

STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN THE PATTERN OF SETTLEMENT DURING THE SHAFT GRAVE PERIOD ON THE GREEK MAINLAND

If we are to judge the settlements and settlement patterns during the phases MH III and LH I, that is the Shaft Grave Period on the Greek Mainland, we have to take into consideration that despite increased research efforts during the past decades very little has changed in as much as the composition of our archaeological sources is characterized by a marked discrepancy in quality between grave finds on the one hand and settlement finds on the other hand. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the whole period is named after a particular type of tomb. The statement that during the Shaft Grave Period in some regions of the Greek Mainland there existed a social hierarchy with a ruling upper class is strictly speaking based only on the evidence of the grave finds. As a matter of fact it is doubtful whether our perception of the Shaft Grave Period would be the same, if there were instead of the Shaft Graves of Mycenae only settlement finds at our disposal. The latter still offer such a fragmentary picture that an answer to the question what changes accompanied the social rise of the upper class can only partially be given¹. Nevertheless, we can say for certain that the nature of settlements during the Shaft Grave Period underwent significant changes compared to the previous phases of the Middle Helladic Period. In my paper I will refer to some aspects of this change concentrating on the eastern half of the Greek Mainland from Thessaly in the north to the Northeastern Peloponnese in the south.

The obstacles which hinder a well founded judgement of the settlements of the Shaft Grave Period are varied. Regarding the architecture and the layout of the settlements the obstacles are obvious. There simply are only very few architectural remains of this period, even less to speak of settlement plans. Ironically, it is the time of the richest shaft graves of Mycenae in particular, the phase LH I, for which there is an almost complete lack of architecture. Regarding the settlement patterns, however, there are other factors which detrimentally affected the archaeology of the Shaft Grave Period. I herewith particularly refer to the difficulties in the chronological subdivision of Middle Helladic Pottery as well as the problem in defining the pottery used during LH I, especially since the latter, as is well known, is notorious for its "low visibility" in surveys². All these difficulties in definition lead to the fact that in extensive as well as intensive surveys often only a rough chronological framework distinguishing for instance between "Middle Helladic" and "Late Helladic" is used as the basis for pottery classification. It goes without saying that a lack of fine chronological subdivision of the pottery from the beginning rules out the possibility to define the characteristics of the settlement patterns during relatively short periods of time, as for instance the Shaft Grave Period.

1 M.K. DABNEY and J.C. WRIGHT, "Mortuary Customs, Palatial Society and State Formation in the Aegean Area: A Comparative Study", *Celebrations*, 47-49 and n. 31.

2 J.B. RUTTER, "Some Thoughts on the Analysis of Ceramic Data Generated by Site Surveys", *Archaeological Survey in the Mediterranean Area* (1983), 137-142; O.T.P.K. DICKINSON, "Mycenaean Geography: An Archaeological Viewpoint", *Mycenaean Geography, Proceedings of the Cambridge Colloquium, September 1976* (1977), 22.

Even more problematic is the fact that by using only a rough chronological framework the impression of a settlement continuity may be gained which does not correspond to the actual situation. If, for instance, during a survey MH and LH pottery is found at a particular site, the assumption of a continuous occupation through these periods must be considered premature, since an occupational gap, for example within the MH period might exist, which could not be detected because of the rough chronological pottery classification used. That these considerations are not merely based on theory can be shown by the results of the Nemea Valley Archaeological Project, which also prove what interesting insights may be gained if MH and LH pottery is chronologically classified as finely as possible³. Thus, it becomes obvious that the Valley of Nemea following EH III, was not inhabited during most of the Middle Helladic Period. It was not till MH III, that is the early Shaft Grave Period, that a reoccupation of the valley took place, which in the following period lasted until LH IIIB. These results pointing to a settlement gap during MH I and MH II and a resettlement in MH III are particularly convincing, since they are not only based on the intensive survey conducted in the valley, but also on the results of the excavations at Tsoungiza, the main site of this micro-region. Interestingly enough during the Shaft Grave Period similar resettlement processes following a long occupational gap seem to have occurred in other valley systems at the border of the Argolid and the Corinthia as well as possibly in the Southeastern Argolid⁴. According to this, it is likely that at least on the Northeastern Peloponnese we are dealing with a pattern of settlement expansion during the Shaft Grave Period into regions, which were previously uninhabited for a long time span. Hitherto, as far as I know, this phenomenon finds no equivalent outside of the Northeastern Peloponnese, but it should be mentioned that this might be only due to the inconclusive present state of research.

The next change in the manner of settlement during the Shaft Grave Period, which should be pointed out, consists of a rising interest in fortificational aspects, when choosing a suitable location for a settlement. Thus, starting with MH III a number of sites of acropolis type were newly founded in various regions of the Greek Mainland⁵. In this context belong sites such as Kiapha Thiti in Attica⁶ and Panakton in the plain of Skourta in Boeotia⁷. Perhaps also Petra, a former rocky peninsula in the Thessalian Lake Karla, should be mentioned among these sites⁸. At least the oldest Middle Bronze Age pottery from this unfortunately not yet sufficiently explored site of Petra, in my opinion, does not go back further than the Shaft Grave Period⁹. Pottery assignable to the Shaft Grave Period however seems to abound here, and this is reminiscent of the situation at Kiapha Thiti.

What conclusions can be drawn from the founding of these settlements? It would seem to me that on the one hand they point to a greater need for protection, an element clearly underlined by the building of the fortification system at Kiapha Thiti in the

3 J.C. WRIGHT *et alii*, *Hesperia* 59 (1990), 609, 641.

4 J.B. RUTTER, *AJA* 97 (1993), 781; A. LAMBROPOULOU, *The Middle Helladic Period in the Corinthia and the Argolid: An Archaeological Survey* (1991), 145-147, 287-294.

5 S. DIETZ, *The Argolid at the Transition to the Mycenaean Age: Studies in the Chronology and Cultural Development in the Shaft Grave Period* (1991), 294.

6 H. LAUTER, "Die protomykenische Burg auf Kiapha Thiti in Attika", *Transition. Le monde égéen du Bronze moyen au Bronze récent. Actes de la 2e Rencontre égéenne int. de l'Université de Liège* (18-20 avril 1988), *Aegaeum* 3 (1989), 145-9; J. MARAN, *Kiapha Thiti: Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen II.2: 2. Jt. v. Chr.: Keramik und Kleinfunde, Marburger Winckelmann-Programm 1990* (1992).

7 RUTTER (*supra* n. 4), 781 and n. 146; E.B. FRENCH, *AR* 38 (1992), 29-31 (for Panakton).

8 V. MILOJCIC, *AA* 1955, 222-230, fig. 22; ID., *AA* 1960, 150-163.

9 J. MARAN, *Die deutschen Ausgrabungen auf der Pevkakia-Magula in Thessalien III: Die mittlere Bronzezeit* (1992), 244-245.

beginning of MH III. This need for protection in turn probably derives from a rise in conflicts and warlike encounters, a factor which is also reflected by the improvement of weaponry and the often martial iconography used during the Shaft Grave Period. On the other hand the founding of new sites of acropolis type seems to be linked to the wish to control trade routes and strategically important areas. Kiapha Thiti, for instance, as was shown by H. Lauter¹⁰, is situated at the bifurcation of two important natural routes. The first coming from Athens and leading to the silver mines of Lavrion at the southern tip of Attica; the second leading over a pass to the eastern coast of Attica.

The hitherto mentioned changes in the manner of settlement during the Shaft Grave Period concerned solely processes of settlement expansion, either by the opening up of new micro-regions, or by the choice of new settlement locations. However, what about the settlements that are characterized by a long term occupation from the beginning of the Middle Helladic to the Mycenaean Age? Do they also show signs of changes during the Shaft Grave Period, or do they show a continuation of Middle Helladic traditions into the Early Mycenaean Period? Although, as mentioned, there are only very few architectural remnants of the Shaft Grave Period, there are nevertheless reasons to believe that these settlements also underwent significant changes. To prove this I shall pick up an observation, which was first made in passing by K. Kilian¹¹. In order to define the nature of the phenomenon we are dealing with, the results of the excavations of V. Milojevic at Pevkakia-Magula are most suitable to be used.

In the main excavation area of this site, starting with phase 3 of the local Middle Bronze Age a specific structural pattern in the arrangement of houses was introduced. It consisted of rows of long rectangular houses concentrically arranged on low terraces¹². This structural pattern was maintained with only minor changes until the end of Middle Bronze Age Phase 6 at Pevkakia. Since the phases 3 to 6 of the Middle Bronze Age at Pevkakia cover the time span from the end of EH III to the end of MH II according to the southern Greek terminology¹³, this sequence at Pevkakia points to a remarkable architectural continuity throughout several centuries. However, this continuity came to an abrupt end after MBA phase 6, and after that the nature of the use of this part of the site changed fundamentally. Overlying the ruins of the houses, and partially lowered into them, there appeared cist graves, forming a small cemetery. This cemetery evidently was founded during phase 7 of the local MBA, but continued well into the LBA¹⁴. The question of where the houses of MBA phase 7 at Pevkakia were located could not be solved, since none of the excavation areas yielded architecture assignable to this particular phase. Because of this, even the possibility of a temporary shift of the settlement away from the magula to its vicinity cannot be ruled out. For our purpose it is relevant that this sudden change in the use of at least a portion of the hill belongs to the earlier Shaft Grave Period. Kilian was of the opinion that this sudden break in the settlement history of Pevkakia was

10 H. LAUTER, AA 1982, 299-315, fig. 5; D.K. HAGEL and H. LAUTER, in H. LAUTER ed., *Kiapha Thiti: Ergebnisse der Ausgrabung III.2: Eisenzeit, Marburger Winckelmann-Programm 1989* (1990), 9-12 fig. 1.

11 K. KILIAN, "Μυκηναϊκά ανάκτορα τῆς Ἀργολίδας. Ἀρχιτεκτονικὴ ἐξέλιξη ἀπὸ τὴν οἰκία τοῦ ἀρχηγοῦ στὸ ἀνάκτορο τοῦ WANAX", in *Πρακτικὰ τοῦ Β' Τοπικοῦ Συνεδρίου Ἀρχαϊκῶν Σπουδῶν Ἄργος 30 Μαΐου - 1 Ἰουνίου 1986* (1989), 39-40; K. KILIAN, "Ältere mykenische Residenzen", *Kolloquium zur ägäischen Vorgeschichte, Mannheim, 20.-22.2.1986, Schriften des Deutschen Archäologen-Verbandes IX* (1987), 124.

12 MARAN (*supra* n. 9), esp. 61-64, 409, Plan VIA-VIIIA; J. MARAN, "Zum mittelbronzezeitlichen Bebauungsschema auf der Pevkakia-Magula", *La Thessalie. Colloque int. d'archéologie: La Thessalie, 15 années de recherches (1975-1990), bilans et perspectives, Lyon, 17-22 avril 1990* (1994), 205-210.

13 MARAN (*supra* n. 9), 369-374, fig. 25.

14 MARAN (*supra* n. 9), 33-44, Plan VIIIB.

part of a general phenomenon extending from Thessaly to the Southern Peloponnese, and consisting of the establishment of cemeteries during the Shaft Grave Period in former habitation areas ¹⁵. According to Kilian this would indicate a supra regional recession in settlement activity, which does not coincide with our perception of the Shaft Grave Period as an era of significant progress after a long period of stagnation during most of the Middle Helladic.

Leaving the latter interpretation aside for a moment, there is a lot to be said in favour of Kilian's statement that the break in architectural continuity and the transformation of former habitation areas into burial grounds is a phenomenon of supra regional significance for the Shaft Grave Period. In this respect the so-called "intra muros burials", which are thought to be typical for the Middle Helladic, deserve our attention. In many cases of alleged burials "intra muros" there is a strong possibility that the expression "intra muros" does not apply, since at the time of the burial the relevant plot was not being used for settlement purposes any more ¹⁶. Before turning to examples for the last point I want to emphasize that it is not my intention to deny the existence of "intra muros burials" during the Middle Helladic and Early Mycenaean Periods categorically. On the contrary, it seems to me indisputable that the burial of infants and small children in simple pits or in vessels within the houses was quite common during the Middle Helladic. However, we have to be sceptical, whenever cist-graves with burials of adults are found in the immediate vicinity of houses, particularly when several of such burials appear in the same stratigraphic horizon. The chronological relationship between the architecture and the graves can often not be clarified, and thus the archaeological circumstances can suggest contemporaneity, while in reality we are dealing with the results of chronologically distinct events.

In Thessalian settlements alone, there are several examples of cist graves of the Shaft Grave Period, which were found close to houses and are reminiscent of the mentioned situation at Pevkakia-Magula. I particularly want to refer to the numerous cist graves uncovered by Chr. Tsountas at Sesklo ¹⁷, but similar graves are also known from Serelia, and perhaps also from Tsangli, Rini and Lianokladi ¹⁸. However, in none of these cases the available documentation is sufficient to establish with certainty the chronological relationship between the houses and the graves, and therefore we can only assume that these findings represent parallels to Pevkakia-Magula. In the eastern part of Central Greece the site of Kirra seemingly has provided a sequence of events similar to the situation at Pevkakia ¹⁹. In almost all excavation areas in Kirra, but especially in areas A and D, cist graves were found within the Middle Helladic habitation area, and, similar to Pevkakia, these cist graves with one exception were encountered only in the horizons of the Shaft Grave Period. Typically, the only cist grave found in Kirra before the phase "Helladique Moyen IIIB" was that of a child ²⁰. Although the documentation of the excavations at Kirra is not sufficient to give a chronological assessment of the relationship between the houses and the cist graves, it has to be considered that at least a part of the hill of Kirra during the Shaft Grave Period temporarily was kept from being covered by buildings and instead was used for burial purposes.

15 KILIAN (*supra* n. 11).

16 G. NORDQUIST, *A Middle Helladic Village: Asine in the Argolid* (1987), 95; DIETZ (*supra* n. 5), 275.

17 Chr. TSOUNTAS, *Αἱ προϊστορικαὶ ἀκροπόλεις Διμηνίου καὶ Σέσκλου* (1908), 132-147; MARAN (*supra* n. 9), 222-226.

18 A.J.B. WACE and M.S. THOMPSON, *Prehistoric Thessaly* (1912), 121, 133, 161, 191.

19 L. DOR, J. JANNORAY, H. and M. van EFFENTERRE, *Kirra. Étude de préhistoire phocidienne* (1960), 43-64, esp. 46-49, pls. III, VIII.

20 DOR, JANNORAY, van EFFENTERRE (*supra* n. 19), 47 (grave no. 33).

Turning to the Argolid, we now are able, thanks to the research of S. Dietz, to establish remarkable similarities to the previously described conditions at Pevkakia. Dietz also considers the customary designation of cist graves found within settlement areas as "intra muros" overly simplified, and he refers to the problem of clarifying the stratigraphical relationship between houses and graves. Furthermore Dietz's analysis of the settlements and graves of the Shaft Grave Period in the Argolid leads him to the conclusion that at several Argive sites during the transition from MH to LH traditional habitation areas were abandoned and thereafter transformed to burial grounds²¹. As examples for these drastical changes in the history of some settlements Dietz mentions the graves which were cut into the ruins of the houses on the Barbouna Hill at Asine²², as well as the small cemetery of the Shaft Grave Period at Lerna²³.

If we summarize the most important points mentioned, we may state that, just like Kilian thought, from Thessaly in the north to at least the Argolid in the south, a pattern of discontinuities in the history of settlements during the Shaft Grave Period emerges. The main similarity between the mentioned examples lies in the fact that parts of settlements, which in some cases were used continuously for several centuries as building plots suddenly were abandoned during the Shaft Grave Period and afterwards used for burial purposes. The change may be so marked that, as is the case at Pevkakia, we are unable to say for certain where the houses contemporary to the graves were located, or whether the *magula* was covered with houses at all. An additional similarity between the cases of graves located in former habitation areas, however, is that they usually are summed up under the heading "intra muros burials", and I believe that this classification is not a fortunate one. On the one hand, this classification has contributed to the disguising of the potential significance of the graves being dug into former habitation areas as possible signs of a break in settlement history. On the other hand, the expression "intra muros" probably does not even apply, since the respective areas used for burials in the eyes of the members of the community were no longer regarded as parts of the settlement. From a chronological viewpoint the mentioned discontinuities in the history of some settlements certainly do not constitute an exactly contemporary horizon. In some cases (like Pevkakia) the break dates to the beginning of MH III, in other cases (like Asine) it rather belongs to the transition from MH III to LH I. However, it always seems to be the Shaft Grave Period, which brings along radical changes in the use of settlement areas.

We now have to turn to the crucial question of interpreting the described discontinuities in the history of settlements during the Shaft Grave Period. As mentioned, Kilian saw them as signs of a recession of settlement activities, which, according to him, would contradict the assumption of expanding settlements during that time. In order to evaluate Kilian's interpretation it is important to look for structural comparisons to the described changes during the Shaft Grave Period, and in this respect it seems to me that especially the changes at the transition from EH II to EH III offer a suitable basis for comparison. At the transition from EH II to EH III a break in settlement continuity at many sites of the Greek Mainland can be observed, which is accompanied by drastic changes in the way habitation areas are used. For instance, we wish to point out the well known architectural changes accompanying the transition from Lerna III, with its magnificent "House of the Tiles", to Lerna IV, with its humble apsidal houses. Concerning the phenomenon of sudden change in the use of settlement areas, we can thus,

21 DIETZ (*supra* n. 5), 281-294, esp. 293.

22 I. and R. HÄGG, *ArchAnAth* 8 (1975), 154-158; NORDQUIST (*supra* n. 16), 85-86, 98-101, fig. 87; DIETZ (*supra* n. 5), 292.

23 J.L. CASKEY, *Hesperia* 27 (1958), 144; C.W. ZERNER, "Ceramics and Ceremony: Pottery and Burials from Lerna in the Middle and Early Late Bronze Ages", *Celebrations*, 23-34; DIETZ (*supra* n. 5), 285-6.

in a sense, note structural similarities between the changes at the transition from EH II to EH III and those during the Shaft Grave Period. Nevertheless, there are also serious differences. Thus, not once, as far as I know, were the mentioned discontinuities during the Shaft Grave Period preceded by a destruction of the settlement, nor is there any evidence that the era following the abandonment of former habitation areas in the Shaft Grave Period is characterized by a marked cultural set-back similar to the one Lerna underwent after the destruction of the "House of the Tiles". On the contrary, the quality of the grave goods in some of the cist graves is a strong argument against the opinion that the changed use of the former habitation areas was accompanied by a cultural decline or a general impoverishment.

Therefore, it seems to me that the interpretation of the discontinuities in so many settlements of the Shaft Grave Period as the result of a settlement recession is not convincing. This seems all the more true, since due to the lack of architectural remains we are in no position to give a qualitative appraisal of the settlements contemporary to the graves. In addition, the idea of interpreting the discontinuities as the result of war or invasion is highly unlikely, since there are no signs of destruction or of a cultural break between the earlier phases of the Middle Helladic and the Shaft Grave Period.

It seems to me that the interpretation of the phenomenon should rather be sought along the lines pointed out by S. Dietz, when he attributed the abandonment of former parts of the settlement to the desire to create entirely new habitation areas²⁴. This would correspond to the explanation I offered for the drastic break in the settlement history of the Pevkakia-Magula during the Shaft Grave Period, namely that the main reason for the abandonment of the traditional Middle Bronze Age architectural pattern was that in the Shaft Grave Period new demands regarding the lay-out of settlements arose, which could not be met by the old structural patterns²⁵. If we generalize this, we could assume that the breaks in settlement continuity during the Shaft Grave Period are connected with a restructuring and reorganization of the settlements²⁶. If this were true the discontinuities would not speak against but rather for an interpretation of the Shaft Grave Period as an era of significant progress, since they would be the result of the old settlement patterns being considered inadequate.

If we continue these thoughts along these lines, we are left, in closing, with two intriguing questions: first, how does it come that during a relatively short time span at different places of the Greek Mainland very similar decisions were made, namely that the traditional MH way of settlement was no longer adequate and that new habitation areas should be created; second, who was responsible for these decisions? In my opinion, but this is admittedly speculative, the changed socio-economic situation during the Shaft Grave Period provided the background for these events. It was not till the Shaft Grave Period that in different regions of the Greek Mainland the social differences within society had become so polarized that local or regional elites were in the position to make independent decisions of importance for the whole society and to enforce these decisions. In this case, the true meaning of the settlement discontinuities would be that of a turning point brought about by the conscious decisions of groups of peoples, and thus an important step towards the Mycenaean palatial society was taken.

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²⁴ DIETZ (*supra* n. 5), 293.

²⁵ MARAN (*supra* n. 9), 64, 410; MARAN (*supra* n. 12).

²⁶ J. MARAN, *PZ* 68 (1993), 160.