

# SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PROCESSES IN THE MYCENAEAN ARGOLID: THE EVIDENCE FROM THE MORTUARY PRACTICES \*

## 1. The problem: Mycenaean mortuary practices and social structure

The aim of this paper is to reconstruct social and political change in the Mycenaean Argolid, more precisely to understand the formation of a hierarchical society and a centralized political system through a detailed analysis of the mortuary practices of the period.

The question we need to address is: how should we approach and analyze mortuary data? And in the specific Mycenaean case, how can we overcome the problems of uneven research, robbed tombs, multiple burials, not to mention the removal of offerings by the Mycenaean themselves?

In the Argolid at least the first two problems are not so serious: this is the most thoroughly investigated area of the Mycenaean world<sup>1</sup> and the percentage of robbed tombs is relatively small. It is true that important tombs, like the tholoi of Mycenae, are robbed. However, if we want to examine social and political developments, we should not look only at Mycenae, nor only at the large and well documented cemeteries; we should examine all the sites, even the poor and peripheral ones; only then can we detect wider trends and changes (Pl. VIIa). Of course, the looted tombs are not the only problem; assessing the wealth of even the intact graves is a very difficult question. The solution I have adopted in my research<sup>2</sup> has been to note the *diversity* of objects inside a tomb simply by adding up the number of categories of funerary offerings (excluding pottery)

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\* Acknowledgements: I spent four very enjoyable and stimulating days at the *Politeia* Conference in Heidelberg; for this I would like to thank the organizers, Prof. W.-D. Niemeier and Prof. R. Laffineur, as well as Mrs. B. Niemeier. I am also grateful to the Faculty of Classics, Cambridge for support with the travel costs. Many thanks are due to Onno van Nijf, this time for pointing out parallels from the Classical and Roman period and for preparing the illustrations.

1 The main publications of important Argive cemeteries are:

Mycenae, the Shaft Graves: G. KARO, *Die Schachtgräber von Mykenai* (1930-33); G.E. MYLONAS, *Ο Ταφικός Κύκλος Β' των Μυκηνών* (1973); Mycenae, the tholoi: A.J.B. WACE, "Excavations at Mycenae. The Tholos Tombs", *BSA* 25 (1923), 283-402; Mycenae, the chamber tomb cemeteries: A.J.B. WACE, *Chamber Tombs at Mycenae* (1932); A. XENAKI-SAKELLARIOU, *Οι θαλαμωτοί τάφοι των Μυκηνών* (1985); Prosymna: C.W. BLEGEN, *Prosymna: the Helladic Settlement Preceding the Argive Heraeum* (1937); Berbati: G. SÄFLUND, *Excavations at Berbati 1936-7* (1965), 14-81; E.J. HOLMBERG, *A Mycenaean Chamber Tomb near Berbati in Argolis* (1982); Dendra: A.W. PERSSON, *The Royal Tombs at Dendra near Midea* (1931); ID., *New Tombs at Dendra* (1942); P. ÅSTRÖM, *The Cuirass Tomb and other Finds at Dendra. Part I: The Chamber Tombs*, (1977); Tiryns: K. MÜLLER, *Das Kuppelgrab von Tiryns, Tiryns VI* (1975), 1-4; R. WOLF, *Die Nekropole am Prophitis Elias bei Tiryns, Tiryns VIII* (1975), 8-56; Asine: O. FRÖDIN and A.W. PERSSON, *Asine: Results of the Swedish Excavations* (1938), 354-421; Argos, Deiras: J. DESHAYES, *Argos: les fouilles de la Deiras* (1966).

2 S. VOUTSAKI, *Society and Culture in the Mycenaean World: an Analysis of Mortuary Practices in the Argolid, Thessaly and the Dodecanese* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1993).

found in the tomb<sup>3</sup>. The Mycenaean funerary assemblage is characterized by quality (*i.e.* fine craftsmanship), quantity and diversity. I chose to look at diversity rather than quantity of objects for two reasons: a. depositing a wide range of objects was an important consideration for the Mycenaeans themselves (one has only to look at the Shaft Grave assemblage), and b. diversity is much less sensitive to distorting factors such as incomplete publication, poor preservation and removal. Judging the quality of the offerings is a dangerous and ultimately subjective exercise: we know neither their symbolic significance, nor their relative exchange value. Estimating the value of objects on the basis of labour input is very problematic, on both theoretical and methodological grounds. It is important to emphasize that labour can only give us a measure of *cost*, which should not be confused with the *value* of an object<sup>4</sup>. A more complex point has to be added: labour can be used as a measure of cost in our society, where labour is a commodity that can be bought and sold, but it is very doubtful if this notion can be projected to pre-market, pre-monetary economies<sup>5</sup>. A further problem with the energy expenditure measure is that it would be very difficult to apply it to the Mycenaean funerary assemblage, which is characterized by an enormous variety of objects, materials, forms and techniques<sup>6</sup>. For all these reasons the diversity index is preferable, as it provides us with a practical, simple and reasonably objective way to measure and compare the wealth of tombs. It has to be added that in the analysis the tombs have not been treated as a 'closed box': I have noted, whenever possible, in which phase the valuable items were deposited inside the tomb, as we can often establish this with some certainty.

What we *cannot* say is with whom the offerings were placed. We are dealing with multiple tombs, reused over centuries, for which no age/sex data exist. If the sole aim of mortuary analysis is to assign rank to individuals by measuring energy expenditure in the treatment of the body, the size and construction of the tomb, the number of offerings, etc., then the Mycenaean data are hopeless. But is this the only aim of mortuary analysis?

To put the question differently: does treatment at death always reflect status in life? Is there always a direct correspondance between the mortuary record and social organization? This notion of *isomorphism* (to use the jargon of the New Archaeology of the 60s)<sup>7</sup> has been strongly criticized over the last fifteen years. Ritual practices *may* faithfully mirror social reality, but they may also distort and idealize social relationships<sup>8</sup>.

3 The diversity index for each tomb was calculated on the basis of a data-base consisting of 106 categories of valuable objects, classified by material, function and degree of elaboration.

4 For instance, a golden mask certainly required less labour than a bead decorated with granulation, but the very exclusive distribution of golden masks indicates that they had a very high social value and a very specific symbolic significance.

5 For a more detailed discussion see S. VOUTSAKI, "Value and Exchange in Pre-monetary Societies: Anthropological Debates and Aegean Archaeology", *Hydra* (1992), 42-53.

6 For a more thorough presentation of the theoretical and practical considerations behind the *diversity index*, see VOUTSAKI (*supra* n. 2), chapter 6.

7 The classic expositions of the systemic approach to mortuary practices are: L.R. BINFORD, "Mortuary Practices and their Potential", *Approaches to the Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practices, Memoirs of the Society for American Archaeology*, no 25 (1971), 208-243.; A. SAXE, *Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practices* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Michigan, 1970); J. TAINTER, "Social Inference and Mortuary Practices: an Experiment in Numerical Classification", *World Archaeology* (1975), 1-15. Useful discussions can be found in R. CHAPMAN, I. KINNES and K. RANDSBORG (eds.), *The Archaeology of Death* (1981).

8 I. HODDER, "The Identification and Interpretation of Ranking in Prehistory: a Contextual Perspective", *Ranking, Resource and Exchange*, 150-154. For extensive discussions on the relation between mortuary practices and social organization see I. MORRIS, *Burial and Ancient Society* (1987), 29-43; J. WHITLEY, *Style and Society in Dark Age Greece* (1991), 23-3; I. MORRIS, *Death-Ritual and Social Structure in Classical Antiquity* (1992), particularly 1-30; VOUTSAKI (*supra* n. 2), chapter 2.

The crucial factor is ideology, the way people think about themselves and choose to represent themselves. The relationship between ideology and social reality is a complex issue<sup>9</sup>, but my position can be clarified with some simple examples: in Imperial Rome some very conspicuous funerary structures were erected by wealthy freedmen<sup>10</sup>, the marginal social climbers of the period who attempted to break through the hierarchy of Roman orders. This indicates that mortuary forms are not necessarily about actual status held in life, but rather about aspirations and claims on status; therefore, mortuary practices can become a strategy to *acquire* status. To give another example: funerary inscriptions in classical Athens emphasized citizenship and denied social divisions within the *polis*<sup>11</sup>, providing thus an idealized representation rather than a faithful reflection of the social order. In both cases though, the funerary practices allow us to discern the organizing principles that govern social life: *ισονομία* in Athens, hierarchy in Rome.

Let us now examine the Mycenaean case. The question that has been discussed very much in the last few years is whether tomb types and levels of wealth correspond to specific social classes. Recent studies<sup>12</sup> have moved beyond the earlier simplifications that tholoi mean kings, chamber tombs mean middle class and pits or cists poor people.

But we have still to test our assumptions. The problem is not whether a type of tomb corresponds to a specific social class or not, but whether the problem of understanding the Mycenaean social structure begins and ends with this question. First of all, were there classes in Mycenaean society? Did social classes exist from the beginning of the period, or did they emerge only at a later stage? A further question: does a specific mortuary form have the same significance through time and across space? Does being buried in a tholos

9 The relationship between ideology and social reality (and even the existence of social reality as a separate entity) has been the main problem in neo-marxist and recently in post-structuralist debates. It would be futile to attempt to refer to these discussions in a footnote. Within archaeology some (more or less) useful discussions (tracing the shift of Cambridge-based theoretical archaeology from marxism through neo-marxism and structuralism to post-structuralism -a remarkable development in less than one decade !) can be found in I. HODDER (ed.), *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology* (1982); M. SPRIGGS (ed.), *Marxist Perspectives in Archaeology* (1984); D. MILLER and C. TILLEY (eds.), *Ideology, Power and Prehistory* (1984); M. SHANKS and C. TILLEY, *Re-Constructing Archaeology* (1987); T. YATES and I. BAPTY, *Archaeology after Structuralism: Post-Structuralism and the Practice of Archaeology* (1990).

10 See P. ZANKER, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (1988), 15, fig. 13; N. PURCELL, "Tomb and Suburb", *Römische Gräberstrassen. Selbstdarstellung, Status, Standard* (1987).

11 E.A. MEYER, "Epitaphs and Citizenship in Classical Athens", *JHS* 103 (1993), 99-121.

12 The discussion was initiated by Chr. TSOUNTAS and J. MANATT, *The Mycenaean Age* (1897), 131 and revived by O.T.P.K. DICKINSON, "Cist Graves and Chamber Tombs", *BSA* 78 (1983), 55-67. Other recent studies: M. ALDEN, *Bronze Age Population Fluctuations in the Argolid from the Evidence of Mycenaean Tombs* (1981), 19, 110-116; C.B. MEE and W.G. CAVANAGH, "Mycenaean Tombs as Evidence for Social and Political Organisation", *OJA* 3:3 (1984), 45-65; I. KILIAN-DIRLMEIER, "Beobachtungen zu den Schachtgräbern von Mykenai und zu den Schmuckbeigaben mykenischer Männergräber. Untersuchungen zur Sozialstruktur in späthelladischer Zeit", *JRGZM* 33 (1986), 159-98; W.G. CAVANAGH, "Cluster Analysis of Mycenaean Chamber Tombs", *Thanatos*, 161-9; P. DARQUE, "Les tholoi et l'organisation socio-politique du monde mycénien", *Thanatos*, 185-205; J. WRIGHT, "Death and Power at Mycenae: Changing Symbols in Mortuary Practices", *Thanatos*, 171-84; E.B. FRENCH, "'Dynamis' in the Archaeological Record at Mycenae", *Images of Authority. Papers Presented to J. Reynolds on the Occasion of her 70th Birthday, PCPS*, suppl. vol. 16 (1989), 122-30; W.G. CAVANAGH and C.B. MEE, "The Location of Mycenaean Chamber Tombs in the Argolid", *Celebrations*, 55-64; B. WELLS, "Death at Dendra: on Mortuary Practices in a Mycenaean Community", *Celebrations*, 125-39; C.B. MEE and W.G. CAVANAGH, "The Spatial Distribution of Mycenaean Tombs", *BSA* 85 (1990), 225-43; G. GRAZIADIO, "The Process of Social Stratification at Mycenae in the Shaft Grave Period: a Comparative Examination of the Evidence", *AJA* 95 (1991), 403-40.



mean the same in LH II and in LH IIIB, in Mycenae and in Kokla<sup>13</sup>? However, noting changes or differences in usage is only a first step; the next, and most crucial one, is to explain them. Why does the number of tholoi in use in the Argolid as a whole, but also in Mycenae decrease through time? Why is the tholos in Kokla poorly built, why is it only used for such a short period? We need to realize that the inquiry cannot stop at the equation of a tomb type with a social class<sup>14</sup>.

Therefore, I suggest that we should not discuss formal features such as burial in a tholos in isolation, but rather examine them within their spatial and temporal associations and against other aspects of the data. This will allow us to understand the social function of the monumental tombs and the lavish disposal of wealth with the dead.

To clarify and summarize my approach: my intention is not to identify social classes in the Mycenaean period. I see the elaboration of the mortuary sphere in the Mycenaean period as a social strategy; consequently, my aim is to observe how this strategy evolves and changes forms.

## 2. The data: differentiation in the Argive mortuary practices

Having discussed the relationship between mortuary practices and social structure, we now need to observe and discuss the spatial and temporal patterns in the development of the mortuary forms. The emphasis will be on the fluctuations in the deposition of wealth in the tombs and variation in the distribution of the main tomb types.

In the LH I period we can immediately notice a very asymmetrical distribution of wealth (Pl. VIIc-VIIIa). This is the peak of the Shaft Grave phenomenon with the enormous concentration of exotic and valuable goods in the Grave Circles of Mycenae (but one should keep in mind the robbed shaft graves in Lerna)<sup>15</sup>. The first chamber tombs, for instance in Mycenae and Prosymna, vary in wealth, but none is really rich. The other graves (mostly simple pits and cists) are consistently poor.

The LH II period (Pl. IXa-Xb) sees the abandonment of the Grave Circles and the adoption and spread of the tholos tomb. Even if we miss the crucial information from most tholoi (as they are robbed), we can still observe that the distribution of wealth becomes more even and gradual. This is because LH II represents the peak in the use of tholoi and/or rich chamber tombs in Mycenae, Prosymna, Berbati, Dendra and even in less important, peripheral sites such as Kazarma and Kokla. In this period, the deposition of wealth in chamber tombs reaches a peak; some of these tombs are large, carefully finished and, in a few cases, decorated<sup>16</sup>. The number of cists and pits declines; those that we have are poor.

In LH IIIA (Pl. XIa-XIIb) the distribution of wealth once more presents an asymmetrical pattern. This is due to two developments: a. the spread of the chamber tomb (in this period by far the majority of new chamber tombs is poor), and b. the decrease in

13 The question becomes more complex if we take regional variation into account; see DICKINSON (*supra* n. 12), MEE and CAVANAGH (*supra* n. 12) and VOUTSAKI (*supra* n. 2).

14 At the other end of the scale, it is tempting to attribute burials in pits and cists (which in the Argolid are consistently poor) to a lower social class. But we would still have to account for their decline in LH II and particularly in LH III, when we would expect to find a highly stratified social structure. See K. LEWARTOWSKI, this volume, pp. 103-112 for a more extensive discussion of Mycenaean cists and pits.

15 J.L. CASKEY, *Hesperia* 24 (1955), 32-4; ID., *Hesperia* 25 (1956), 155-7.

16 A good example of a rich, well cut chamber tomb with painted decoration on its façade is tomb II at Prosymna: BLEGEN (*supra* n. 1), 173-80, Pls. 38-9. For other chamber tombs with painted decoration (dating to LH II-LH III) see L. KONTORLI-PAPADOPOULOU, "Some Aspects Concerning Local Peculiarities of the Mycenaean Chamber Tombs", *Thanatos*, 152-3.

the number of tholoi. Many tholoi have fallen out of use; new ones are built only in Mycenae and Dendra (the situation in Tiryns is uncertain, as the two tholoi there cannot be dated), but the one in Dendra is abandoned before LH IIIA2. Thus, the use of tholoi becomes progressively restricted in Mycenae and perhaps Tiryns. But rich chamber tombs are still in use in Prosymna and Dendra and perhaps in Asine.

The patterns we have discerned in LH IIIA are accentuated in LH IIIB (Pl. XIII): the distribution of wealth becomes even more asymmetrical, as there are no tholoi outside the palatial centres and there do not seem to be any rich chamber tombs outside Mycenae. The period is characterized by a general decline in the levels of wealth in the tombs, as well as a decrease in the quality of construction and the size of the (chamber) tombs.

To summarize: we observe an increase in the deposition of wealth and a general elaboration of the mortuary forms in LH I-II, while in LH IIIA-B we see a sharper differentiation between the palatial centres and the other sites in the plain.

### 3. Discussion: social and political change in the Mycenaean Argolid

Having established some general trends, we should now attempt to interpret them.

To start with the LH I period: the group of people buried in the Shaft Graves in MH III-LH I form a strictly defined group that distances itself from the rest of the community, or rather the entire Argive plain through the use of a demarcated disposal area, large graves, complex ritual, the use of figured *stelai*, but primarily through the lavish disposal of exotic and valuable objects. It has already been proposed that we witness the emergence of an increasingly prosperous and cosmopolitan élite<sup>17</sup>. The question is, does this élite constitute a distinct social class, the higher level of an already stratified society? We need to reflect about the social significance of the Shaft Grave phenomenon, in particular of its two main aspects: (i) the deposition of wealth, and (ii) the emphasis on descent and the ancestors.

(i) To take the first point: while the *origins* of the wealth deposited in the Grave Circles of Mycenae have been at the centre of passionate debates for over a century now, the act of *deposition of wealth with the dead* has not attracted much attention. In order to address this problem, we need to reflect on the complex relation between wealth and status<sup>18</sup>. Generally, in pre-modern societies, wealth may be a prerequisite, but is never the sole basis of power. Wealth needs to be transformed into prestige and authority through its ostentatious disposal, through public acts of generosity or worship (such as the North American *potlatch* ceremonies, the Athenian *λειτουργίαι* or Roman

17 On social stratification in the Shaft Graves of Mycenae see the recent studies by KILIAN-DIRLMEIER, GRAZIADIO (*supra* n. 12) and R. LAFFINEUR, "Iconography as Evidence of Social and Political Status in Mycenaean Greece", *EIKΩN. Aegean Bronze Age Iconography: Shaping a Methodology. Proceedings of the 4th International Aegean Conference, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Australia, 6-9 April 1992*, *Aegaeum* 8 (1992), 105-114.

18 The anthropological literature on this question is enormous. Two seminal studies are M. MAUSS, "Essai sur le don", *L'Année Sociologique* (1923-4), 30-186; M. SAHLINS, *Stone Age Economics* (1972). J. BAUDRILLARD, *Pour une critique de l'économie politique du signe* (1972) is essential reading, even if he discusses primarily the modern society. A useful discussion of politics in pre-modern (but primarily tribal) societies is P. CLASTRES, *La société contre l'Etat* (1974).

euergetism)<sup>19</sup>. I suggest that we observe a similar phenomenon in the Shaft Graves<sup>20</sup>; I propose that the ostentatious deposition of valuable goods with the dead became a crucial mechanism for the creation of prestige in Mycenaean times. Therefore, the mortuary practices did not simply *legitimate* status; they were an essential element in the *creation* of status, in the process of differentiation. The partial overlap between the two Grave Circles and the spiralling increase of wealth and energy input in the Shaft Graves indicate that the process of differentiation is a tense and competitive process, still unfolding rather than crystallized into a new social order.

(ii) We should also take into account the other important aspect of the transformation of the mortuary practices in the transition to the LBA: the spread of the secondary treatment of the body<sup>21</sup> and the reuse of tombs<sup>22</sup>, which both indicate an emphasis on descent and the ancestors. The emphasis on descent has to be understood against this influx of new wealth (and perhaps the arrival of new skills) which created a new basis for social evaluation. These developments must have disrupted the traditional power balance of the MH societies, which we can assume were based largely on kinship and descent. Certainly, a discussion of the Shaft Grave phenomenon cannot limit itself to purely social considerations or internal developments alone. This is the period of the New Palaces in Crete, which sees the peak of the Minoan expansion in the Aegean (whatever the exact nature of this expansion was)<sup>23</sup>, a period of increased mobility and acculturation in the Aegean. The end of the MBA signals also the exit of the mainland from its relative (cultural, not necessarily economic)<sup>24</sup> isolation. Thus, the emphasis on, indeed the glorification of the ancestors can be seen as an assertion of a separate mainland identity

19 On the *potlatch*: MAUSS (*supra* n. 18); H. CODERE and F. BOAS, *Kwakiutl Ethnography* (1966). On the Athenian λειτουργία: M.I. FINLEY, *Politics in the Ancient World* (1982), 36-40. On Roman euergetism: P. VEYNE, *Le pain et le cirque. Sociologie historique d'un pluralisme politique* (1976).

20 It is important not to treat the Shaft Grave phenomenon in isolation: we need to keep in mind similar developments elsewhere, e.g. in Messenia (the Messenian tholoi, the Grave Circle or tholos tomb at Vayena in Pylos, the rich shaft-like tomb in Peristeria).

21 W.G. CAVANAGH, "A Mycenaean Second Burial Custom?", *BICS* 25 (1978), 171-2 was the first to point out the importance of the secondary treatment of the body in the Mycenaean mortuary practices; see also WELLS (*supra* n. 12).

22 It is important to note that secondary treatment and reuse of tombs are practiced outside the Grave Circles as well. The LH I period sees the introduction of the chamber tomb, a type of tomb especially designed for reuse over centuries. However, in this period secondary treatment is found increasingly also in pits (e.g. in Prosymna) and cists (e.g. in the tumulus Gamma in Argos).

23 The phenomenon of the 'Minoan Thalassocracy' has been debated passionately over the last thirty years. Only few references can be given here: See R.J. BUCK, "Minoan Thalassocracy re-examined", *Historia* 11 (1962), 129-37; J.L. DAVIS, "Minos and Dexithea: Crete and the Cyclades in the LBA", *Papers in Cycladic Prehistory* (1979), 143-57; K. BRANIGAN, "Minoan Colonialism", *BSA* 76 (1981), 24-33; C. DOUMAS, "The Minoan Thalassocracy and the Cyclades", *AA* (1982), 1-14; *Thalassocracy*; E. SCHOFIELD, "The Western Cyclades and Crete: a 'Special Relationship'", *OJA* 1:1 (1982), 9-25; D.A. HARDY (ed.), *Thera and the Aegean World III. Proceedings of the Third International Congress, 3-9 September 1989*, vol. 1: *Archaeology* (1990).

24 It is becoming increasingly clear that the mainland (primarily the coastal areas of the southeastern mainland) participated in a complex network of exchanges between Aegina, the Cyclades and Crete; see J.B. RUTTER and C.W. ZERNER, "Early Hellado-Minoan Contacts", *Thalassocracy*, 75-83; G.C. NORDQUIST, *A Middle Helladic Village. Asine in the Argolid* (1987), 62-8; S. DIETZ, *The Argolid at the Transition to the Mycenaean Age. Studies in the Chronology and Cultural Development in the Shaft Grave Period* (1991), 297-305.



at a period when the mainland societies open themselves to strong Minoan cultural influence <sup>25</sup>.

If we look at the settlement evidence, the rise of Mycenae seems to be followed by a reorganization of the political landscape and a possible decline of three important MH settlements in the plain: Lerna, Argos and Asine <sup>26</sup>. Does the evidence then warrant already at this stage the political domination of the Argive plain by Mycenae? It has to be emphasized that no site hierarchy around central places can be observed at this stage in the Argolid <sup>27</sup>. For reasons which will become clear, I will defer the answer until after we have examined the developments in the next phase.

In LH II we noticed the spread of the tholos and the existence of rich chamber tombs. In fact, in this period the dividing line between tholoi and chamber tombs is not very clear. In the Argolid (unlike Messenia or Thessaly) the tholos tomb appears only in its monumental version, but there are marked differences in architectural elaboration among the tombs. For instance, the Kokla tholos could be called a hybrid between a tholos and a chamber tomb (it is subterranean, its dromos is not lined, it has painted decoration on the façade) <sup>28</sup>. It is interesting that Kokla and Kazarma <sup>29</sup>, the only intact tholoi, have a lower diversity index than contemporary chamber tombs in other sites <sup>30</sup>. We also noted above the rich, large and decorated chamber tombs in Prosymna which emulate the round tholos form.

Would then the question 'which class is buried in the tholoi?' or 'which class is buried in the chamber tombs?' be very useful here? I suggest we should move beyond assigning social labels and try to interpret the underlying social processes. We need to understand the significance of these complex and mutually reinforcing phenomena: the

25 This was a heavily condensed discussion of the very complex transformation that took place in the mainland at the transition to the LBA. For a more detailed presentation of the Shaft Grave phenomenon see VOUTSAKI (*supra* n. 2), chapters 5, 7 and 10.

26 The evidence is not unequivocal. However, in Lerna despite the limited extent of the excavations, we have to note the contrast between a thriving settlement in MH I-II and the virtual absence of MH III-LH II architectural remains. In Argos, despite the difficulties of piecing together the information from rescue excavations, the abandonment of the tumuli (except Gamma) and primarily the contrast between the extensive MH III finds and the scarce LH I finds (DIETZ, *supra* n. 24, 281-3) point to the same direction. Inferences in Asine are more secure: once more we can note the contrast between the MH III expansion of the settlement and the scarcity of LH I-II architectural remains and finds; see S. DIETZ, "Kontinuität und Kulturwende in der Argolis von 2000-700 v. Chr: Ergebnisse der neuen schwedischen-dänischen Ausgrabungen in Asine", *Zur Ägäischen Frühzeit. Kleine Schriften aus dem Vorgeschichtlichen Seminar Marburg*, Heft 17 (1984), 23-52.

The repopulation of the Nemea valley has also been connected to the rise of Mycenae and the expansion of its agricultural base: J. DAVIS, "If there's Room at the Top, what's at the Bottom?", *BICS* 35 (1988), 164-65; J. WRIGHT *et al.*, "The Nemea Valley Archaeological Project: a Preliminary Report", *Hesperia* 59 (1990), 641; but see J.B. RUTTER, "Pottery Groups from Tsoungiza of the End of the MBA", *Hesperia* 60 (1990), 453-4, for a more sceptical attitude based on ceramic observations.

27 M.K. DABNEY and J.C. WRIGHT, "Mortuary Customs, Palatial Society and State Formation in the Aegean Area: a Comparative Study", *Celebrations*, 50.

28 K. DEMAKOPOULOU, "The Burial Ritual in the Tholos Tomb at Kokla, Argolis", *Celebrations*, 113-23.

29 The Kazarma tholos: E. DEILAKI, *ArchAnAth* 1 (1968), 236-8; *ArchAnAth* 2 (1969), 3-6; *AD* 24 (1969) B, 104.

30 The diversity index for Kazarma is 19 (but the figure is based on preliminary reports) and for the Kokla tholos is 10 (for the sake of comparison, the diversity index of the LH IIIA1 tholos at Dendra is 35). To mention only a few rich chamber tombs (where deposition of wealth in LH II can be ascertained) in other sites:

Mycenae: Kalkani 515 (div. index 28), Kalkani 518 (20), 529 (16); Prosymna: tomb II (21), III (20), XIV (18), XLIV (26); Dendra: tomb 8 (17).

downwards emulation and the spiralling elaboration of the mortuary forms. I propose that in this period mortuary display became an important strategy of social and political competition, as it implied the mobilization of social force and specialized labour, as well as access to a probably exclusive network of gift exchanges between élites. These ostentatious practices do not just act as display and legitimation of the élite's power, they also indicate that the power structure is still crucial and fragile. Nothing illustrates better this fluid and unstable situation than the spasmodic shifts in the construction and abandonment of the tholoi, the most conspicuous -and supposedly the most permanent- symbol of wealth and prestige.

To come back to the question raised earlier: do we have in LH I-II a political system centered on Mycenae? There are two arguments against a centralized system at this point: the first one is the differences that we have noted in the distribution of wealth and exclusive burial structures between LH I and LH II. There is no doubt that in LH II Mycenae with six tholoi and several rich chamber tombs retains its preeminent position, but it does not have the power or the will to retain the exclusivity in the levels of wealth, and the local élites in other centres of the plain still contest and resist its rise. The second argument is to be found in the subsequent developments.

If we detected certain shifts in the use of tholoi in LH II, a more linear pattern emerges in LH IIIA with the progressive restriction of tholoi to the palatial centres. Beyond the palatial sites we see a wider trend towards homogeneity<sup>31</sup> (see Pl. VIIb-c) with the popularization, but also the impoverishment, of the chamber tomb and the decline of intramural burials, cists and pits. Thus, the local élites, who were previously buried in tholoi, now lie in poorer chamber tombs. Another interesting development in this period is that children, previously interred in intramural graves or in cists and pits, are found in chamber tombs as well<sup>32</sup>. Thus, chamber tombs are used for the local élites, the poorer members of society and children. All these developments add up to one point: that the distance between the palatial élites and the rest of the population in this period grows. The mortuary evidence presents in an almost tangible way the emergence of a stricter hierarchical order, the appearance of rigid classes. This is the period where we find the first palatial structures in Tiryns and Mycenae<sup>33</sup>.

All these processes are intensified in LH IIIB when there is an overall decline in wealth and elaboration of the tombs outside Mycenae (the situation in Tiryns is not clear). It is evident that the full concentration of power by the palatial authorities was only possible if a main symbol of prestige, mortuary display, became restricted to the palatial élites. Thus, the power and independence of the local leaders were curbed, as this arena of competition became the exclusive right of the palatial élites. The mortuary evidence presents us with a successful centralized system where wealth and labour are channelled exclusively towards the palatial centres.

31 This trend towards homogeneity has already been noted by MEE and CAVANAGH (*supra* n. 12), 49.

32 The absence of child burials in LH I-II chamber tombs was pointed out by O.T.P.K. DICKINSON, *The Origins of Mycenaean Civilization* (1977), 59. Of course, we know almost nothing about the original contents of the tholoi. Needless to say that any observations on child burials are only tentative, since osteological data have hardly ever been obtained from Mycenaean tombs. I take the opportunity to make a plea for the preservation and study of human bones from tombs; the importance of this information for social reconstructions cannot be emphasized enough.

33 K. KILIAN, "L'architecture des résidences mycénienes: origine et extension d'une structure du pouvoir politique pendant l'Âge du Bronze récent", *Le système palatial en Orient, en Grèce et à Rome. Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, 19-22 juin 1985* (1987), 209; K. KILIAN, "The Emergence of wanax Ideology in the Mycenaean Palaces", *OJA* 7 (1988), 295.



However, the settlement evidence casts some doubt upon the success of centralization. What we see there is an unstable picture: destructions, the strengthening of fortifications, the appearance of small forts in several sites<sup>34</sup>. Either the mortuary evidence presents an idealized pattern of centralization which is belied by the historical developments, or precisely this overcentralization becomes dysfunctional.

To sum up: I argued that the spiralling elaboration of the mortuary practices in LH I-II was an essential element of social and political competition in the plain, while the progressive restriction of mortuary display in LH IIIA-B has been interpreted as a strategy for the establishment and consolidation of palatial control.

## Conclusions

In this paper I tried to demonstrate that we *can* use the mortuary practices to examine social and political phenomena, if we adopt a regional framework, examine systematically all aspects of the mortuary evidence and compare them with the settlement information. I did not try to reconstruct a static picture of the social organization, but rather to understand how the Mycenaean society *came into being*, to reconstruct the social and political processes that led to the emergence of a hierarchical society and a centralized political system.

Sofia VOUTSAKI

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34 K. KILIAN, "Η διοικητική οργάνωση της Πύλου και η αρχαιολογική ιεραρχία των οικισμών της Αργολίδας στη Μυκηναϊκή εποχή", *Πρακτικά Β' Τοπικού Συνεδρίου Μεσσηνιακών Σπουδών*, 27-29 Νοεμβρίου 1982 (1984), 63ff.

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Pl. VIIa	Map of the Argolid with the sites included in the analysis
Pl. VIIb	Types of tombs in LH I-II
Pl. VIIc	Types of tombs in LH IIIA2-B
Pl. VIIla	Deposition of wealth in LH I
Pl. VIIlb	Map showing the deposition of wealth in LH I
Pl. IXa	Deposition of wealth in LH IIA
Pl. IXb	Map showing the deposition of wealth in LH IIA
Pl. Xa	Deposition of wealth in LH IIB
Pl. Xb	Map showing the deposition of wealth in LH IIB
Pl. XIa	Deposition of wealth in LH IIIA1
Pl. XIb	Map showing the deposition of wealth in LH IIIA1
Pl. XIIa	Deposition of wealth in LH IIIA2
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Pl. XIIIa	Deposition of wealth in LH IIIB
Pl. XIIIb	Map showing the deposition of wealth in LH IIIB

## DISCUSSION

**G. Kopke:** You say that the shaft graves reflect the competitive situation in relation to the establishing power. Now I have a problem with this. Who are the competitors? Neither Lerna nor Asine nor Argos has given us evidence beyond large burials that materially really qualify as competitors. There seems to be a competition without competitors somehow. Maybe that is wrong. Maybe we did not find the rich burials and the ranks that were on the same level with Mycenae. But so far – really there is quite a number of material now – it does not really somehow add up. Within Mycenae itself it is the question whether there are other undiscovered grave circles that would prove that there were competing families within that vicinity. I think that is what Mrs. Kilian does not want to rule out, and maybe she is right in not ruling it out. But it is unproved. My impression is that there is no competition in the vicinity, but one is living up to things that existed on Crete and imitating the life-style of the Cretan elite.

**S. Voutsaki:** Indeed the Shaft Grave phenomenon cannot be dealt with at the local level. I could not possibly explain it in terms of developments only within Mycenae, or only within the Argive plain. I agree with you that it has to do with the assertion of mainland communities, indeed of the mainland as a whole, as for instance we can see in the rich tombs in Messenia, Corinth, Thebes and Asine. So, the shaft graves are only part of the wider reaction of the mainland against the Cretan New Palaces, which were at the time the dominant power in the Aegean. We should look at them also from a different angle: if people in this period in Crete, but also in the Cyclades and the Dodecanese (which were under Minoan influence in this period) want to display their wealth and their status, they build palaces and mansions, but not large tombs. The mainlanders assert their position in the Aegean through the elaboration of the mortuary sphere, something which follows more their local tradition. You are right, we have to place the Shaft Grave problem in its spatial context. But we also need to place it in its temporal context. You said that there were no competitors at this point. But Lerna, Argos, Asine certainly *were* important centres in the Middle Bronze Age which the ruling families in Mycenae had to displace in one way or another. And something more: there was the weight of the at least more egalitarian Middle Helladic tradition.

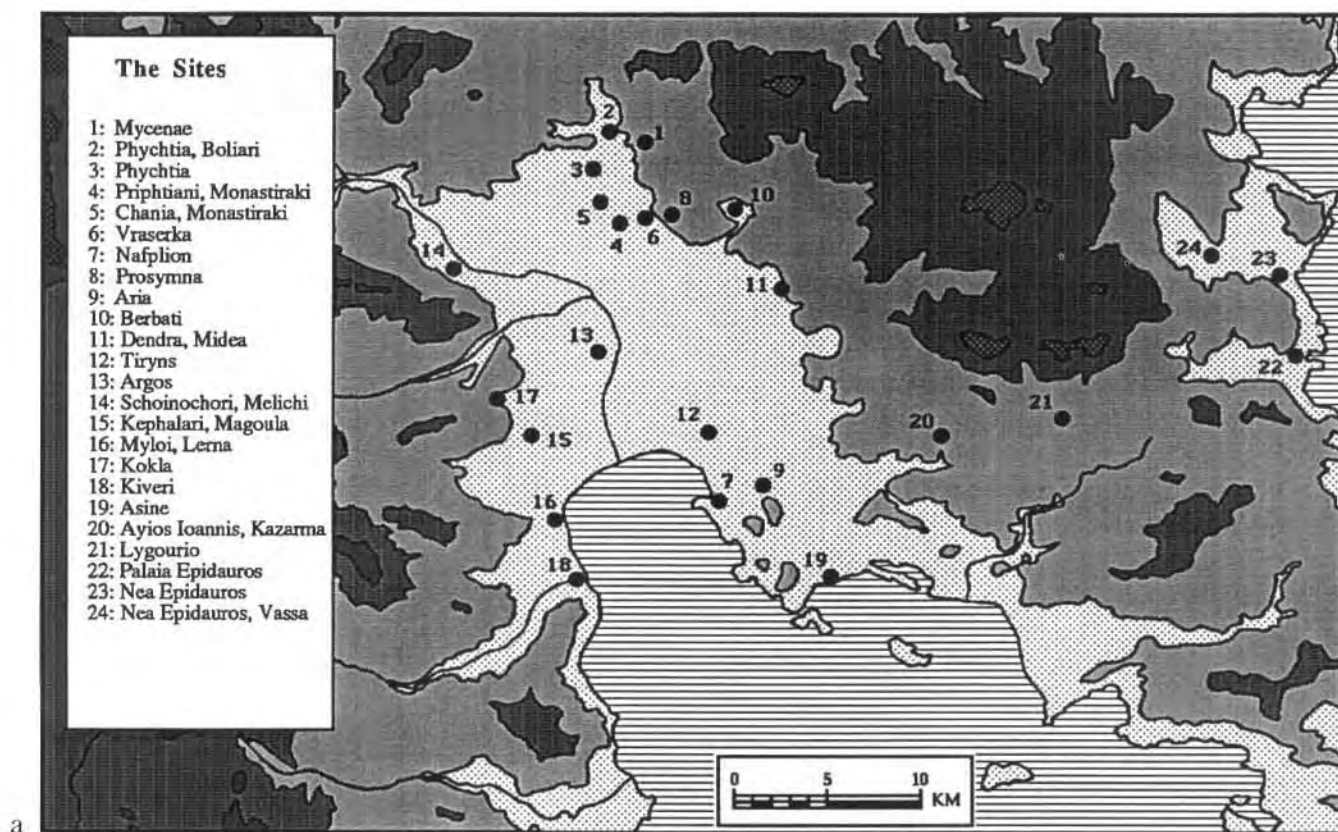
**M. Wedde:** How do you calculate your diversity index? Is it a mere statement of an increased range of goods in terms of typology or do you take into account the nature of the finds which have a material, origin, degree of transformation, raw material in relationship to a basic common mutual assemblage which would be your zero?

**S. Voutsaki:** The way I measured diversity is embarrassingly simple. Basically I counted and added up the number of categories of offerings (excluding the pottery) within each tomb. I had devised 106 categories by organising the material in terms of simple, functional categories which, however, also took account of the decoration. For example, a bronze sword would be in the category "simple bronze sword" if it didn't have any decoration; but if it had, for instance, inlaid decoration or a handle covered with gold, it would be entered under the category "elaborate bronze sword". In this way, a golden mask and an amethyst bead would have the same 'value' in my data-base. Why? Because I wanted to avoid deciding how many amethyst beads make up a golden mask.

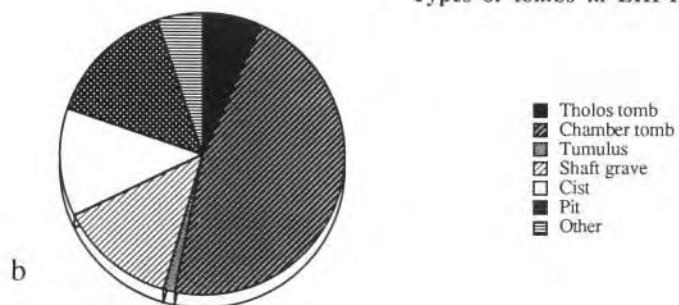
**J.C. Wright:** Just a comment on G. Kopcke's observations: I think maybe we are misplacing the role of competition here. Maybe one of us misunderstood what Sofia was saying. It would seem to me that the shaft graves in particular are really a kind of acme of a long process of increasing social differentiation and really do not have anything to do with competition at this point so much as they have to do with internal changes within different regional groups that are in some kind of a ranked or tribal model. Then you begin to get lineages that develop as for example in the tumuli at Argos, at which point you begin to get some evidence of stratification or social differentiation. After that perhaps what you really are seeing — and here I think that the point of the relationship to Crete is very important — is that there is a very acquisitive group of people at Mycenae who are reacting to the stimulus of a long history of contact with Crete. What seems to me to be the case with respect to the question of competition is: What is happening in LH II when you have the tholos form, which is coming up from Messenia, emulated by other Mycenaeans. I was wondering as well if you would say that among all the LH II tombs you find much more evidence of a wider distribution of this wealth than is being acquired by people in the first instance in the shaft graves and does that distribution develop into a more competitive one as regional chiefdoms are developing? Since you made a sharp distinction between LH II and then LH IIIA and B in the tombs, does that also relate to a radical change in this organisation of the political economy and the social structure of this society that relates to the rise of the palaces? Are these really intimately related, the tomb material and this other political event?



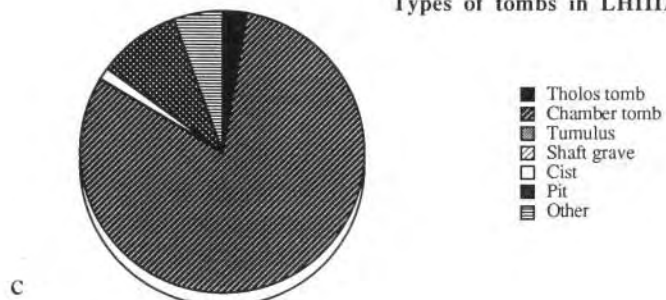
**S. Voutsaki:** If I understood you well, your question was whether we can reconstruct the political changes through the mortuary data. To start with the situation in LHI and whether we can really interpret the rise of Mycenae in political and social terms. Why is there such an enormous difference in wealth between Mycenae and the other centres ? Can this difference be interpreted as real social and political distance between Mycenae and the other sites ? I don't think so, precisely because of the developments that I tried to outline, namely because of this relative dispersion of wealth in LHII that Mycenae couldn't or wouldn't resist. In LHII we see not only in the Argolid, but also in Messenia and elsewhere the emergence of principalities or 'petty kingdoms'. In the Argolid some of them are eventually absorbed into the orbit of Mycenae (e.g. Berbati, Prosymna - i.e. the tholoi that were abandoned early); some resisted for a little longer (e.g. Dendra). So, in LHIII I see a clear pattern in the political organization of the Argive plain and in LHIII I think I can detect the process of centralization. But the problem is: all this time we talk about Mycenae - but how does Tiryns emerge as an important centre ? This indeed remains an open question.



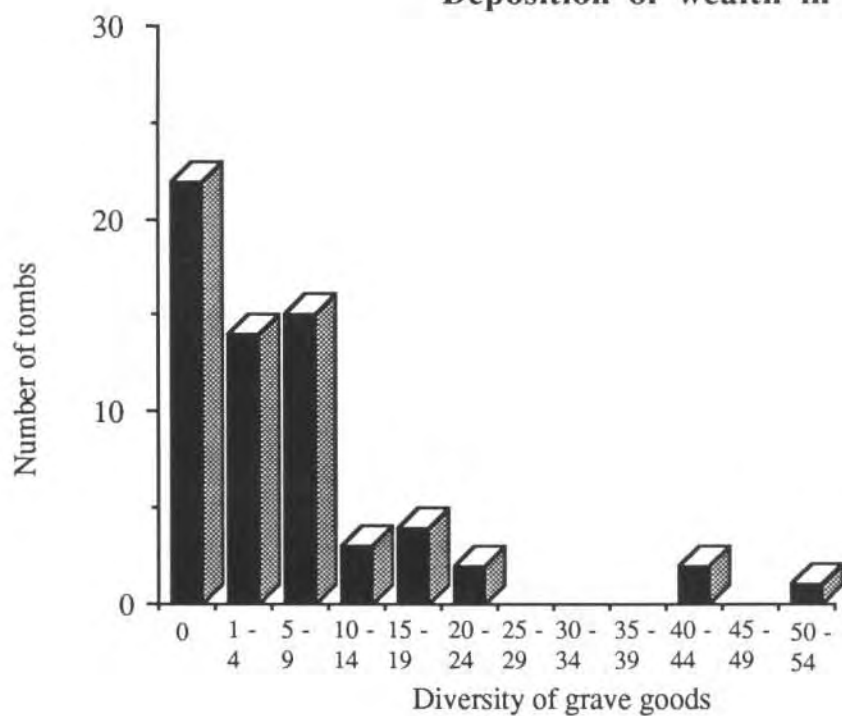
Types of tombs in LHI-II



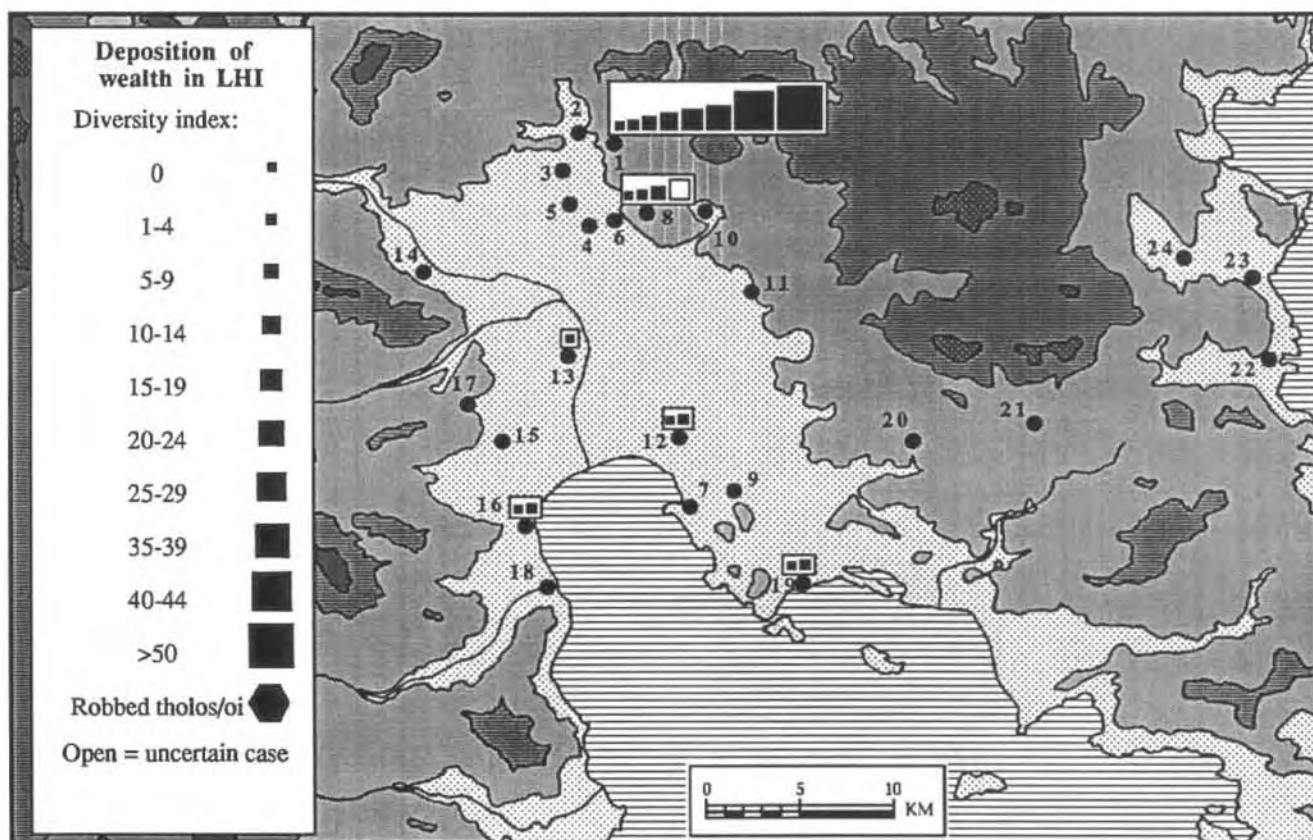
Types of tombs in LHIIIA2-B



## Deposition of wealth in LHI



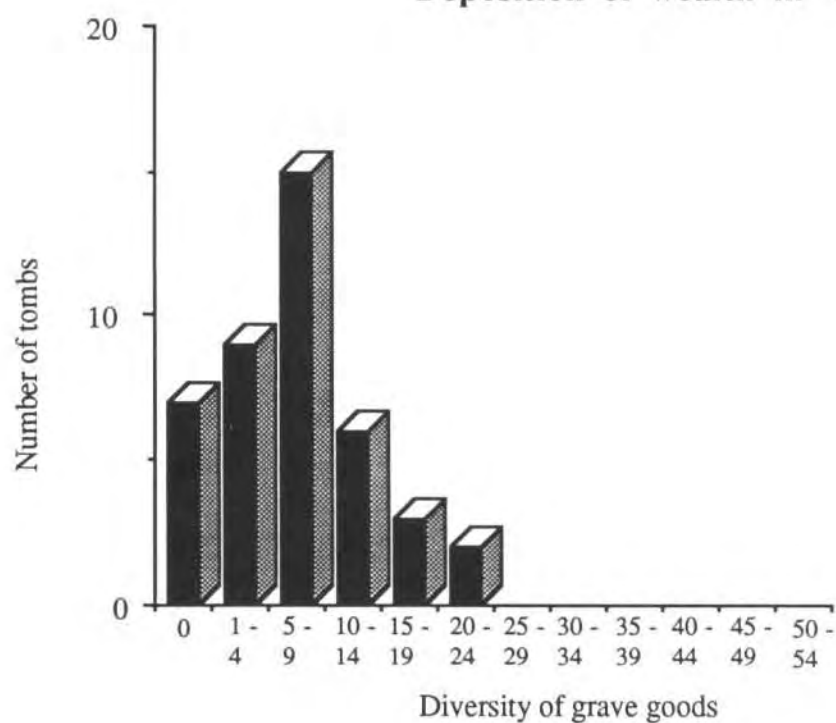
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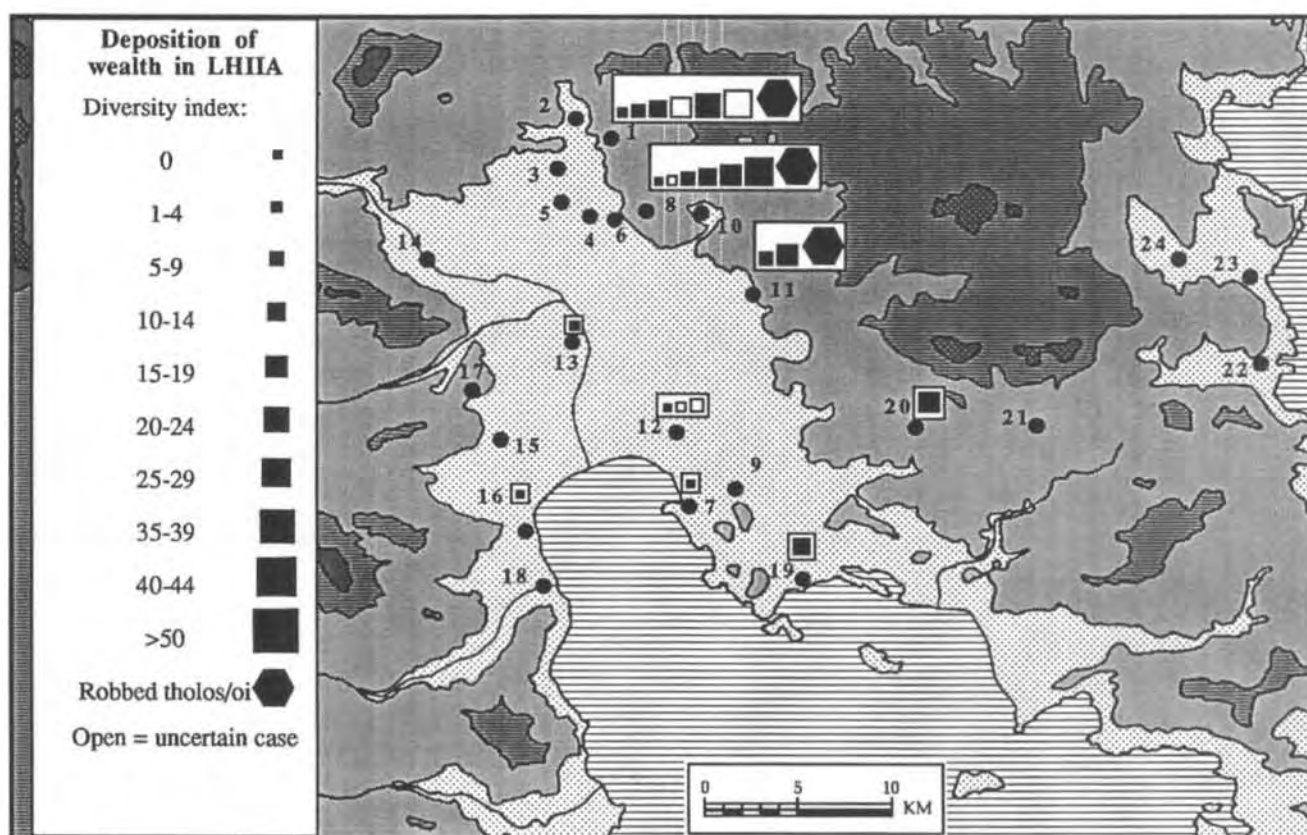
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## Deposition of wealth in LHIIA

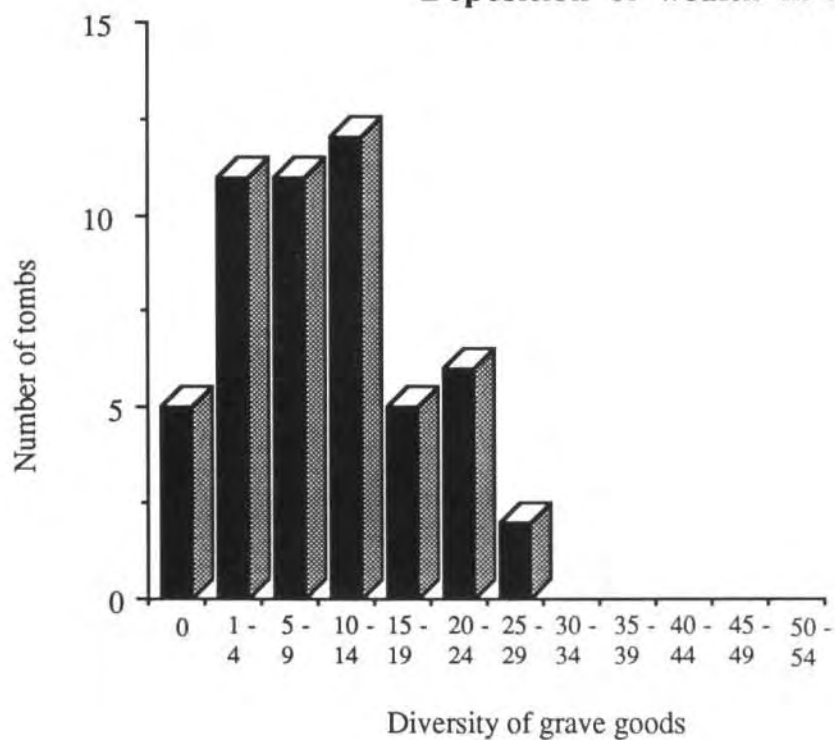


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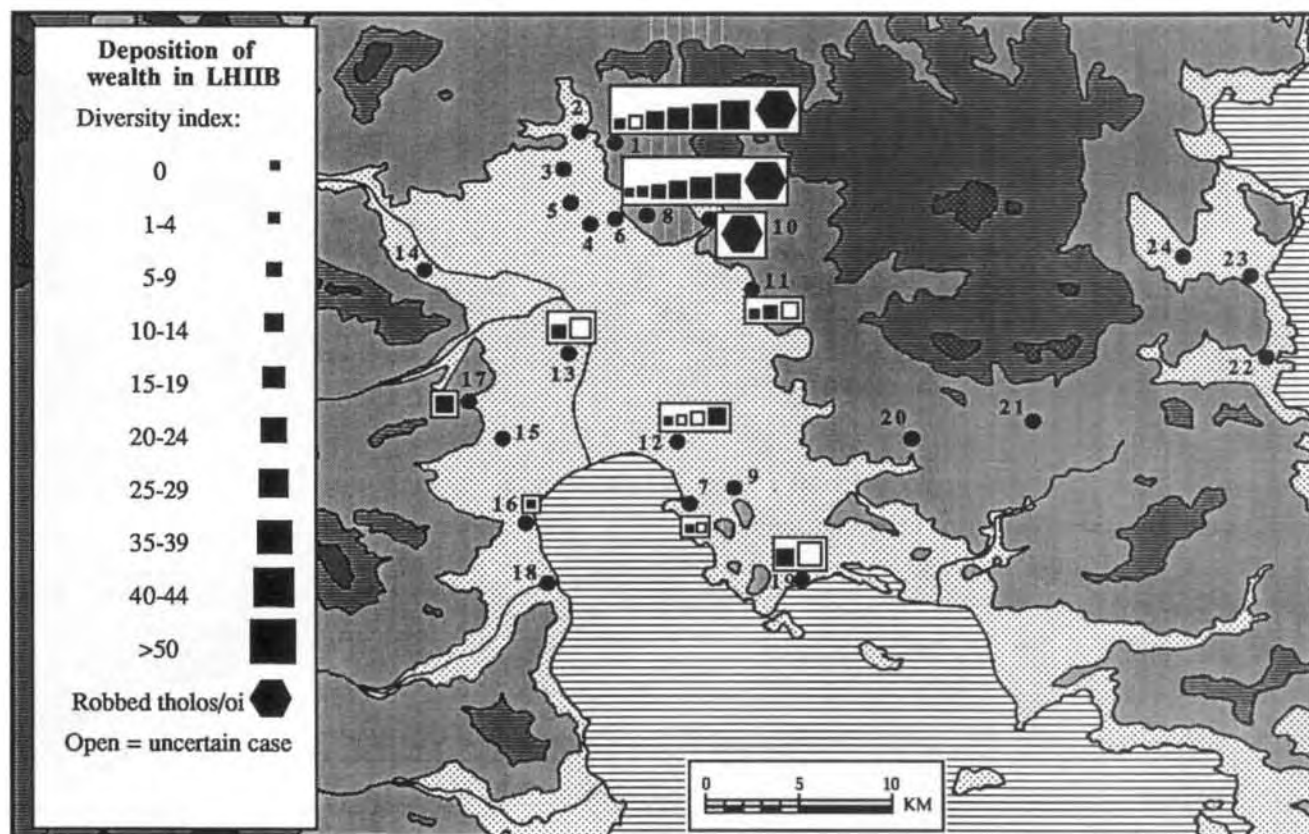


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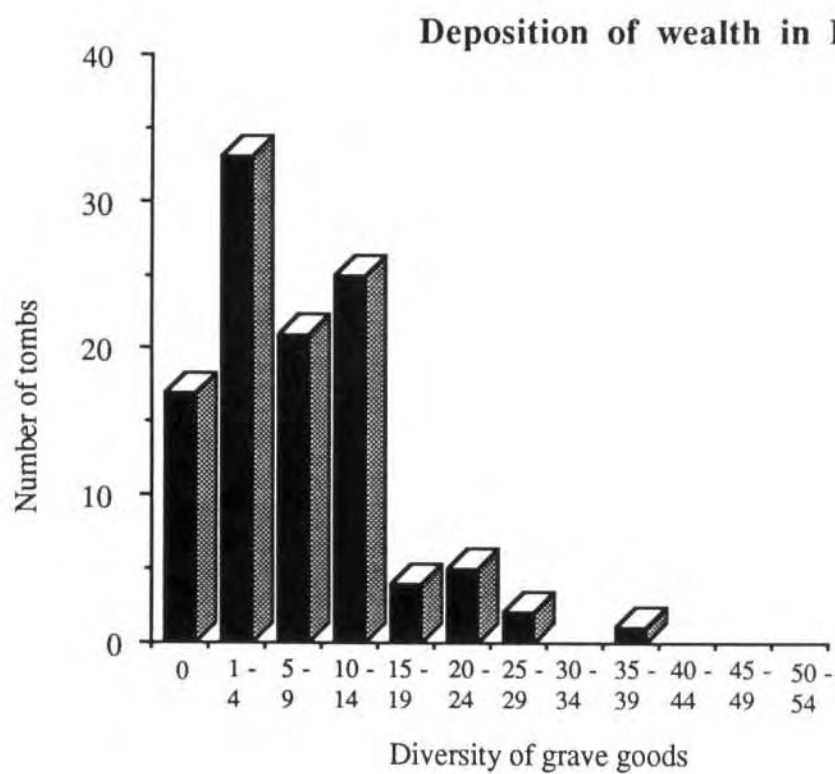
## Deposition of wealth in LHIIB



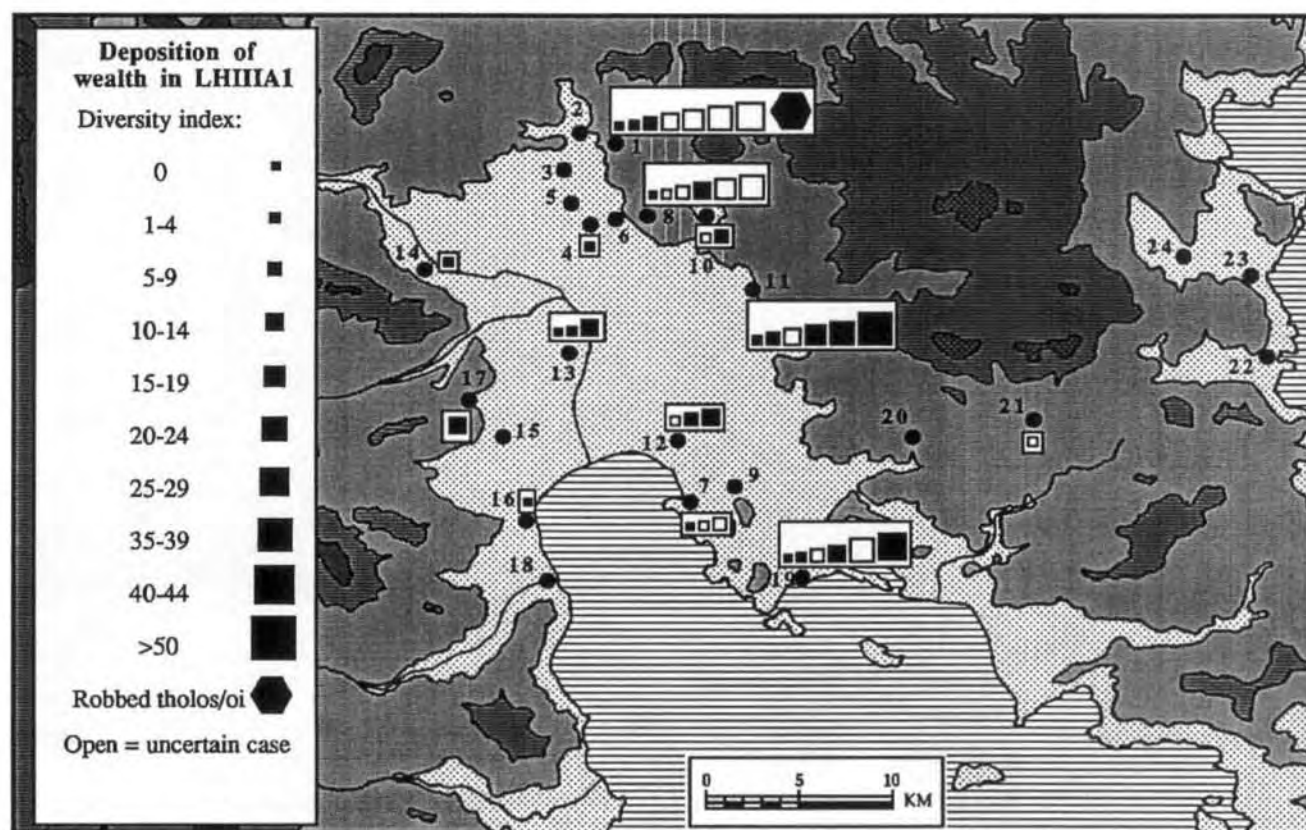
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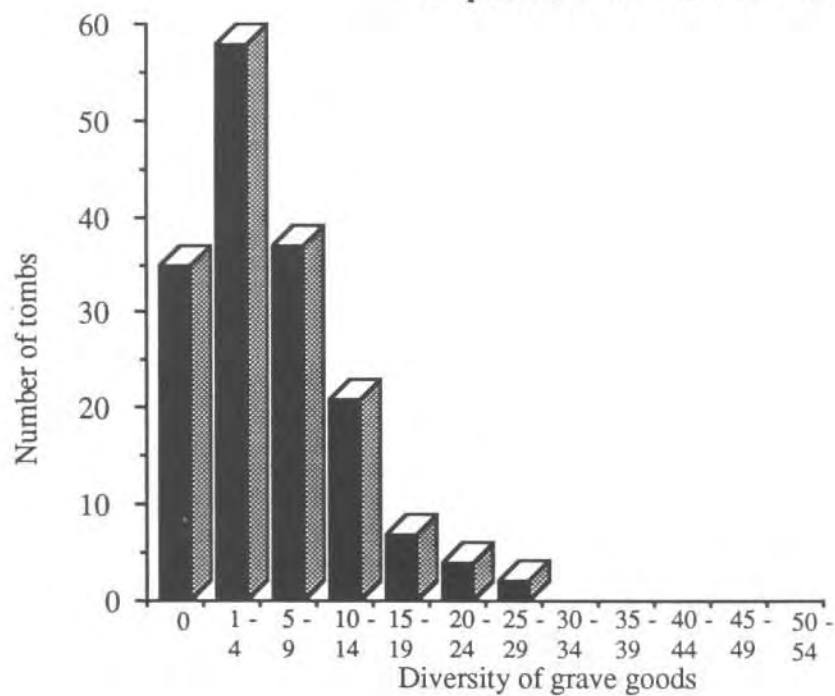
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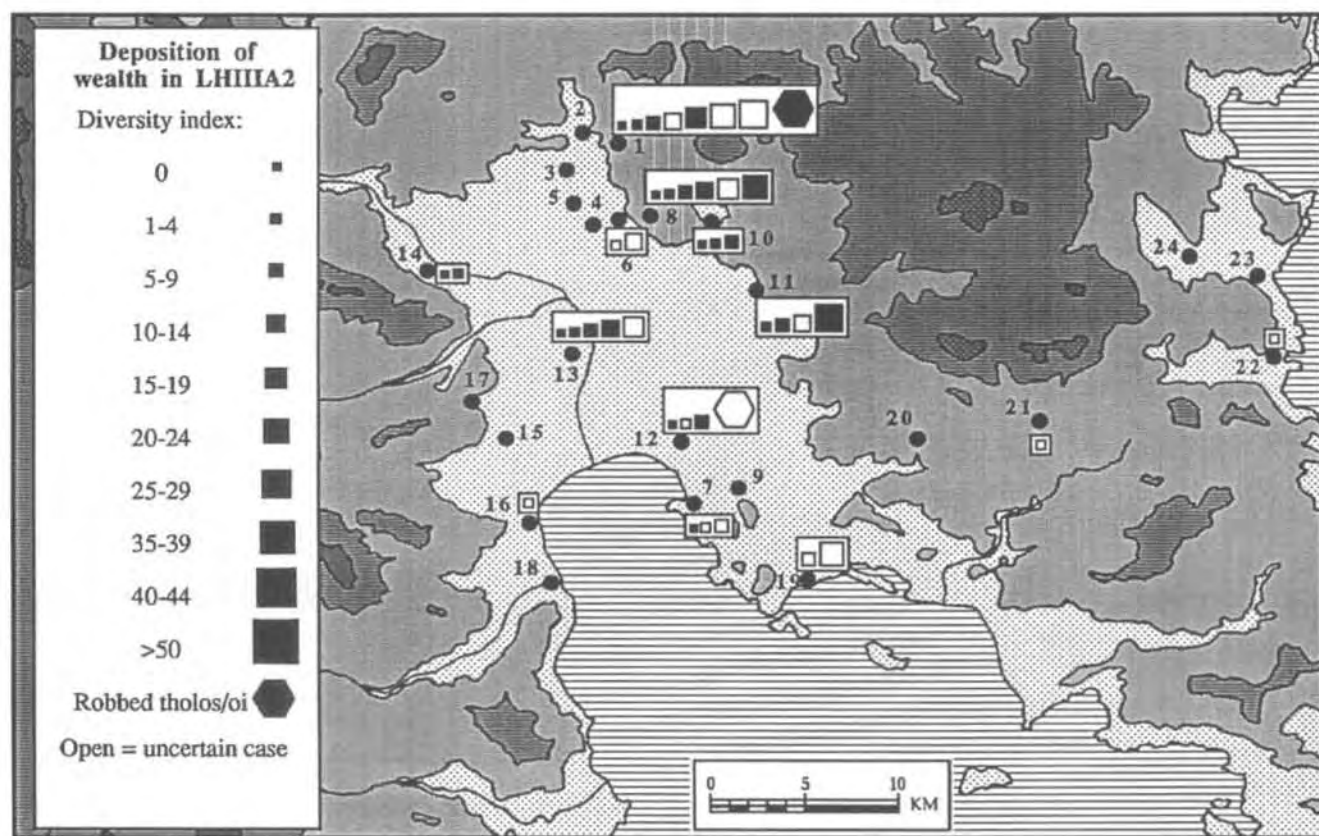
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## Deposition of wealth in LHIIIA2

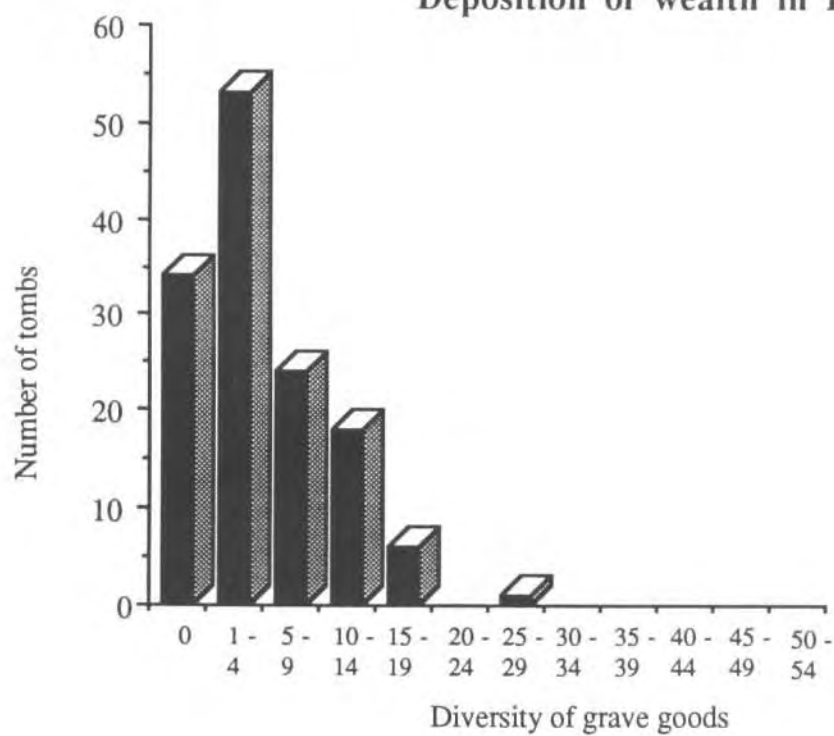


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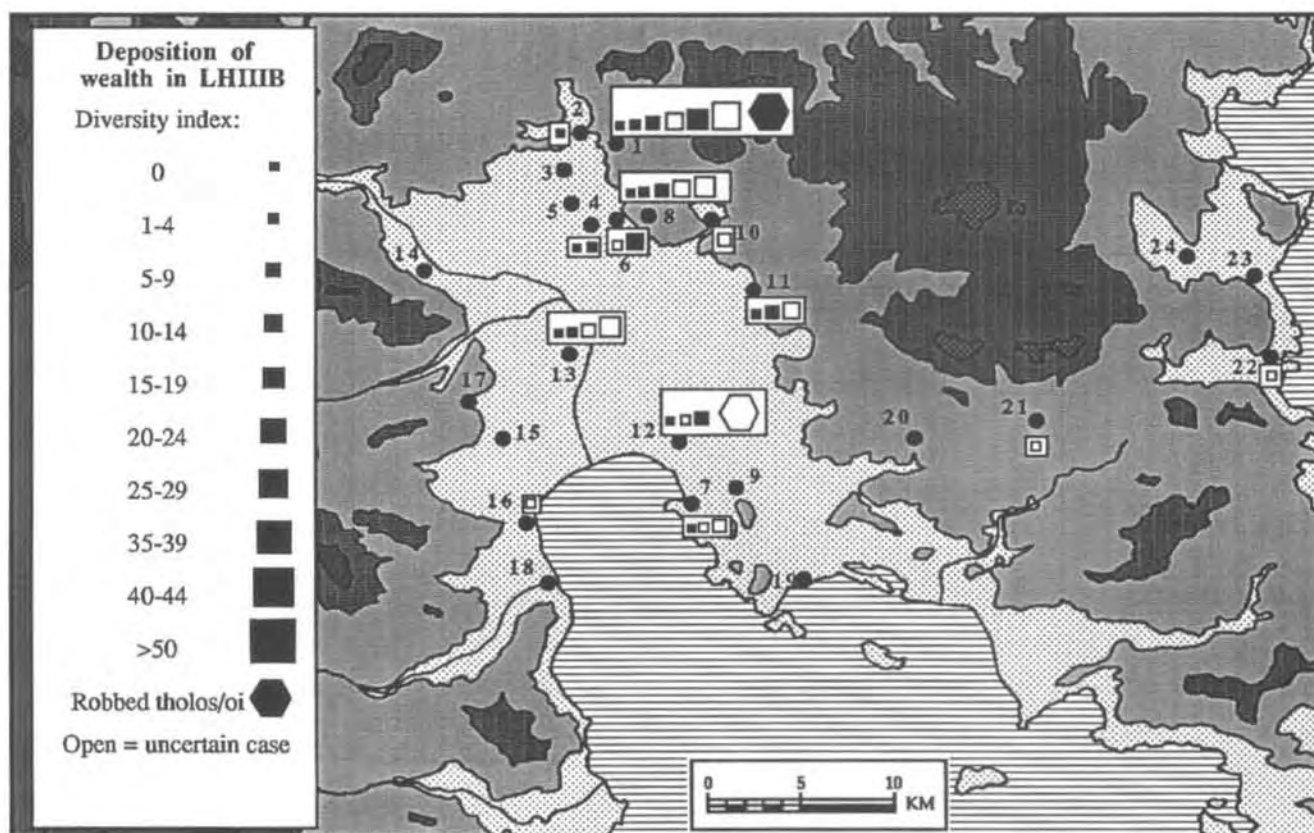


b

## Deposition of wealth in LHIIIB



a



b