



A RE-EVALUATION OF THE SETTLEMENT EVIDENCE OF LATE HELLADIC III C1

MARINA THOMATOS

*Department of Classics University of Edinburgh
 David Hume Tower, George Square
 Edinburgh, UK, EH8 9JX*

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e-mail : thomatosm@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

The collapse of the Mycenaean palaces brought about a number of changes that are attested in the archaeological evidence of Late Helladic III C. This paper will deal with the settlement evidence of Tiryns, Lefkandi and Koukounaries in an attempt to clarify this post-palatial period. In particular, three main points of interest will be examined: organization and political authority, population movements and evidence of hostility and destructions. Through an examination of these three sites, it becomes clear that a new approach must be established when studying this post-palatial period. Finally, using the archaeological data available today, we must re-evaluate early scholarly material which characterizes Late Helladic III C as a period of decline.

KEYWORDS: Late Helladic, Settlement, Tiryns, Lefkandi, Palace, Mycenaean

INTRODUCTION

The collapse of the Mycenaean palatial system at the end of the 13th century marks the beginning of a period of transformation from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age. The significance of the period that follows this collapse, known as Late Helladic III C, lies in what it can contribute to the study and understanding of the new social, political and economic systems, which derived as a response to the loss of the Mycenaean administrative centres. Hostilities and

destructions, the arrival of people to sites, social differentiation and political authority are just a few of the features which characterise the archaeological records of LH III C. Such features can be illustrated through an examination of settlements with occupation in this period and particularly, by looking at the three different types of settlements present; namely palatial centres with continuation, non-palatial settlements with continuation and newly built settlements². This paper will examine the

settlements of Tiryns, a palatial centre with continuation, Xeropolis-Lefkandi, a non-palatial settlement with continuation and Koukounaries, a newly built settlement. It is hoped that through an evaluation of these three sites that certain conclusions will be reached concerning Late Helladic IIIC as a whole.

First, I would like to briefly present the LH IIIC settlement evidence of the three selected sites. At Tiryns, after a number of destructions throughout LH IIIB in the areas of the Upper and Lower Acropolis, the evidence of LH IIIC occupation can be traced in building activities in the Upper Acropolis, the Lower Acropolis and the Lower Town on the plain below. More specifically, on the Upper Acropolis a narrow megaron, known as Building T, is built in the east portion of the Great Megaron (LH IIIA1-LH IIIB2) incorporating the former throne.³ Other activities in the area include the construction of a square platform enclosing the round platform of the LH IIIB altar of the Great Court in front of the Megaron. (Maran 2001). On the Lower Acropolis over 30 newly constructed rooms and buildings are erected, many of which are built over the destruction layers and buildings of LH IIIB. (Fig. 1) These are groups of household units with various functions such as workshop areas, storage facilities and an important shrine area, all constructed within a unique system of streets and courtyards. (Kilian 1988, 135) On the plain below, both to the north and south, an organised town consisting of houses with similar orientations, courtyards and paved areas, covering a region of over 25 hectares, reveal the period of Tiryns' greatest expansion from the time of its foundation (Fig. 2) (Gercke and Hiesel 1975, 10-15; Kilian 1978, 468-470; Maran 2002).

The settlement of Xeropolis-Lefkandi is a large settlement, nearly 500 metres in length and 120 metres broad. The IIIC settlement evidence at Lefkandi that has been excavated,

reveals three building phases, phases 1, 2 and 3, during which time the settlement undergoes significant changes in planning and layout.⁴ It is marked with an IIIC early settlement, which was destroyed and followed by an entirely new settlement layout without any re-use of older walls or features. (Popham and Sackett 1968)

The settlement at Koukounaries was built on the Upper Plateau of a large hill on the SW side of the large Naousa Bay. It has an impressive fortification wall on the upper plateau and other parallel lines of fortification downhill, to the south on the slope of the hill. To the north of this fortification wall was the so-called "mansion" of Koukounaries measuring 22m in length and 16.5 m in width, 363 sq. m. The main plan consists of two corridors giving access to the various rooms of the basement. The evidence reveals a number of rooms with varying functions, including a small shrine to the north and a room believed to have functioned as the "administrative room of the high magistrate". (Schilardi 1984, 188) The largest concentration of finds comes from the three storage rooms directly behind the fortification wall, which contained among other finds, over 400 fine ware vessels. (Schilardi 1992; Schilardi 1984; Koehl 1984)

The first aspect I would like to examine covers elements of hostilities and destructions, including what one may characterise as concern for safety. There are indications, that following the devastations of LH IIIB, hostilities and concern for safety were still prominent throughout Greece. Although only a number of settlements such as Grotta and Koukounaries build fortification walls in this period, there is other archaeological evidence indicative of such concerns. The movement of a local population to the immediate vicinity of Tiryns, could show the need for habitation in an area that was previously one of the strongholds of the Argolid. This need for a

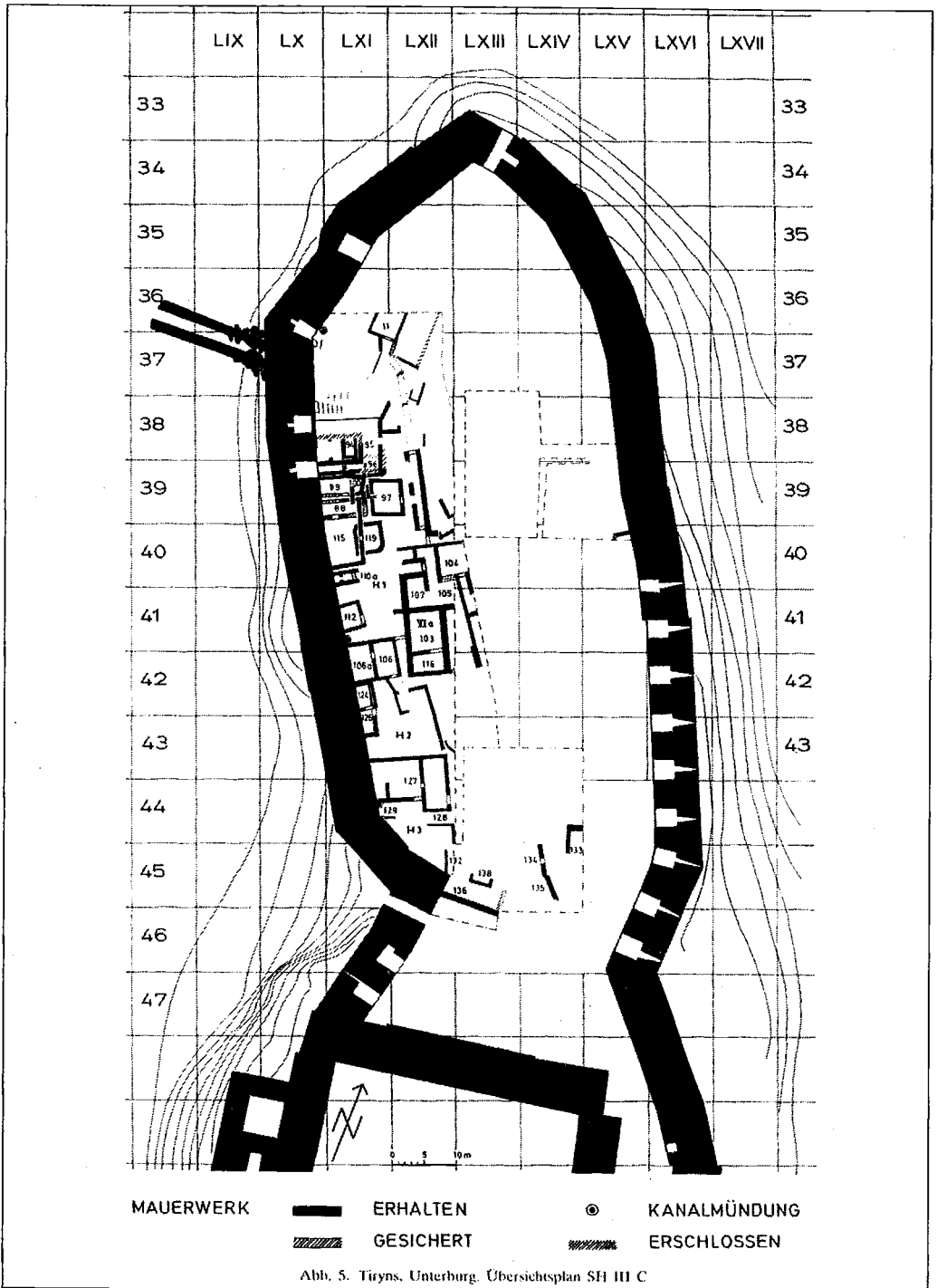


Abb. 5. Tiryns, Unterburg. Übersichtsplan SH III C

Fig. 2: Tiryns, Lower Acropolis After Kilian 1981

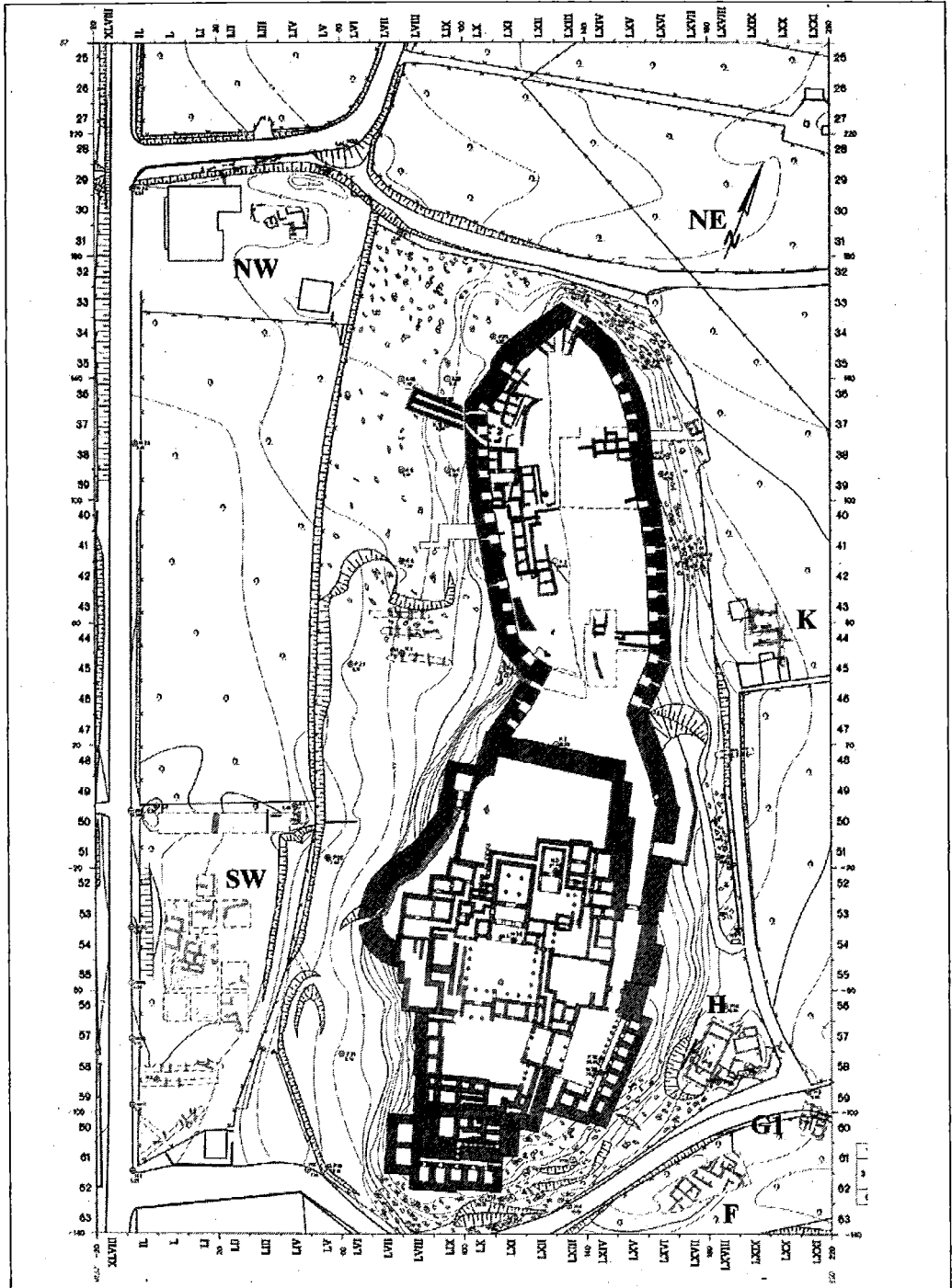


Fig. 3: Tiryns, Acropolis and Lower Town (After Maran 2002)

sense of security is evident even in the houses below on the plain surrounding the citadel, which are in close enough proximity to the fortified citadel. A series of destructions in the Lower Citadel and Lower Town further demonstrate that LH IIIC was still a period of hostility. (Kilian 1978, 460-461; Kilian 1981, 154-155; Maran 2002, 8-11)

At Lefkandi, there is evidence of at least two destructions occurring during LH IIIC. Additionally, the presence of many storage facilities in the few houses which stored foodstuffs such as figs and olives, show as Popham states that the "preoccupation of the inhabitants with storage areas and containers might suggest hoarding in case of attack". (Popham and Sackett 1968, 23)

Finally, the evidence from Koukounaries has the clearest evidence of such concerns, the best indication of this being the series of fortification walls up the slope leading to the "mansion" as well as the impressive fortification wall on the southern side of the complex. Destructions also occur here during LH IIIC, destructions so strong that the inhabitants of the area abandon the site. Schilardi has pointed out that a number of stone balls found along the slopes below were used to defend the hilltop at the time of this great destruction. He also points out that the number of skeletons, primarily of children, found in the complex, indicates that they were killed at the time of this final attack, when the children were put into the basement rooms for protection. (Schilardi 1992, 631) The selection of this high plateau, the ascent of which is very difficult even today, indicates the clear intention of its inhabitants to choose an area difficult to penetrate and in a strategic location which provided a clear view of the harbour below.

The arrival and movement of people to sites was a direct result of these concerns and devastations. The evidence from Tiryns reveals that in this period there is a movement from

the neighbouring areas to the immediate vicinity of the Acropolis to form a town in the area covering the plain below, possibly from settlements such as Katsingri, which are abandoned at the end of LH IIIB. This, according to Kilian, "*should be regarded as the result of some synoikismos, which resettled the people of the, by now, deserted inland sites around the reactivated fortress.*" Certainly, one associates security with such an area, particularly in a period that followed such great destructions. The continuity of the material evidence does not indicate new comers to the area, but rather, that the community of Tiryns continued to flourish both by later generation of the earlier inhabitants, indicated by the continuation of function of certain areas such as shrine Room 110/110a, but also from a migrating population probably from neighbouring areas.

Koukounaries has evidence of newcomers with the establishment of the hilltop complex. The richness of the storage facilities of Koukounaries could indicate that in this area the newcomers were of a higher class. The material finds of pottery and luxury items as well as the Cyclopean style fortification suggest that the settlers of Koukounaries were of Mycenaean background and were "familiar with Mycenaean governmental structures and with a residential style of life" (Deger-Jalkotzy 1998, 108).

It is well documented that with the fall of the great palaces the administrative system characteristic of LH IIIA-B ceases to exist. This is best illustrated by the missing evidence of written texts in LH IIIC as well as limited evidence of the fine arts such as fresco painting. However, there is still evidence of social differentiation and authority, and this is the final point I would like to briefly examine. The evidence from Tiryns, as outlined above, reveals many aspects social differentiation and authority. The homogenous orientation of houses around the Citadel and the

organisation of houses in the Lower Acropolis with their multiple household units organised around courtyards and roads presupposes an economic and political organisation. (Kilian 1978, 470) Kilian points out that “the foundation and successful running of a town... makes it certain that...there should be some political power inherent.” He goes on to point out that “neither should the persistence of bureaucracy to some extent, in order to back up the new system, be denied even if official recording seems to have stopped”. (Kilian 1988, 135). Furthermore, as Maran points out, “the reutilization of official symbols of palatial times like the place of the throne and the altar in the Great Court” indicate that at least in some part the inhabitants of the citadel linked themselves to their predecessors and in turn to a palatial elite. (Maran 2001, 119) The architectural evidence from Phase II at Lefkandi with its careful planning and regularity could also be indicative of directed organisation and political authority. Whether, in either case, this is manifested in the form of a ruling figure such as a wanax is less clear. However, the attributes by which one can identify such a leader in all likelihood changes in LH IIIC with the collapse of the palatial administrative system.

It seems logical that when studying these post-palatial settlements one must attempt to infer or define new attributes by which to judge the archaeological material. The evidence of Koukounaries can perhaps reveal such new attributes. These attributes could include differences in the size of the complex, certainly incomparable to the palaces of LH IIIA and IIIB, but also difference in the material evidence such as those that appear to be lacking in the archaeological record of LH IIIC, such as writing and fine arts. On the other hand however, objects such as the curved ivory handle believed to be from a throne, luxury items such as steatite objects but also the un-worked obsidian cores reflect customs

typical of Mycenaean palaces. If one accepts that this hilltop complex is that of a centralized authority, one might be able to create a new model for how such an authority may be represented after the fall of the great palatial administrative system.

CONCLUSIONS

To summarise, the purpose of this paper has been to re-evaluate the three settlements of Tiryns, Lefkandi and Koukounaries in order to better understand the post-palatial period of Late Helladic IIIC. Although all three sites differ greatly in their layouts, organisation and even size, they share many common aspects.. What becomes apparent is that one must begin to look at post-palatial remains with a different attitude than before, since the archaeological evidence available today greatly alters our knowledge of the post-palatial period of Late Helladic IIIC. One cannot simply see that a civilization, which according to Desborough, “depended on the system of monarchical rule for the whole and parts of its world’ was now finished with”. (Desborough 1964, 243)

The destructions at the end of Late Helladic IIIB, whether due to earthquakes, internal conflicts, climatic changes or attacks from foreigners, left the survivors in a state of fear and uncertainty however not without organisation and authority. This uncertainty led not only to settlements in and around citadels of LH IIIB, but also to the building of new fortified settlements in peripheral areas such as the Cyclades. The political authority and social differentiation revealed in the archaeological evidence of these three sites is not indicative of a demise of a civilisation but rather of continuity in combination with aspects of change brought about by the collapse of the palatial system. Population movements to areas that were once palatial strongholds such as Tiryns, to those previously considered peripheral areas such as

Lefkandi, or to new areas such as Koukounaries also indicate this change.

Evidence for prosperity and continuity in this period of the Mycenaean culture is seen in other settlements throughout Greece, such as Aegira in Achaia, Kynos in Central Greece, Grotta on Naxos as well as at other citadels such as Mycenae and Midea in the Argolid. The material evidence, particularly the pottery

of Late Helladic IIIC middle, allows us to get a glimpse of the importance of this phase in history as well as providing clear evidence that life continued to flourish in the Aegean. (Deger-Jalkotzy 1998) It is this flourishing that needs to be re-examined and better understood before we can truly understand the historical events of this period.

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Notes:

1. This paper is a work in progress of my current PhD research on The Final Revival of the Aegean Bronze Age: Late Helladic IIIC Middle in Edinburgh University.
2. Palatial centres with continuation in LH IIIC include Mycenae, Tiryns and Midea. Non-palatial settlements with continuation include Grotta on Naxos, Lefkandi-Xeropolis in Euboea and Korakou in Corinth. Newly constructed settlements following the destructions of the Mycenaean palaces include Aigeira in Achaia and Koukounaries on Paros.
3. The date of this building has been controversial due to insufficient evidence provided by the early excavators of the Megaron. Blegen was one of the first to speculate its dating to end of the Bronze Age, see Blegen (1921) 130-134. Kilian also agreed with this probable dating, see Kilian (1981), 160; See Mazarakis for references to scholarly material suggesting a later date. Recent C-14 analysis of remains of three wooden post provided a date no later than the 11th century. This in combination with the fact that that the post holes were dug into the plaster floor of the Great Megaron and thus post date it provide a most probable date of construction to Late Helladic IIIC; Maran (2001) 115.
4. Phase 1a corresponds roughly to LH IIIC early, that is the construction of the first building phase. Phase 1b corresponds to the end of LH IIIC early beginning of LH IIIC middle developed, that is the material found in the first major destruction layer at the site. Phase 2a corresponds to LH IIIC middle developed and advanced and corresponds to the material found in a second smaller destruction which occurred after the phase 2 buildings had been built over the 1b debris. Phase 2b correspond to the LH IIIC middle advanced phase and the beginning of the LH IIIC late phase and corresponds to the phase 2 occupation of the house after the second destruction until their abandonment. Finally, Phase 3 corresponds to LH IIIC late, which is limited to only one excavated house after which the area was deserted. Popham and Milburn (1971) 333-349.

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