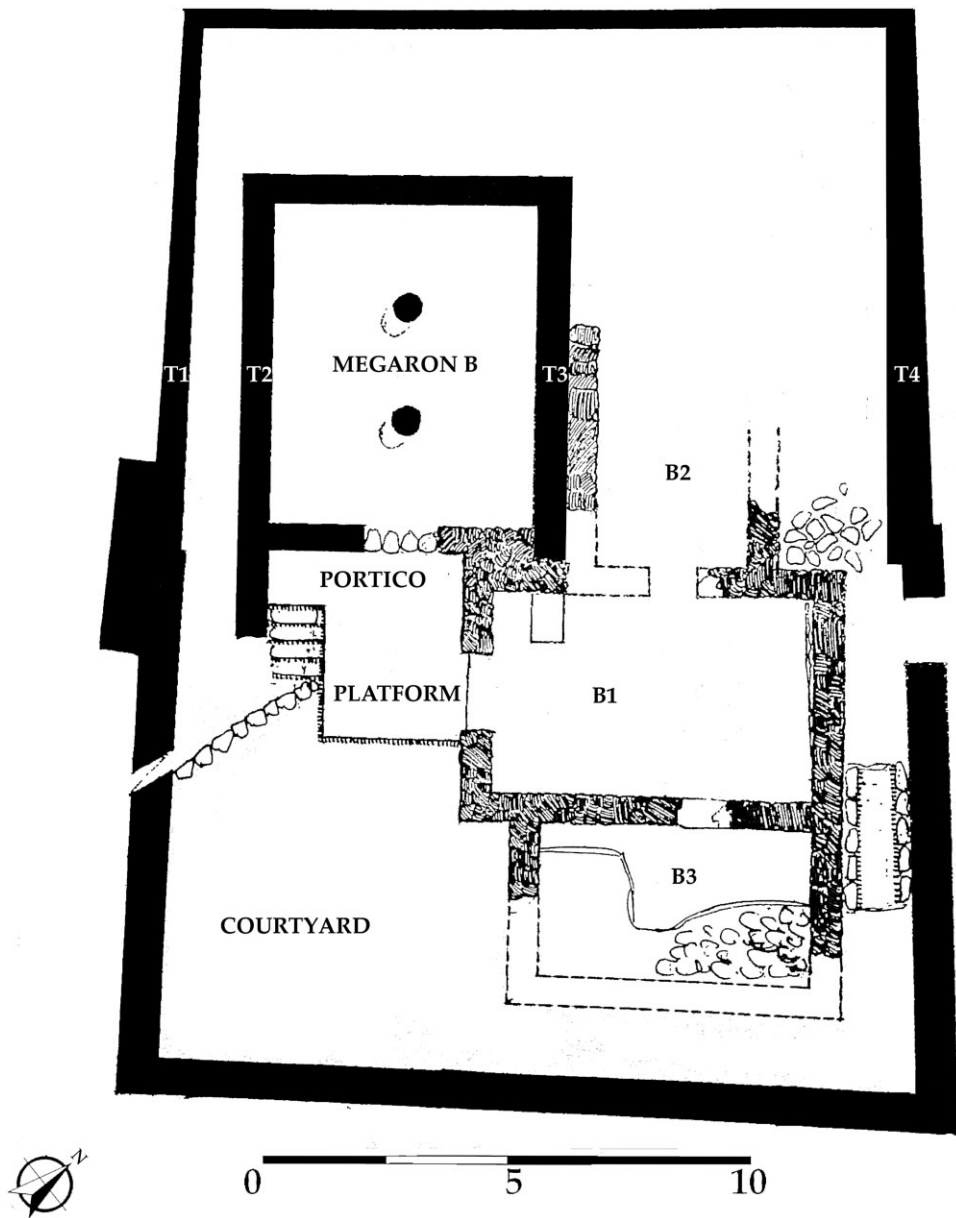


Figure 2
Plan of the Megaron B Complex (Athens Archaeological Society, Travlos Archives, Plan no. 33).

partly by the artificially smoothed bedrock, which slopes towards the south to facilitate the flow of the water, and partly by a layer of small stones in the south end of the drain, where the bedrock drops abruptly. The exit under wall 5 is well preserved, made of two parallel courses of small stones that form a smooth face. In front of the south (external) face of wall 5 and on the east side

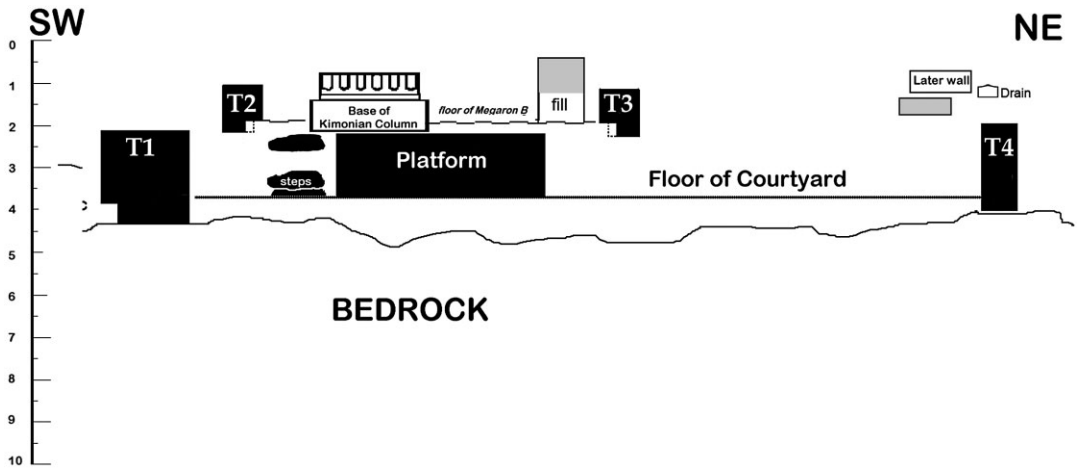


Figure 3
Schematic section of the MBC.

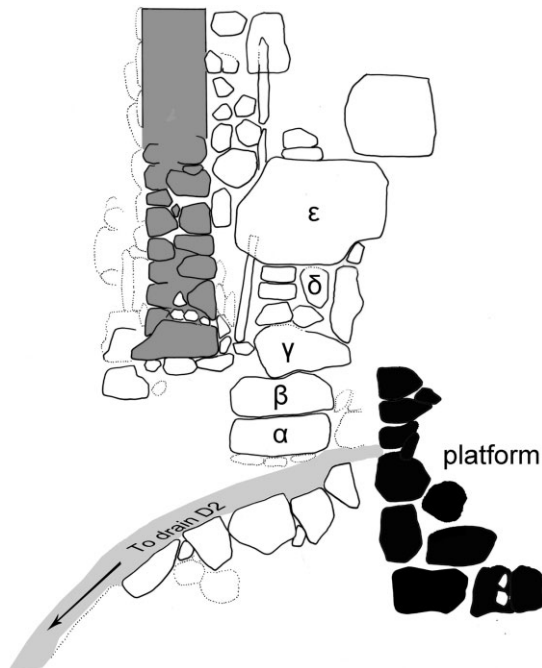


Figure 4
Plan of the east part of wall T2 (dark grey) with the steps (α–ε), the platform (solid black) and the channel (light grey) (Athens Archaeological Society, Travlos Archives, Folder 8, Subfolder 2. Pencil drawing by Travlos, inked by Vivian Stasi; digitized by the author).



Figure 5

The channel in front of Megaron B, the entrance to drain D2 and MH grave E.I.7 from the north-east (Athens Archaeological Society, Photo Archives A/A 1270).

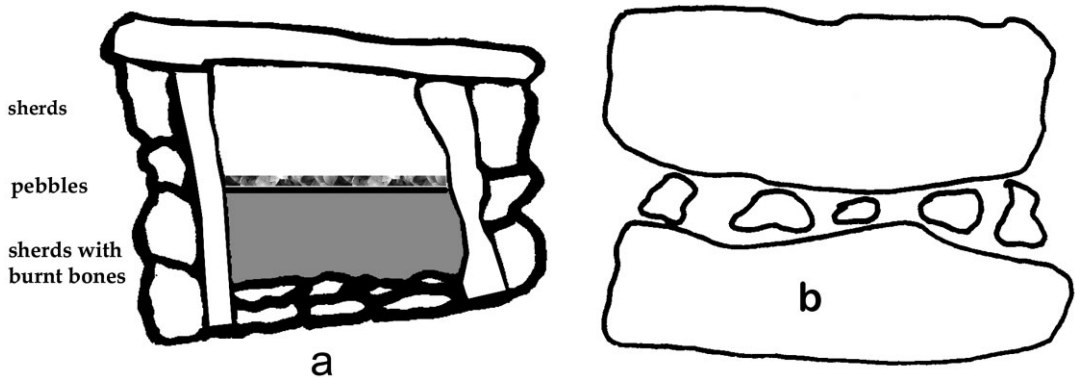


Figure 6

Section (a) and top view (b) of drain D2 (not to scale, based on Mylonas, Notebook 1932, 3).

of the exit of the drain there is a row of seven large- and medium-sized stones, which would have directed the waters away from the foundation of the wall. This drain was clearly designed to bring the waters outside the courtyard.

The interior of drain D2 was excavated by Ioannis Threpsiades in 1931. In the unpublished notebook of that year Threpsiades mentions the following find (18 July, 1931,



Figure 7
Finds from E SU 8 (locus 1).

pp. 15–16) from the interior of the drain, at the point where the drain exits under the south wall of the peribolos:

In the upper layer [of the drain], immediately beneath the large slab that covers the opening, we found small fragments of mudbricks. Under this layer, inside the fill, we found carbonized remains mixed with LH sherds. In the south part, at a depth of 1.15 m² there was a layer of pebbles and large stones, under which we found a concentration of ashes mixed with animal bones and fragments from Late Helladic round alabastra.

The ashes with animal bones and LH sherds found in the lower part of the drain were placed in a bag separately from the rest of the faunal remains from the early excavations. Its importance was not recognized at the time of excavation, as in the 1930s there had not been any discussions about Mycenaean burnt animal sacrifice. Although it did not make its way into the published reports, it has important bearing on the issue of burnt animal sacrifices. The pottery from this findgroup (Figs. 7 and 8) includes fragments of:

- (1) a bridge spouted jug (FS 103) decorated with ogival canopy (FM 13:1);
- (2–3) two fragments of rounded alabastra FS 82/FS 83 decorated with rock pattern (FM 32:22);
- (4) a goblet FS 254 decorated with running spiral (?FM 46:51);
- (5–6) two Ephyraean goblets FS 254, one decorated with argonaut (FM 22:7) and chevrons (FM 58:2), the other preserving traces of a vertical decorative element (perhaps lily-stem, variant of ?FM 9);
- (7) a goblet FS 254 with a red slip;
- (8) a monochrome goblet; and
- (9) a large coarse storage vessel (amphora or jar, no FS).

These sherds date to LH IIB, except for (1), which may have been as early as LH IIA, and (3), (7) and (9), which can be dated to the general LH IIB/LH IIIA1 range (Fig. 7).

2 Elevations in this part of Threpsiades' notebook are measured from the top surface of wall K (Cosmopoulos 2014b, fig. 2).

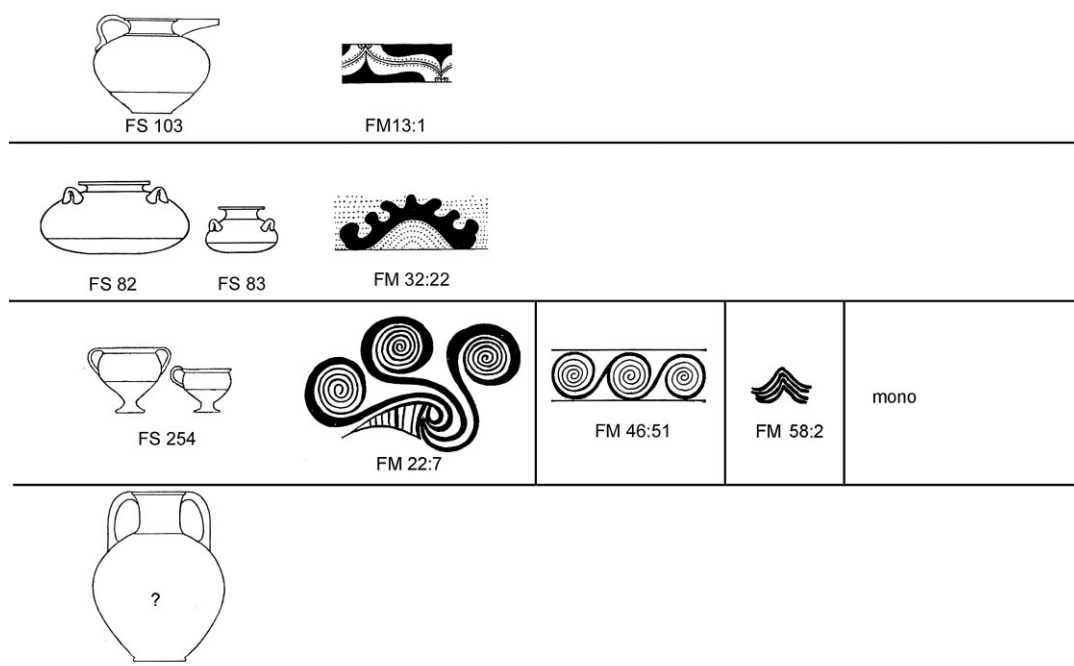


Figure 8
Drawings of shapes and motifs of pottery.

TABLE 1
List of burnt animal bones from drain

Identification	Age	Sex	Observations
<i>Sus</i> right metacarpal III	<2 yrs	?female	
<i>Sus</i> left metatarsal III	c.2 yrs	?female	complete in two pieces
<i>Sus</i> distal metacarpal	<2 yrs	?female	unfused
<i>Sus</i> left mid calcaneum	<2 yrs	female	unfused; same individual?
<i>Sus</i> right mid calcaneum			
<i>Sus</i> proximal and medial phalanx	>1 yr	?female	probably from the same individual, though differentially fired (prox. black, med. calcined); proximal end of proximal phalanx cut straight through?
<i>Sus</i> left distal ilium	6–12 mos.		
<i>Sus</i> keel of left mandible	c.2 yrs		
<i>Sus</i> two frs. mid ribs	6–12 mos.		one fine metal cut mark
<i>Sus</i> one mid rib	c.2 yrs		
<i>Sus</i> two cranial frs.	c.6 mos.		one fine metal cut mark
<i>Sus</i> one fr. long bone			

Mixed with these sherds were found 18 animal bones, all burnt (Table 1; the 16 bones shown in Figure 9, plus two mammalian fragments). The bones belong to at least three piglets (NISP) and consist mostly of distal extremities. Except for a small fragment of a mid long bone and the corner of a left distal ilium, the meat-bearing parts are missing. The trunks of at least two



Figure 9
Burned bones from E SU 8 (locus 1).

individuals are represented by ribs. All the bones are calcined straight through to the medullary cavity suggesting they have been left in the fire for several hours at a temperature of over 600°C (Shipman *et al.* 1984). Three bones reveal fine cut marks: a rib bone, a cranium and a proximal phalanx.

Several interesting observations can be drawn from this findgroup:

- 1) the sherds belong to drinking, pouring and storage vessels, indicating food consumption (goblets, jug) and storage (alabastra, amphora/jar), which perhaps suggest feasting;
- 2) the pigs were at an optimal age to be slaughtered for food, i.e. 6–24 months (Ruscillo 2013). This observation is supported by the presence of three cut marks: the one on the rib bone could represent the sectioning of the victim into quarters or the removal of the internal organs, the one on the proximal phalanx could be due to the separation of the distal extremities (though the adjacent metapodials are also represented in the assemblage), and the cut on the cranium could be due to the removal of the brain before burning. Because most of the meat-bearing elements of the pigs are missing, it appears that they were not burnt in the fire, in contrast to the non-meaty parts, which were thrown into the fire. Such an action is consistent with the ritual burning of non-meaty parts of the animals, such as the feet and head (cf. Hamilakis and Konsolaki 2004, 143–4);
- 3) the sherds and bones were found at the bottom of the drain, mixed with ashes and sealed by a layer of pebbles. The possibility that this find may have been contaminated (cf. Halstead and Isaakidou 2004, 138) can be excluded: the chronological uniformity of the ceramic material and the homogeneity of the faunal material (all burnt, no weathering, no gnawing) indicate

TABLE 2
Proposed criteria for identifying bones from burnt animal sacrifice

Criterion	Burnt sacrifice	Debris from meals
Spatial context (including association with special architectural structures)	Yes	No
Choice of animals	Single species	Variety of edible animals
Selection of parts	Both meaty and non-meaty	Meaty
Breakage	No marrow extraction	Marrow extraction
Gnawing marks	No	Occasionally

that the deposit was not contaminated during deposition; additionally, the fact that the find had been sealed by the layer of pebbles suggests that there was no post-depositional contamination either.

Where did these bones and pottery originate? The spatial proximity of the bones and associated pottery to Megaron B is unquestionable and it is fairly clear that they were carried by the waters that flowed inside the drain from a higher point – the top of the channel that feeds into the drain. This channel started by the south wall of the platform and, as mentioned above, collected the waters from the interior of Megaron B and the platform. It is confirmed that there was no hearth in the interior of Megaron B and that in the central part of the room stood two columns aligned with the long axis of the building. In the absence of a hearth the only place in the entire MBC complex where these bones could have been burnt is the platform, from which they were washed off after the ritual (for a similar assemblage of charred bones from burnt sacrifices washed off the altar at Zeytin Tepe, see Hägg 1998b, 53). On the basis of the pottery, the bones were washed into the drain during LH IIB, but use of the drain continued as indicated by the presence of pottery and ashes in its upper part (see above, entry from the excavation notebook).

DISCUSSION

In general, there are a number of criteria that can be applied to the identification of burnt animal sacrifices in Mycenaean sites (summarized in Table 2).

The first criterion for burnt animal sacrifices concerns spatial context and specifically the association of burnt animal bones with architectural structures that would have been suitable for such sacrifices (Yavis 1949; Bergquist 1988; Whittaker 2008). What form, shape and size would such structures have? A close definition is provided by Bergquist (1988, 32): ‘an appropriate, detached, built or otherwise shaped, solid structure of limited, upper surface and moderately raised for the display and operation of a ritual burning of (a part of) an animal offering’. The platform in front of Megaron B is a solid structure attached to the Megaron; it has a surface area of about 6 sq m; and its floor is elevated about 1.30–1.40 m from the paved courtyard that opens up in front of it, allowing for the activities taking place on its floor to be easily viewable by the people standing in the courtyard. Accordingly, this platform matches the criteria for an architectural structure suitable for burnt animal sacrifice. The location of the burnt animal bones (at the bottom of the drain that collected waters from the channel) and the association of the channel with the platform are strong arguments that the bones originated from the platform.

Other criteria concern the choice of animals: unless from a single event, burnt bones from ordinary meals normally belong to a variety of edible animals (usually sheep/goat, cattle,

pigs); if an assemblage of burnt bones is restricted to a single species, it is more likely that this preference is due to ritual selection (Halstead and Isaakidou 2004, 141). The opposite is not necessarily true, as in some cases there is a wide range of animals that have been burnt ritually as offerings to the same divinity (Hägg 1998b, 52). The selection of body parts is also relevant, as bones from food waste are likely to belong to meat-bearing parts of the animal, such as humeri or femora; if non-edible parts (metapodials, phalanxes, etc.) from primary butchery are burnt together with meat-bearing parts, one must look for a cultural explanation. Breakage for the extraction of marrow in long bones could serve as an additional indicator: if the bones are the waste from consumed animal parts, one will expect breakages for the extraction of marrow; if they are burnt ritually, even if they have been defleshed prior to burning, the marrow is not likely to have been extracted. Finally, the presence or absence of canid gnawing marks may be an indirect indicator, as experimental archaeology has shown that waste from food is often fed to dogs and that this happens usually shortly after discard (Dabney *et al.* 2004, 81). If burnt bones do not have gnawing marks, they are likely to have been thrown into the fire soon after slaughter.

As mentioned above, it is likely that the burnt bones under discussion had been burnt on the platform before being washed off the platform into the drain. These bones belong exclusively to pigs; they contain non-meaty parts of the animals; they do not exhibit gnaw marks; and although many are broken, this breakage was probably the result of their friability after they had been burnt and not due to extraction of marrow, since they are not meat-bearing bones and have limited or no marrow. These characteristics match the criteria for bones burnt in sacrifice and not those for disposal of debris from meals.³

Two reasonable objections must be pre-empted. The first concerns the fact that the bones and sherds found in the drain do not constitute a primary deposit. There can be no doubt, however, that these finds originated in the MBC and thus form an integral part of the systems of activities that were taking place in that complex (cf. Rapoport 1990). Such systems include post-activity processes, represented in the archaeological record not only by primary but also by secondary and tertiary deposits (Schiffer 1987), as long as they can be related to the original context, which is clearly the case here.

The second objection concerns the small size of the find – only 18 bones. There are three possible explanations for this: a) given the fact that faunal remains were not systematically collected in the old excavations (often only a sample was kept), it is possible that the small size of the sample is due to preservation bias; b) the part of the drain that was exposed (as a reminder, the burnt bones were found in that part of the drain that is covered by wall T1) was destroyed by later construction, so it is likely that other burnt bones have been obliterated by the continuous use of the site for two millennia; c) assuming that the drain was used repeatedly, previous ritual remains would have been washed further down the drain with every washing of the platform – the drain can only contain a small amount of material.

Eleusis is not the sole example of a Mycenaean site where burnt animal sacrifices are likely to have taken place. At Ayios Konstantinos at Methana (Konsolaki 2002, 28; Hamilakis and Konsolaki 2004; Konsolaki-Yannopoulou 2004), the finds in Room A included a large number of mostly zoomorphic figurines, drinking vessels (kylikes, etc.) and a large triton shell

3 It should be noted that a second group of burnt bones, also from non-meat-bearing parts of ungulates, was found in the same drawer of the Eleusis museum as this find; although this second group did not have any indication of provenance, it should not be excluded that it was found in the drain, as well.

(Konsolaki-Yannopoulou 2001, 213–14). Near the hearth of this room were found a number of cooking pots and a stone spit-rest; in other parts of the room were found ‘vessels associated with libations, including an animal-head rhyton resembling a pig head’ (Hamilakis and Konsolaki 2004, 138). The burnt bones found in this room belong to immature pigs and include non-meaty parts of the animals (phalanges, mandibles, teeth). By contrast, the bones from the adjacent Rooms B and C (which are unburnt) belong to a variety of edible animals (sheep/goats, cattle, pigs) and mostly to ‘meaty’ parts (humerus, femur, tibia, scapula, pelvis; Hamilakis and Konsolaki 2004, 141–3). Chopmarks and cut marks are rare in the burnt bones from Room A, although a pig tibia preserves filleting cut marks (Hamilakis and Konsolaki 2004, 143). Overall, the evidence suggests that in Room A juvenile pigs were sacrificed and burnt, with their meaty parts burnt after the meat had been removed for consumption, while ‘some neonatal pigs may have been thrown into the fire as whole carcasses’ (*ibid.*, 143). Comparisons between the small fire of Room A and the large hearths of the major Mycenaean palaces (Whittaker 2008, 184–5) cannot be made, as this is a domestic and not a palatial shrine. The argument that the spit stand and cooking pots in the room suggest that the burnt bones were ‘waste from the preparation and/or consumption of meat dishes which had been thrown into the fire in order to dispose of it’ (*ibid.*) is disproved by the very nature of the faunal material: juvenile pigs under a year of age would not normally have been killed to be eaten because they do not yet carry enough meat. If juvenile pigs are slaughtered, one must look for a cultural explanation, for example a ritual. The selection of animals is of major relevance to the issue of ritual burning vs. simple disposal of meal debris by fire.

At Pylos (Isaakidou *et al.* 2002; Halstead and Isaakidou 2004; Stocker and Davis 2004) were found six groups of burnt bones consisting almost exclusively of mandibles, humeri and femurs from cattle (parts of at least 5–11 individuals in each group and from one red deer in each of two groups; Isaakidou *et al.* 2002, 88; Halstead and Isaakidou 2004, 145; Stocker and Davis 2004, 182). One of these groups of bones was too small for any meaningful conclusions to be drawn; of the remaining five, one was found in room 7 of the Archives Complex, next to a group of miniature kylikes or cups, and seemed to have been burnt in the final conflagration that destroyed the palace (Stocker and Davis 2004, 182). The other four groups were found in unburned deposits: the bones in those groups preserved cut marks indicating that the meat had been separated from the bone before burning, but did not have any breakage for the extraction of marrow (Isaakidou *et al.* 2002, 88; Halstead and Isaakidou 2004, 146). The absence of gnawing marks, the choice of animals, and their large numbers (Halstead and Isaakidou 2004, 146, table 7.1) conform with the idea that the bones of those animals had been burnt ritually after the sacrifice. When such a ritual burning is seen against the backdrop of Linear B references to the mobilization of animals for feasting (Palaima 1989; Killen 1994; 1999; 2004; Palmer 1994; Bendall 2004), it is difficult not to associate the ritual burning of animals with aspects of Mycenaean formalized religion, although the scale of the sacrifices, as evidenced by the faunal remains, is much larger than the one that the tablets would lead us to think (Halstead and Isaakidou 2004, 147). The suggestion that these bones were simply waste from butchered animals disposed of in the fire (Whittaker 2008, 187) is not supported by the evidence, as the Pylos bones do not show either signs of the extraction of marrow (a common feature of the bones from Tsoungiza (Dabney *et al.* 2004, 80); mentioned by Whittaker as an example of remains of feasting), or gnawing marks, which suggests that the bones were burnt immediately after slaughter. These two differences suggest that the burnt bones from Pylos were treated differently from those from Tsoungiza and that Tsoungiza cannot be used as an argument against burnt

animal sacrifice at Pylos. There is no real basis to argue that the Pylos bones were anything but remains of burnt animal sacrifice.

Finally, at Mt Lykaion, burnt animal bones found in the bedrock layer of the altar in contexts dating from LH IIB and stretching into the Late Mycenaean period have been ritually burnt, but one must await the publication for more information (Romano and Voyatzis in press; Starkovich *et al.* in press).

Burnt animal bones from other Mycenaean sites have been reported, but until their final publication they cannot be cited either for or against the practice of burnt animal sacrifices. Such is the case of Mt Kynortion (Lambrinoudakis 1980; 1981), where large quantities of burnt animal bones were found in a layer of ashes and burnt soil. At Mycenae, burnt bones of pigs were found in the large hearth of the Cult Center (French 2002, 134; Umberto Albarella, pers. comm.); the burnt bones found in the Room with the Fresco have not been analysed properly and it is uncertain what percentage of these bones were actually burnt, although French considers them 'comparable' to those of Methana (French 2002, 134). The fact that one of the two cooking pots found associated with the hearth contained a stew with olive oil, meat and lentils and the other olive oil, wine and fish (French 2002, 132) is not necessarily an argument (as Whittaker 2008, 185 suggests) against the practice of burnt animal sacrifice in that room, as the eating of sacrificed animals may very well have been complemented by a meal containing other foods.⁴

Other findings of burnt animal bones are clearly remains of feasting and meals and do not indicate burnt animal sacrifices.⁵ Such is the case at Tiryns, where burnt animal bones have been found in the cult buildings and the court of the Unterburg (Kilian 1981; Albers 1994, 106, 131); and Tsoungiza, where the burnt animal bones were clearly remains of feasting disposed of in a fire (Wright 1994, 69–70; Dabney *et al.* 2004, 77–95). The faunal assemblage included bones of mostly cattle, pigs, sheep and goat representing most parts of the animals; the only exception was cattle, the bones of which belonged to head and feet.

CONCLUSIONS

The evidence from Megaron B suggests that burnt animal sacrifices involving the ritual burning of non-meaty parts of pigs took place on the platform along with some kind of feasting. The setting in which these sacrifices took place is on an open-air altar (the platform), which, however, is separated from the surrounding area by a peribolos wall ensuring the privacy of the ritual. Because rituals in Greece enhance the identity of the participating groups and serve at the same time to 'delimit the group from those not entitled to its benefits' (Seaford 1994, xii), the peribolos wall surrounding the MBC may have functioned as a social barrier between those participating in the ritual and those who did not. At the same time, the architecture of the MBC is more formal than standard residential Mycenaean architecture and the entire complex may have been, as Travlos (1983) had suggested, both the residence of a ruling family of Eleusis and a family shrine. Because rituals and sacrifices are tools by which elites consolidate their authority, the private but formalized setting of Megaron B may be a case of a ritual used by the

4 Another possible case of burnt animal sacrifice may be Iklaina. In the 2012 season was found a pit containing scores of burnt animal bones together with kylikes and conical bowls, plaster offering tables, a sheet of lead, and a bone handle, possibly from a knife. The finds are currently under study.

5 The study of McNiven and Feldman (2003) reminds us that in some cultures there is no clear dichotomy between ritual and meal remains.

ruling family of Eleusis to establish and consolidate their control over their clan or group of supporters.

It is now well understood that Mycenaean religious practices operated at different levels: official and popular, public and private (Hägg 1981, 36–9; 1995, 391; 1996, 601; Albers 2001, 132, n. 6). The growing body of burnt animal sacrifices helps to highlight these distinctions. Both at Eleusis and Methana, the sacrificial animals are pigs and in both places the burning takes place in a private (Methana) or semi-private (Eleusis) setting; at Pylos, large numbers of cattle (and a few deer) are sacrificed in a public setting as part of an official, state ritual, possibly a ‘banquet d’État’ (Sacconi 2001) and the meat-carrying bones are burnt ritually. These differences, between Eleusis and Methana on the one hand and Pylos on the other, may suggest that the Mycenaean world practised two types of burnt animal sacrifice, with different purposes and for different audiences (Hamilakis and Konsolaki 2004, 147). In the first type, a small group of people (perhaps a family or clan?) conducted the sacrifice and was the recipient of the benevolence of the gods; these sacrifices took place in a private setting and included the ceremonial burning of pigs and feasting for a small group of people (Hamilakis and Konsolaki 2004, 146). In the second type, it was the state that conducted the sacrifice and the audience consisted of the population at large; in this case the sacrifice had also political motives and included feeding large numbers of people and, therefore, larger and more numerous animals (cattle) were used. Indirect confirmation for the practice of burnt animal sacrifice in the Mycenaean world is provided by the mention of a fire altar (*eskhāra*) for Dionysus in the Linear B tablets from Pylos.⁶

A chronological pattern may thus begin to emerge, according to which private burnt sacrifices in the pre-palatial period may have developed into large-scale official rituals in the palatial period. If this holds true, one may postulate that within the Mycenaean period burnt animal sacrifices acquired an increasingly public and institutionalized character, from the private, small-scale sacrifices at LH IIB Eleusis, to the indoor sacrifices at LH IIIA/IIIB Methana, to the formal and conspicuous public sacrifices of LH IIIB Pylos. Such a development fits well with Wright’s (1994, 74) model of increasing formalization of Mycenaean religion, affected by the increasing socio-political complexity of Mycenaean states.

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6 **PY Ea 102+107**; *e-ka-ra* occurs also **twice** on **PY Ta 709.2**. The join between **PY Ea 102** and **Ea 107** has confirmed the association of the term with the genitive singular *di-wu-no-so-jo* (‘of Dionysus’). Melena 2000–1; Palaima 2008, 349. Cf. also Chadwick 1986.

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