

OLD AND NEW EVIDENCE FOR THE PALATIAL SOCIETY OF MYCENAEAN THEBES: AN OUTLINE *

If we take for granted that the prime concern of archaeology, as an historical science, is the study of how men live in society and of how they attempt within the social framework to fulfill their needs and desires ¹, our debt to the organizers of this Conference is great. The results of more than a hundred years of archaeological research ², with many excavations and studies of sites (settlements and cemeteries), has demonstrated that archaeologists working on the Bronze Age in the Aegean must find new ways to convert the static picture of the remains and opinions about them into a reconstruction of an active, living society ³. This reconstruction must involve society as a whole, because in the study of any society, past or present, no aspect can safely be omitted as all are interdependent ⁴.

Mycenaean palatial society was certainly complex. Its main expression, the palace or administrative center, was a multi-faceted institution serving a vast number of functions ⁵. We cannot, however, focus only on the palace since this would distort our view of the Mycenaean world and our understanding of the non-palatial sector and the complete range of social activities during this period: we must consider both the archival and the archaeological

* My written text does not differ substantially from my presentation at the Heidelberg conference. I would like to state that my footnotes, because of circumstances beyond my control, i.e. lack of time and the burden of bureaucratic (primarily) commitments, are perforce limited to the absolutely basic requirements for the explication of my paper. The specialists to whom it is addressed already possess a good knowledge of the Aegean bibliography. Furthermore, they will discover a wealth of bibliographical references in the texts of the other participants in the conference. One would hope that the Mycenaeans, who were themselves oppressed by a bureaucracy, would understand my situation. In reality, R. Laffineur has displayed tremendous patience toward me, having finally received my text after much delay and many broken deadlines. I ask his forgiveness and that of the other participants, and I thank them as well. Since, in similar circumstances, some specific excuse is generally put forward, I would like to mention that from April (when the Heidelberg conference occurred) to December, 1994, as I write this note, tablets have been continuously coming to light at Thebes. The new linear B tablets, either whole or fragmentary, which have been catalogued up to this moment total 153. It is expected that this number will increase with the sifting of the fill, and as new sections are made into the pavement of Pelopidou Street in the coming spring. I think it is significant that the first scholarly presentation of these finds has been made at a conference on Mycenaean society. I warmly thank the conference organizers for the opportunity to do so and especially my friends, W.-D. Niemeier and B. Niemeier, for their exceptional hospitality throughout all the rainy days of the meeting. I also thank my friends J. Bennet, R. Hägg, P. Halstead, S. Deger-Jalkotzy, I. Kilian, J. Killen, J. Maran, T. Palaima, R. Palmer, E. Stavrianopoulou and, last but not least, M. Wiener for discussions, both scholarly and otherwise, and for the ideas they shared with me, as well as C. Zerner for correcting my English Text.

1 G. CLARK, "Bees in Antiquity", *Antiquity* 16 (1942) 208.

2 S. IAKOVIDIS, "A Hundred Years of Mycenaean Archaeology", *Antiquaries Journal* 63 (1978) I 13 ff.

3 Sh. CRAWFORD, "Re-evaluating Material Culture: Crawling towards a Reconstruction of Minoan Society", in *Minoan Society* 48-53.

4 See CLARK (*supra* n. 1) 215.

5 Cf. J.F. CHERRY, "Evolution, Revolution, and the Origins of Complex Society in Minoan Crete", in *Minoan Society* 32 ff.; P. HALSTEAD, "The Mycenaean Palatial Economy: Making the Most of the Gaps in the Evidence", *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philosophical Society* 38 (1992) 74.

evidence. In the last twenty years this approach has contributed to a better understanding of economy, agriculture, craft production, religion and administration in the Late Bronze Aegean, but more still remains to be done ⁶.

The topic "society" has been investigated by Aegean scholars in general books or in a few specific studies while three recent conferences and relevant publications on Minoan, Eastern Mediterranean and Early Cypriote societies show clearly how real scholarly progress can come from such relatively small gatherings of specialists ⁷.

I believe that we are agreed on several points of approach:

- a) We must avoid confusing Mycenaean and Homeric societies and realities, as the differences between them in social structure, economy and specialized occupations are striking ⁸.
- b) We have to resist the tendency to accept as given, opinions expressed about Aegean prehistory which have no convincing evidence to support them.
- c) We must keep in mind the essential character of the archives as inventories of palatial resources (goods, lands and personnel) and as records of the movement of these resources to, from and within the palatial system and thus we must keep in mind the limited, *cum multis lacunis*, information they provide ⁹.
- d) Mycenaeanologists must be careful in their choice of models from other disciplines to interpret their own data and must concentrate on the texts and the material remains themselves.

It must also be kept in mind that the material remains (archaeological data) in their original context once played an active role within a social process. These remains are, therefore, essential tools for understanding past societies and how they worked.

I have purposely spoken at length on these matters in my introduction in order to explain how I plan to approach the main question posed by my paper: what can we learn about Mycenaean society from a state such as Thebes?

Some years ago, when speaking of the possible role of Thebes and other Mainland centers in trade in the Aegean before the period of the Mycenaean palaces, I emphasized that the Early and Middle Helladic settlements had had an impact that was felt beyond the limits of Boeotia ¹⁰. This has been clearly confirmed by recent discoveries on the Kadmeia. A great deal of evidence from the final phases of the Middle Helladic period or a little earlier is now

6 Cf. J. BENNET, "Text and Context: Levels of Approach to the Integration of Archaeological and Textual Data in the Late Bronze Age Aegean", *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 3:2 (1984) 63-75. For an example of the use of this method, see ARAVANTINOS, "Santuari e Palazzo: Appunti sui rapporti economico-amministrativi tra la sfera del culto e il potere politico in età micenea", *Scienze dell'Antichità* 3-4 (1989-1990) 243-261.

7 *Minoan Society*; M. HELTZER and E. LIPINSKI (eds.), *Society and Economy in the Eastern Mediterranean (1500-1000 B.C.)* (1988); E. PELTENBURG (ed.), *Early Society in Cyprus* (1989).

8 See in general M.I. FINLEY, "Homer and Mycenae", *Historia* 6 (1957) 133 ff.; M. JAMESON, "The Mycenaean and Homeric Political System", *Archaeology* 11 (1958) 60; more recently, E. LEVY, *Le système palatial en Orient, en Grèce et à Rome. Actes du colloque de Strasbourg* (1987).

9 See on this problem the old but useful work of K. WUNDSAM, *Die politische und soziale Struktur in den mykenischen Residenzen nach den Linear B Texten* (1968); cf. new work by S. DEGER-JALKOTZY, "Landbesitz und soziale Struktur im mykenischen Staat vom Pylos", in HELTZER and LIPINSKI (*supra* n. 7) 31 ff.; K. KILIAN, "Zur Funktion der mykenischen Residenzen auf dem griechischen Festland", in *Function Palaces* 21 ff.; S. DEGER-JALKOTZY, "Zum Charakter und Herausbildung der mykenischen Sozialstruktur", in A. HEUBECK and G. NEUMANN (eds.), *Res Mycenaee* (1983) 89-111.

10 See V. ARAVANTINOS, "Tebe e il ruolo dei centri elladici nel commercio egeo in età premicenea", in M. MARAZZI, S. TUSA and L. VAGNETTI (eds.), *Traffici micenei nel Mediterraneo: Problemi storici e documentazione archeologica* (1986) 215 ff.; cf. A. KERAMOPOULLOS, "Thebaika", *ArchDelt* 3 (1917); S. SYMEONOGLOU, *The Topography of Thebes* (1984) 14 ff.

available. Apart from the usual difficulties of rescue excavation in the center of a modern town, good information about the first inhabitants of Thebes has come to light in the last decade. From a preliminary study of the material we can now state that, in the pre-Mycenaean Bronze Age, the settlement of Thebes extended over the whole system of hills that, in historical times, made up the upper part of the city, and that during the period of the Mycenaean palaces was enclosed by a sturdy fortification wall.

Thus, for the first time, it is clear that a vital and crowded city existed on the citadel of the Kadmeia at least as early as Early Helladic II and III, continuing on into Middle Helladic and through Late Helladic IIIA-B. In prehistoric as well as in historic times the city was supported by a fertile agricultural hinterland and eventually by the control of important land and land-sea routes. There is really little doubt that there were several major centers in prehistoric Boeotia, among them Eutresis, Thebes and Orchomenos. These were prosperous, well-populated and fortified. Whatever their relations to one another, they controlled the extensive hilly and fertile areas around lakes and marshes. They also controlled communication routes along the Euboean and Corinthian gulfs and from the Kephissos valley to Attica and the Isthmus. The same land and sea routes were later exploited by the Mycenaeans as the continuing importance of these sites indicates. According to most scholars, the Helladic population of the territories of Thebes and Orchomenos were in need of overseas communication routes for trade, especially for the acquisition of raw materials, i.e., metals, which were not available at home.

Towards the end of the Middle Helladic period or a bit earlier, the presence of a warrior class is well attested at Thebes. It seems that its members had access to metals, possessed gold and silver and weapons of fine quality and built carefully made tombs. Some of the tombs at Thebes were probably very richly furnished, like the Aegina shaft grave about which I. Kilian and S. Hiller spoke¹¹. The date of these tombs is roughly contemporary or slightly earlier than some of the shaft graves at Mycenae. Traditions and myths relate events like the building of the first enceinte of the city to Amphion and Zethos or even to Kadmos, while the warrior class may be reflected in the legend of the Spartoi.

Unfortunately, less is known about the extent of the early Mycenaean (LH I-II and early IIIA) settlement before the construction and functioning of the palatial buildings on the Kadmeia and the fortification wall¹². The wall was in use after a late IIIA or a very early IIIB destruction, for at least as long as the survival of the palatial system on the citadel. It seems that in the early Mycenaean phase (LH I-II), or a little earlier or a little later, increasing wealth and prosperity may have resulted in social differentiation between some chieftains and other clan members in the most important settlements of this area. Prosperity and prominence are shown by the funerary gifts in tombs excavated in the hills close to the Kadmeia (Kolonaki and Kastellia cemeteries). On the other hand, Late Helladic I and II pottery of excellent quality was collected from excavated domestic areas on the Kadmeia. It seems for certain that the center of the Early Mycenaean settlement was in the southern part of the Kadmeia on the highest peak of the citadel. Later, most probably following the completion of the fortification program, the city was extended to the north and presumably to the lower areas of the Kadmeian hill system. The Early Mycenaean architectural phases on the higher

11 For the first report, see H. WALTER, "Ανασκαφή στο λόφο Κολώνα, Αίγινα", AAA 14 (1981) 182-184; on the general problems of this period, see now S. DIETZ, *The Argolid at the Transition to the Mycenaean Age* (1991) *passim*.

12 V. ARAVANTINOS, "Η μυκηναϊκή οχύρωση της Καδμείας", *Επετηρίς της Εταιρείας Βοιωτικών Μελετών* 1 (1988) 113-136; IDEM, "La fortificazione micenea di Tebe. I risultati degli scavi recenti sulla Cadmeia", *Colloqui del Sodalizio tra studiosi dell'arte* 9-10-11 (1991) 89-104, pls. 49-56.

sections have suffered serious damage from erosion and continuous building activity from Late Helladic IIIA onwards.

The population of Thebes in the time of the palaces was concentrated on the spacious citadel and was protected by fortifications. Estimations of this population at about 8,000 individuals seems quite logical¹³. It is very interesting that the survey and excavation have not provided evidence for the existence of Mycenaean habitation in the immediate area of the plains or the hills around Thebes. The closest settlements at Harma (Eleon), Kallithea, Daulosis, Hypaton and Hylike are ca. ten kilometers away from the Kadmeia¹⁴. There is little doubt that the lower parts of the Theban plain were inappropriate for cultivation during the greater part of the agricultural year; the area south of Thebes and Potniai has not been studied in survey projects. In spite of this the absence of any substantial Mycenaean remains in the areas around the Kadmeia citadel presents a problem.

On the other hand we believe that during the period of the Mycenaean palaces the kingdom of Thebes was strong enough and could exercise its control in the south, southeast and southwest provinces of Boeotia in a way not unlike the domination exercised by the city in historical times. Undoubtedly, the domination of Orchomenos extended to the north and northeast and most probably to parts of East Lokris. The existence of two kingdoms in Boeotia, which led to antagonism in the historical period, was certainly the case in LH III times¹⁵. It is probably reflected in the well known tradition of Herakles attacking the hydraulic constructions and the dams in the Kopaic Basin and fighting against the Minyan dynasty of Orchomenos, which resulted in the flooding of the lake bed. Some texts on tablets and sealings found in rescue excavations on the Kadmeia suggest the interest of Thebes in the area of Thespieae, as well as in the islands of Aegina and Euboea¹⁶. A sherd of an inscribed stirrup jar has been found in Livadostra (Kreusis), one of the harbors of Thebes on the south coast of Boeotia¹⁷.

In the 1930's, Keramopoulos proposed, against accepted opinion, the idea of a king-entrepreneur engaged in craft production and in overseas enterprises, not unlike a medieval dynast residing in his palace. Excavations and Linear B studies have proved that Keramopoulos's reconstruction was more than plausible¹⁸. Finds from excavations in the central area of the Kadmeia in the early 1960's greatly expanded our knowledge of the importance of Mycenaean Thebes and its relations with the Aegean and the Mediterranean world. However, for a considerable time the main questions of scholars focused on the date, style and extent of the Old and New Palaces and on the Phoenician, presumably Semitic, colonization of Thebes. Theories have been proposed of a very old Egyptian presence in Boeotia and of the influence of Egyptians and others on drainage operations in the Kopaic lake. These speculations have been hardening into dogma, a process favored by the almost

13 Cf. SYMEONOGLOU (*supra* n. 10) 69, 154; also, W.A. McDONALD and G. RAPP (eds.), *The Minnesota Messenia Expedition* (1972) 254 ff.

14 Cf. D. KONSOLA, *Προμυκηναϊκή Θήβα* (1981) *passim* and especially 179 ff. On site distribution, see R. HOPE SIMPSON and O.T.P.K. DICKINSON, *A Gazetteer of Aegean Civilization in the Bronze Age* (1979) 235 ff.

15 On this and other relevant problems, see R. BUCK, *A History of Boeotia* (1979) 38-41; more recently, W.D. NIEMEIER, "La struttura territoriale della Grecia micenea", in F. PRONTERA (ed.), *Geografia storica della Grecia Antica* (1991) 123 ff., especially 136-138; and most recently, V. ARAVANTINOS, "Principal and Secondary Centers in Mycenaean Boeotia", *International Conference on The Periphery of the Mycenaean World* (in press).

16 See for example V. ARAVANTINOS, "Mycenaean Place-Names from Thebes: The New Evidence", *Minos* 20-22 (1987) (*Studies Chadwick*) 33-40.

17 Cf. W.A. HEURTLEY, "Notes on the Harbours of South Boeotia and Sea-Trade between Boeotia and Corinth in Prehistoric Times", *BSA* 26 (1923-1925) 38-45.

18 See A. KERAMOPOULLOS, "Αι βιομηχανίαι και το εμπόριον του Κάδμου", *ArchEph* (1930) 29-58.

total absence of publication of the material from the extensive excavations in the town and the cemeteries in the surrounding hills¹⁹. It must be emphasized that it is very difficult to determine by means of stratigraphy, pottery sequence and the orientation and width of the foundation walls whether a particular ruin is part of the main palace or its annexes or part of a private house. It is even quite hard to identify as palatial the remains in the center of the citadel (e.g., the famous "House of Kadmos") and to identify as non-palatial some important buildings on the extremities of the hill (e.g., the "Room of the Sealings" close to the eastern part of the fortifications). Also, a group of oriental seals from a building in the center of Thebes does not prove the presence of an oriental (Syrian, Mitannian, Mesopotamian, Palestinian or Cypriot) population in the heart of Mycenaean Boeotia. *Mutatis mutandis*, the successful drainage of the Kopaic basin does not presuppose the presence of Egyptians in Boeotia. On the contrary, the above-mentioned imports and technical achievements are characteristic of the people of the palatial centers of Thebes and Orchomenos who continued Helladic traditions and merged them with Minoan and Aegean ones, maintaining contacts with Crete and Cyprus as well as with the Syro-Palestinian coast. It would appear that no other administrative center in southern Boeotia could challenge the control and supremacy of Thebes during LH III. Furthermore, its contact with the east Mediterranean coast and the Aegean sea was supported by a series of secondary, but flourishing sub-centers or harbor towns corresponding in general to the historical *poleis* of the coastal area (Anthedon, Aulis) and the hilly inland area (the *tetracomia* of Tanagra, Harma, Eleon, Pharai and Mykalessos). Theban control of the west coast of Euboea and the southern part of the island (Amarynthos, Karystos) is postulated only on the basis of textual evidence and must remain in question until more direct evidence is available. On the other hand there is almost no doubt that the small settlements close to and around the Asopos Valley, the historical frontier of Plataia and Thebes, and Thespieae, Thisbe and the dry plains around the lake of Hylike were in Theban territory or at least in the Theban sphere of control or influence. Thus in LH III the Mycenaean state of Thebes could have supported a minimum population of 30,000 and a maximum of 50,000, not unlike Pylos, if we accept that the area of Boeotia in the historical period supported from 60,000 to 100,000 people, analogous to that of contemporary Messenia²⁰. The same number, from 30,000-50,000 inhabitants, can be postulated for the kingdom of Orchomenos (Erchomenos), which probably extended beyond the frontiers of historical and modern Boeotia into the country of Opuntian Lokris. This assumption seems quite logical as no other powerful kingdoms in the area of Kopais and East Lokris could question the power of Orchomenos at that period, and the ports of Halai and Larymna are both situated relatively nearby, on the shore of the northern Euboean gulf.

If the dependent or semi-dependent personnel in the service of the Palace of Pylos is estimated at ca. 4,000, we have to postulate an approximately equal, possibly a bit smaller, number for the Palace of Thebes²¹. The palace workforce, in our view the major part of the Theban population living on the Kadmeia citadel, depended on the payments and rations distributed by the palatial administration. On the other hand rural or village communities all over the kingdom had special economic relations to the central power as far as we can see from operations described laconically in the texts of the tablets, the sealings and the inscribed stirrup jars. It seems possible that whereas palatial livestock were widely distributed within

19 A concise presentation of the excavations in Thebes can be found in K. DEMA KOPOULOU and D. KONSOLA, *The Archaeological Museum of Thebes* (1981); on the various interpretations of the findings, see R. EDWARDS, *Kadmos the Phoenician* (1979), with bibliography.

20 See McDONALD and RAPP (*supra* n. 13) 254-256.

21 Cf. HALSTEAD (*supra* n. 5) *passim*. See esp. S. HILLER, "Dependent Personnel in Mycenaean Texts", in HELTZER and LIPINSKI (*supra* n. 7) 53 ff., especially 60, 61.

the territory of each palace, agricultural activities were concentrated in the vicinity of the main residences and in the major sub-centers.

In the documents of series Of and in the texts of the sealings of the class Wu, discovered during rescue excavations in two separate plots on the Kadmeia, there is some good evidence to show that Theban livestock were handled in exactly the same manner as in other contemporary Aegean administrative centers. In the texts of the above mentioned tablets and sealings, animals are registered and in some cases their final destinations were places of a religious or cultic character. In some cases a part of the offerings may have come from outside the palatial system itself. Generally speaking sanctuaries and holy places and the offerings for them are treated in the texts as an integral part of the palatial economy and show palatial incorporation of the religious authority²². Rations for the sanctuaries most likely supported religious personnel, while raw materials registered in other similar disbursements supported craft production. On the other hand live animals disbursed to cult places, as in the case of Wu sealings, were perhaps sacrificed and their meat and pelts redistributed or used by the administration²³. The Wu texts speak of various domestic animals delivered presumably at Thebes on special occasions, which were accompanied and registered by scribes who used at least 23 seals attributed to officials or local authorities. The high rank, political, religious or social, of some of them is attested by the sealings created by the impression of precious gold rings or sealstones with cultic representations. In my opinion, based on contextual and archaeological observations, the sealings were once kept in what E. French would call a "religious store"²⁴. Thus the real character of the "Room of the Sealings" quite clearly emerges from economic and religious expressions found either in these texts or from the material remains: steatite buttons, terracotta figurines of well known Mycenaean types and small stirrup jars which once undoubtedly contained perfumed oil. Fragments of larger vessels, a stone vase and several miscellaneous objects attest to the character of the small room which was used both for religious purposes and for storage. We have no idea where the sanctuaries of the Theban kingdom were located and where exactly religious ceremonies took place. On the analogy of other Mycenaean centers, some of the sacred places could have been in the vicinity of the Kadmeia citadel if not within its circuit wall and in the vast area of the palace or main administrative center. Some evidence of archaeological nature comes from St. George Square very close to the Hospital and the Museum where excavation to bedrock has revealed certain traces of a sacrificed animal (bull?), remains of a linen cloth and weapons in a pyre and the head of an idol of the type known from the shrines at Mycenae and Tiryns. In the same excavation very rich deposits from a Classical temple, perhaps that of Demeter Thesmophoros, came to light. In another quite recent excavation, this time outside the circuit wall and to the southeast of the Kadmeia, four typical Mycenaean figurines were found in some rock cavities but without any other Mycenaean material. Given the cultic connections of

22 See ARAVANTINOS (*supra* n. 6) *passim* and especially 259-260.

23 See ARAVANTINOS (*supra* n. 6) 255-257; IDEM, "The Mycenaean Inscribed Sealings from Thebes: Problems of Content and Function", in T.G. PALAIMA (ed.), *Aegean Seals, Sealings and Administration, Proceedings of the NEH-Dickson Conference, Austin 1989*, *Aegaeum* 5 (1990) 163-165. Cf. also the speculative analysis by J.-P. OLIVIER and J.L. MELENA, "Les inscriptions en linéaire B des nodules de Thèbes", *BCH* 114 (1990) 171-184, especially 172-175. It is more than likely that many more sealings similar to those recovered from the excavation have been lost; thus, the attempt to estimate numbers of animals on the basis of those recorded elsewhere seems a futile exercise.

24 See E. FRENCH, "Cult Places at Mycenae", in *Sanctuaries and Cults* 45.

the place, later occupied by the Sanctuary of Herakles, the later finds could be considered as *ex voto* offerings in a rural sanctuary in the vicinity during the Late Helladic period ²⁵.

By utilizing both the archaeological and the archival evidence, we can better understand the palatial administration and the society of Mycenaean Thebes. Excavations on the Kadmeia hill fortunately have yielded many finds and ongoing excavations have produced almost two hundred new tablets and fragments of tablets ²⁶. These will be added to the small corpus of 43 tablets and 56 inscribed sealings already known from Thebes. Among the old, rediscovered pieces, a clay sealing from the excavations of the so-called Old Kadmeion by Keramopoulos is, as far as I know, unique among Mycenaean sealings. It has a flat, almost discoid form; on one of the two faces is the impression of a gold ring bearing a heraldic representation: two antithetic bulls flanking a tripartite tree. Two other trees of the same shape appear to bend over the backs of the seated animals and fill the remaining space. But of the most interest for writing practices is the other face of the sealing with its slightly elevated extremities, the hole from a very thin string and traces of leather, parchment or, less probably, papyrus all over its surface ²⁷. As far as I know, this sealing is the first certain archaeological evidence that perishable materials (parchment, papyrus, wood), as in the contemporary Near East and Egypt and all over the civilized world in historical times, were used for texts of non-economic character or for correspondence, in Mainland Greece ²⁸.

I could speak for hours on the material from old and new excavations at Thebes and make use of contemporary socio-economic models and theories to reconstruct the social system of the city in the Late Bronze Age. Certainly even the most humble pottery has tremendous importance and serious implications in such a reconstruction ²⁹. But, unfortunately, the bulk of the excavated ceramic material has not yet been adequately published or even preliminarily examined. Limited time at my disposal does not permit the evaluation of domestic, plain or decorated pottery but the inscribed stirrup jars from the Kadmeia have been thoroughly examined by various scholars ³⁰.

However I will speak of the so-called Arsenal where the first and the latest tablets in Linear B from Thebes have come to light (Pl. LXXIIa). This is, I think, one of the best cases to demonstrate how texts and archaeological material studied together help us to better understand Mycenaean palatial and social activities. Not far from the center of the Kadmeia and the excavated remains of the Mycenaean palace, a rescue excavation late in 1963 and in the beginning of 1964 on the D. Pavlogiannopoulos property (Pelopidou Street 26) revealed

25 Quite recent and unpublished excavation material from Tachi (Potniae), 2 kilometers from the Kadmeia, suggests the existence of a Mycenaean predecessor to the Sanctuary of Demeter at that site. Cf. M. ROCCHI, "Potinija e Demeter Thesmophoros a Tebe", *SMEA* 19 (1978) 63 ff.

26 The excavations as well as the cleaning of the tablets, many in a bad state of preservation, are in progress. Most of the tablets were unearthed in the late fall of 1994. A concise but very informative report with some color photographs of a few of the better preserved pieces has been published in *Kathimerini*, 15 January, 1995. A preliminary report of the discovery and the contents of the texts will be presented in May 1995 at the 11th International Colloquium on Mycenaean Studies in Salzburg, Austria.

27 See ARAVANTINOS (*supra* n. 23) pl. 24.

28 Cf. A. UCHTEL, "The Archives of Mycenaean Greece and the Ancient Near East", in HELTZER and LIPINSKI (*supra* n. 7) 20 ff., 30.

29 See on this topic the interesting study by I. TOURNAVITOU, "Practical Use and Social Function: A Neglected Aspect of Mycenaean Pottery", *BSA* 87 (1992) 181-210, with up-to-date bibliography.

30 The basic reference is still the article by H.W. CATLING, J.F. CHERRY, R.E. JONES and J.T. KILLEN, "The Linear B Inscribed Stirrup Jars and West Crete", *BSA* 75 (1980) 49 ff.

poorly preserved remains of magazines where valuable goods were stored, among them a small group of 24 very fragmentary and worn palm-leaf tablets ³¹.

The text of the tablets is obscure, consisting of one ideographic sign O followed by numerals and preceded by personal names, most likely in the genitive ³². No convincing interpretation has been proposed so far for the contents of this small series. On the other hand the archaeological context of these texts is a very rich one: weapons, both offensive and defensive, horse and chariot equipment, ivory objects and many small finds among them two heavy metal weights. This small complex of magazines has been called the "Arsenal" from the presence of considerable quantities of military and horse or cavalry equipment.

In the year 1980, on the opposite side of the street in the plot of M. Loukos, a building apparently belonging to the same palatial complex of magazines and workshops, which seems to have occupied the central part and the east slope of the Kadmeia, yielded a large number of ivory pieces, some clearly combs, some of them unfinished ³³. In the debris of the two hastily excavated rooms a series of eight small stone weights of excellent quality were uncovered. The values of these weights in grams are 5, 20, 40, 60, and 432. Another weight of 80 grams was found in an excavation on the east slope of the citadel and to all of these we must add the perfectly preserved weights from the Arsenal of 2915 and 2045 grams each (Pl.LXXIIIa). The examination of the series of Mycenaean (LH IIIA/B) weights discovered at Thebes has led to very interesting conclusions ³⁴. According to the evidence offered by the excavated weights which are primarily of Minoan type and by some special signs of Linear B, the Mycenaean weight system was rather simple. The study of a complete series of weights, contemporary to the tablets, postulated by J. Chadwick some years ago as the ideal way of solving the problem is now possible at Thebes ³⁵. The largest unit, which Evans identified with the help of the stone block (anchor?) decorated with an octopus, could be the equivalent of the Classical talanton (talentum) represented by the Linear B sign of a balance. The talent seems to have had an average weight of just over 29 kilograms. The evidence from the 2915 gram weight from Thebes, certainly used for measuring metals, wool or ivory, implies that a talent of ca. 29150 grams was in use by the end of the 14th century by the palatial administration of the Kadmeia. Our weight is identified with the measure LANA (wool), probably the amount of wool produced by a sheep and is equivalent to 3 of the 30 M to which a talent is subdivided. The sign M is a double one representing a double mina (dimnaion) of the sixty (minas) into which a talent was divided. A mina, in our case, could be equivalent to ca. 485 grams and the Mycenaean weight unit of ca. 60/61(60,6) grams. K. Petruso, working with Minoan weights belonging to the sexagesimal system from the island of Crete and the Minoanizing centers of the Cyclades and the Mainland, has fixed the value of the weight unit to ca. 61 grams ³⁶. The evidence from Thebes confirms Petruso's arguments and suggests that the use of this system was diffused throughout the Mycenaean world.

31 J. CHADWICK, "Linear B Tablets from Thebes", *Minos* 10 (1970) 115-137; L. GODART and A. SACCONI, *Les tablettes en linéaire B de Thèbes* (1978); J.L. MELENA, J.-P. OLIVIER, "TITHEMY. The Tablets and Nodules in Linear B from Tiryns, Thebes and Mycenae", *Minos* Suppl. 12 (1991).

32 The numerals vary from 1 to 30. See TITHEMY (*supra* n. 31) 40.

33 See A. SAMPSON, "La destruction d'un atelier palatial mycénien à Thèbes", *BCH* 109 (1985) 21-29.

34 ARAVANTINOS, "Μυκηναϊκά σταθμιά από τη Θήβα", in *Proceedings of the B' International Congress of Boeotian Studies, Levadeia 1992* (in press).

35 J. CHADWICK, *The Mycenaean World* (1976) 103.

36 K. PETRUSO, *Systems of Weight in the Bronze Age Aegean*, Diss. Indiana University (1978); IDEM, *Ayia Irini: The Balance Weights*, *Keos* VIII (1992); cf. A. MICHAELIDOU, "The Lead Weights from Akrotiri: The Archaeological Record", in D.A. HARDY (ed.), *Thera and the Aegean World* III 1 (1990) 407 ff.; EADEM, "Μετρικό σύστημα και σχέσεις παραγωγής στο Αιγαίο στην Ύστερη Εποχή του Χαλκού", *Meletemata* 10 (1990) 65 ff.

This was the status of our research in Thebes until the beginning of November 1993 when the first fragmentary page tablet came to light quite accidentally in the bottom of a 3 meters deep ditch opened by the Municipal Water Company exactly 30 years after the excavation of the neighboring "Arsenal" (Pl. LXXIIa). The tablet, TH Av 100, was soon joined by a second fragment of a sizable one of the same page form. Their find place which corresponds to the continuation of the Arsenal complex under the pavement of Pelopidou Street posed a serious problem to the Ninth Ephorate in that we had to assume that an important part of the Mycenaean Archives lay under that part of the street (Pl. LXXIIb). As I said before, we were fully aware of the importance of that area for the administrative and industrial activities of the Mycenaean palace at Thebes. On the other hand, both tablets, although in a fragmentary state and preserving less than a quarter of the original, convey very useful information about the complexities of the palatial magazines on the Kadmeia and most likely refer to rations distributed by the central administration to craft workers, both male and female. We know from Pylos, for example, that almost one third of the palatial dependents received food rations. In both tablets Av 100 and 101, the ideogram *120 GRA (grain) usually interpreted as wheat is present in close relation to common, professional or personal names like *ku-na-ki-si* (γυναιξι), *wi-ri-ne-u* (ρίνεύς), *e-re-u-te-ri* (ἐλευθηρι from ἐλευθερῶ), *po-me-ne* (ποιμένες), *a-ko-da-mo* (Ἀρχόδαμος), *zo-wa* (personal name), *ma-di-je* and *ko-ru-we*. The last two most possibly denote professional occupations but are less clear in their Greek transcription. At least in some cases and on analogies from the archives of Pylos, Mycenae and Knossos it seems that here the transaction is indeed a monthly ration of some kind of grain called in the case of the ideogram *120 *si-to* (σίτος). Very interesting indeed is the entry *ku-su-to-ro-qa* (ξυστροφά, ξυντροπά) perhaps an expression denoting the total of the grain recorded on that particular tablet, clearly an administrative or economic term.

The new evidence is very important although preliminary and incomplete as the excavation, in what seems to be part of the central administrative headquarters of the Mycenaean kingdom of Thebes, is still in an early stage and will continue in the upcoming months. A recent revision of the identifications of the ideograms *120 and *121 attempted by R. Palmer is worthy of attention³⁷. Her proposal to identify *120 as barley and *121 as wheat is attractive and makes sense in most of the Linear B texts. On the other hand disbursements for religious purposes show that in those cases *121 predominates while *120 is used mainly as rations for slaves or workers and as a land-measure. Palmer's conclusions about the identification of Mycenaean grains must await new evidence and why not from Thebes? The evidence could be purely textual or even archaeological with tablets bearing ideograms being found in the same place as the actual remains of various grains.

Aside from these tantalizing speculations, I think the new evidence from the center of the Kadmeia citadel is of primary importance for the understanding of Mycenaean society in a powerful kingdom around the end of the 14th or the beginning of the 13th century. Using both textual and archaeological material from the excavations in Pelopidou Street, we can begin to visualize a dynamic society seeking resources abroad while maintaining a large workforce in an extensive citadel at home during a period of population pressure. With some good luck everyday activities in this part of the Kadmeia can be explained but much more remains to be done in order to produce a sure understanding of Mycenaean society.

Vassilis L. ARAVANTINOS

37 See R. PALMER, "Wheat and Barley in Mycenaean Society", in J.-P. OLIVIER (ed.), *Mykenaiika. Actes du IXe Colloque international sur les textes mycéniens et égéens* (Athènes, 2-6 octobre 1990), BCH Suppl. XXV (1992), 475ff., especially 490-491; cf. EADEM, "Subsistence Rations at Pylos and Knossos", *Minos* 24 (1989) 89-124.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Pl. LXXIIa Plan of the Kadmeia citadel. The hatched space shows the find spots of the tablets discovered in 1963/4 and 1993/4.
- Pl. LXXIIb Thebes. Kadmeia. A group of LH IIIA/B weights from the eastern part of the Kadmeia.
- Pl. LXXIIIa Thebes. Kadmeia. D. Pavlogiannopoulos plot, "The Arsenal". Excavated in 1963/4 (N. Platon - E. Touloupa). Two more tablets were discovered here in 1994 (V. Aravantinos).
- Pl. LXXIIIb Thebes. Kadmeia. Odos Pelopidou. The area of the excavation of the remains of the Archives under the pavement of the street. The Municipal Water Co. pipe.



