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S. Deger-Jalkotzy

15: Decline, Destruction, Aftermath

in: C. W. Shelmerdine (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Aegean Bronze Age* (Cambridge – New York 2008) 387–415

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521814447.018>

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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO

THE AEGEAN
BRONZE AGE

Edited by

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press
32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA
www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521891271

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First published 2008

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Shelmerdine, Cynthia W.
The Cambridge companion to the Aegean Bronze Age / Cynthia W. Shelmerdine.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-81444-7 (hardback) – ISBN 978-0-521-89127-1 (pbk.)

1. Civilization, Aegean – Textbooks. 2. Bronze age – Aegean Sea Region – Textbooks.
3. Aegean Sea Region – Antiquities – Textbooks. I. Title.

DF220.S47 2008
939'.101-dc22 2007052890

ISBN 978-0-521-81444-7 hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-89127-1 paperback

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This book is dedicated to

Mabel L. Lang
and
Emily D. T. Vermeule

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15: DECLINE, DESTRUCTION, AFTERMATH

Sigrid Deger-Jalkotzy

INSTABILITY AND DECLINE

At the end of LH IIIB2 – conventionally dated to ca. 1190 BCE – the Mycenaean palatial period came to a dramatic end. The palaces were destroyed and the palace system collapsed, never to be rebuilt. The causes of the catastrophes have long been the subject of controversial scholarly discourse, and consensus is not in the offing. One thing, however, has become increasingly clear: the breakdown of the palace system was the result of a process that had started considerably earlier. It is generally assumed that the decline of the Mycenaean states was triggered by a first series of destructions at the end of LH IIIB1.¹ At Mycenae several palace-related buildings outside of the citadel were destroyed and abandoned. At Tiryns the structures on the knoll below the palace (the Lower Citadel) were destroyed, and the palace of Thebes was also damaged. Nor were nonpalatial communities spared. Earthquakes have been blamed for the destructions at Mycenae and Tiryns.² At other sites causes cannot be defined with certainty.

Whatever caused these earlier catastrophes, they seem to have brought to an end the heyday of the Mycenaean palace civilization. The archaeological record of the last decades of the thirteenth century BCE (LH IIIB2) reflects instability and decline. Mycenae and Tiryns were damaged by further destruction, and the great citadel of Gla in Boeotia was burnt down and deserted, whereas other settlements were gradually abandoned.³ The Aegean islands also seem to have undergone a period of insecurity and change. The settlement of Grotta on Naxos was abandoned, a defensive settlement was built at Ayios Andreas on Siphnos, and fortifications at Phylakopi on Melos were strengthened

(Ch. 14, pp. 365–8).⁴ The population of northern Rhodes seems to have been drastically reduced, to judge by the decrease in burials during LH IIIB (Ch. 14, pp. 368–9). In Crete several sites were destroyed, others abandoned, and later LM IIIB was a period of disturbance and decline (Ch. 12, pp. 316–18).⁵

Presumably in response to these troubled conditions, the Mycenaean palaces strengthened their fortification systems (Ch. 11, p. 265; Fig. 11.1).⁶ In LH IIIB2 the circuit wall of Mycenae was extended considerably and the Lion Gate was built. At Tiryns the Upper Citadel received the strong fortifications still visible today, and the Lower Citadel was enclosed with a Cyclopean wall. The extensive fortification walls of Midea and the enceinte around the Athenian acropolis were also built at this time. Moreover, impressive technical efforts were made to ensure the water supply of the citadels. At Mycenae, an oblique passage leading down to an underground reservoir outside of the citadel was sheltered by the northeast extension of the citadel wall. Two constructions of the same kind were built in LH IIIB2 in the Lower Citadel at Tiryns. At Athens in LH IIIB2 a sophisticated stairway system was built down a rock cleft leading to an underground spring. Workshops, particularly for luxury goods, storage areas, and administrative buildings, were transferred to areas behind the fortification walls. Inside the southwest extension of the circuit wall at Mycenae, workshops and administrative activities were included in the Cult Center.⁷ The east wing of the palace was allocated to workshops (the Artisans' Quarters) and to storage areas, supervised and administered from the House of Columns. In contrast to an earlier view, the Lower Citadel of Tiryns was not designed to offer refuge to the general population in times of threat. The architectural layout of the area consisted of palace-associated buildings serving the purposes of administration, production, and cult. At Midea, workshops and storage areas were built against the inner face of the fortification wall.⁸ At Pylos, where no fortifications of this period have so far been ascertained, architectural alterations were made in order to integrate workshops and storerooms into the Main Building and to restrict access to that area.⁹

Some have interpreted the undeniable grandeur of LH IIIB2 fortification walls and gates as an architectural display of the might and splendor of Mycenaean kings.¹⁰ However, the efforts made to ensure the water supply and to restrict access to the economic quarters of the palaces, viewed in the context of destructions and settlement discontinuity after the end of LH IIIB1, rather raise the suspicion that the extension of fortifications in LH IIIB2 served the purposes of defense

and protection, possibly as a response to the unstable conditions of the time.¹¹ The threat that provoked the palace rulers to this effort is not known, but fortifications are usually built against human attack. Metal hoards deposited at the close of LH IIIB2 or soon after point in the same direction.¹² A Cyclopean wall near Isthmia facing north has been taken as evidence for a supraregional defense system for the Peloponnese. However, its construction date is uncertain, and a defensive purpose has been doubted.¹³ More reliably, a coast-watching system is referred to by the *o-ka* texts of the Linear B documents from Pylos. Even if this was a routine measure, the coast guard was taken seriously enough to be set under the control of ten *e-qe-ta*, *hequetai*, “Followers,” who were members of the highest social ranks at Pylos (Ch. 12, pp. 293–4). Some have adduced other Linear B texts too as evidence for a state of emergency, but have not met with general agreement.¹⁴

It is difficult to assess, in this connection, the first appearance in the Aegean of metal objects that had first been developed during the thirteenth century BCE in Italy, the northwestern Balkans, and central Europe.¹⁵ Aegean examples are commonly found in postpalatial LH IIIC contexts, but at Mycenae the flange-hilted sword of the Naue II type, and at Tiryns the violin-bow-shaped **fibula** (a safety-pin-like dress fastener) already appeared in LH IIIB2 (below, p. 401). Moreover, a mould for an Italic winged axe was found at Mycenae. Objects of this kind certainly bear witness to the foreign contacts of the palaces. However, fibulae were not an element of the Mycenaean costume. Similar questions pertain to a handmade burnished class of pottery. Although it was locally made, its appearance is non-Mycenaean, and its origins have been sought outside of the Mycenaean world (below, p. 395). Handmade burnished pottery is mainly found in LH IIIC contexts. Yet at Mycenae, Tiryns, and Midea it too appeared before the end of LH IIIB2, as well as at Kommos and Chania in Crete.¹⁶ Do these novel elements imply that the palaces employed foreigners (tradesmen? craftsmen? mercenaries?) at that time?

There is also evidence for economic problems. Too specialized and too centralizing, the Mycenaean palace economies apparently did not react adequately to disruptive factors.¹⁷ These included the destructions at and after the end of LH IIIB1 and economic strains exercised by a massive increase in population or by the excessive building activities in LH IIIB2, which involved large labor forces paid in rations (Ch. 12, pp. 303–6). The agricultural basis of palace states was taken beyond its limits by overexploitation of arable lands and soils. Wheat and barley were of low quality and contaminated by weeds.¹⁸ Compensation for a dearth

of foodstuffs by imports may have become difficult, judging from the evidence for the decline of overseas communications, especially with the eastern Mediterranean. Causes have been sought in piracy and raids, or changes in the patterns of long-distance trade routes.¹⁹ As a result, Aegean ports of call were lost (above, pp. 387–8), the importation of raw materials demanded by palace workshops decreased, and prestige objects of eastern origin became rare.²⁰

Although some objects of high artistic standard have been found in the ruins of the Mycenaean palaces, the representational arts gradually declined.²¹ The remarkably uniform culture of the Mycenaean palace period disintegrated, indicating perhaps that the economic and cultural predominance of the palace states vis-à-vis the other regions had come to an end. Indeed, as soon as palatial control over the circulation of imported goods and prestige objects was jeopardized, the road became clear for independent regional economic activities.²²

Some scholars hold that the palaces reacted to economic pressure and unstable conditions by tightening political control over their territories and by further centralizing the economy.²³ If so, a rigid centralization must have added to the vulnerability of the system and prepared the ground for a collapse as soon as the center was hit.

DESTRUCTION

According to the Linear B documents preserved by the fires that burned the palaces, all institutions functioned until the very end, administrations worked normally, and religious ceremonies and state banquets were celebrated by the palace élites. Whatever problems the palace administrators had to face and whatever threat they may have perceived, the final disaster seems to have struck all of a sudden at the end of LH IIIB2. This conclusion is borne out again by tablets recently found at Thebes: some of them were burned while the clay was still wet.²⁴ Many Mycenaean communities were hit by destruction and/or conflagrations. Settlements were abandoned, several without having been destroyed.²⁵ The main victims, however, were the palaces. Mycenae, Tiryns, and Midea in the Argolid were destroyed. So were Thebes and Orchomenos in Boeotia and Dimini in Thessaly. Pylos may have been destroyed a little later.²⁶ By the early twelfth century BCE, the palace system was wiped out.

Considerable scholarly effort has been devoted to explaining the disaster. Attacks by foreign enemies, social uprising, natural catastrophes, systems collapse, and changes in warfare have all been blamed.²⁷ The

most longstanding group of theories puts the blame on foreign attackers, either raiders or migrating peoples. As for the identity of the assailants, some have proposed intruders from the north, others the famous “Sea Peoples” of Egyptian and Near Eastern sources; the classical view that the Dorians were responsible is now refuted on archaeological grounds. However, the archaeological evidence for northern intruders, too, is not very strong, and the Sea Peoples theory is mainly based on archaeological and literary sources from Cyprus, the Near East, and Egypt. Intruder theories have other weaknesses, too, so that they have lost much of their earlier attractiveness.²⁸ A related hypothesis suggesting that the chariot forces of the eastern Mediterranean kingdoms were overthrown by the technically superior weaponry of “barbarian” foot soldiers has not found acceptance.²⁹

Theories based on natural catastrophes or resource depletion by climatic shifts have many adherents.³⁰ Indeed, it cannot be excluded that local earthquakes, bad harvests caused by drought or floods, and excessive exploitation of natural resources may have enhanced the economic problems of the palace states.³¹ However, evidence for epidemics and drastic climatic changes is still lacking. Widespread earthquake activity, on the other hand, has also been claimed, mainly by archaeologists. Moreover, a recent theory states that, because of the geophysical conditions of the region, the civilizations of the eastern Mediterranean “could have been and probably were” afflicted by an “earthquake storm” during the decades around 1200 BCE.³² However, theories of this kind have so far not been supported for Greece by actual seismic evidence, and seismologists have remained skeptical.³³

Theories based on conflict within the Mycenaean world hold that the palace system was overthrown by rebellions against poor palatial management of economic hardships,³⁴ or by warfare between hostile states. They fail, however, to explain why not only the palace states, but virtually all Mycenaean regions were hit by the disaster.

Much credibility is now attributed to systems-collapse theories, which ascribe the breakdown of the Mycenaean palaces to their own structural weaknesses and to social contradictions. Centralizing economies, artificial institutions, stifling bureaucracies, ponderous administrations, and excessive exploitation of resources eventually rendered the palace states unable to react to economic pressure and to critical situations.³⁵ Systems-collapse theories aptly explain why the palace system failed. Yet they too are unable to account for the widespread destruction all over Greece, including even non-palatial Mycenaean **polities** (politically organized societies).

In fact, none of the theories enumerated above can explain, by itself, the extinction of the Mycenaean palace civilization. On the evidence now available, a series of factors must have been involved. It appears that decline and internal crisis prepared the ground. However, for the violent finale, a precipitating event (or events) must have occurred.

AFTERMATH

There is no doubt that the collapse of the advanced civilization of the Mycenaean palaces was a fundamental turning point in Greek history. The impressive palatial structures were not rebuilt, and very little of the representational arts and crafts of the palaces seems to have survived. The complex forms of political, social, and economic organization fell into oblivion. Palaces, kings, and royal families became matter for Greek myths. The art of writing was lost for centuries. In short, Greek civilization was reduced to the level of a prehistoric society.³⁶

However, the fall of the palace system did not portend the end of the Mycenaean Age. The twelfth and eleventh centuries until ca. 1070 BCE – in archaeological terms the period LH IIIC – should be viewed as the last stages of Mycenaean civilization rather than the first stretch of a “Dark Age.” Over the past quarter of a century, a substantial increase in archaeological data from new excavations and intensified study of material from earlier excavations have greatly enhanced our insight into LH IIIC. In the first place, the carefully observed sequence of burials in the chamber tombs of the cemetery at Perati and the study of stratified settlement deposits at Mycenae, Tiryns, Lefkandi, and elsewhere have made it possible to follow up the development both of the material culture in general and of pottery styles in particular.³⁷ The postpalatial Mycenaean period therefore no longer appears as an undifferentiated stretch of time between the fall of the palaces and the rise of the Protogeometric style in Attica.

CHRONOLOGY

The sequence of LH IIIC pottery shapes and styles has been divided into several chronological subphases and offers a new basis for establishing the relative chronology of the period (Fig. 1.1).³⁸ It has become obvious that the famous and still widely applied classification and chronology of LH IIIC pottery by Furumark needs revision.³⁹ At present, it is being replaced by a basic tripartite scheme of LH IIIC Early, Middle

(Developed and Advanced), and Late, though other authors would prefer to divide LH IIIC into four or even five phases.⁴⁰ These diverging views mainly arise from the marked regionalism of the pottery styles (below, pp. 400–401). It appears difficult to define a general chronological scheme for LH IIIC that can be applied to all regions of the Aegean. However, most scholars agree that the period was followed by a final phase, called Submycenaean, during which the Mycenaean Age definitely came to a close and the Early Iron Age of Greece was ushered in.⁴¹

With regard to the absolute chronology of LH IIIC, there are almost no clues. Because the exchange of goods with the eastern Mediterranean and Egypt had more or less come to an end after the fall of the palaces, LH IIIC contexts have so far not produced imported objects that could connect the relative chronology of the postpalatial Aegean with the historically established chronologies of the Near Eastern civilizations. The only Aegean–Near Eastern synchronism that can be used for the absolute dating of LH IIIC rests upon the fall of the kingdom of Ugarit, where Mycenaean LH IIIB2 pottery was found in the destruction levels. Ugarit still existed during the reign of the pharaoh Siptah (1194–1188 BCE) and possibly also of Queen Tewosret (1188–1186 BCE). According to the report of Ramses III (1184–1153), Ugarit no longer existed when he defeated the Sea Peoples in the eighth year of his reign (1177 BCE). It is therefore generally agreed that the end of LH IIIB and the beginning of LH IIIC should be dated to ca. 1190 BCE or shortly after.⁴² New radiocarbon dates seem to corroborate the synchronism of the end of LH IIIC with the end of the Twentieth Dynasty of Egypt, around 1070 BCE.⁴³ Otherwise, radiocarbon dates are few and provide only a general dating of LH IIIC in the twelfth century BCE. At present, the postpalatial Mycenaean period can thus be assigned generally to the span between ca. 1190 and 1070 BCE. Between these two limits, absolute dates are arbitrarily assigned to the subphases of LH IIIC and to Submycenaean, based on rough estimates of the duration of settlement phases or of generations (20, 25, or 30 years).

A PERIOD NOT EASILY LIVED IN

The catastrophes at the end of the palace period obviously caused a great deal of upheaval, population movements, and general unrest. Changes in settlement patterns and fluctuation of populations had already marked the last phase of the palatial period (above, pp. 387–90)

and now continued to an even greater degree. Some settlements and the cemeteries associated with them were abandoned, some were newly founded, and still others were reused after a period of abandonment.⁴⁴ In Messenia the population decreased dramatically. Because the region has been thoroughly surveyed, existing sites are not likely to have been overlooked (Ch. 1, p. 9), so a demographic explanation seems inevitable.⁴⁵ People may have been killed by epidemics or by human action. However, it appears more likely that they moved to other parts of the Aegean. The same may apply to Laconia and Thessaly, even if further archaeological work in these regions may reveal more LH IIIC settlements. In Boeotia, LH IIIB sites in the Kopaic Basin were flooded when the Mycenaean drainage system broke down after the destruction of Gla and Orchomenos.⁴⁶ Other parts of Boeotia also seem to have been abandoned at the end of LH IIIB or in LH IIIC Early. In Achaea and Crete people appear to have moved to safer and more defensible sites within their own regions, and the same may have been true of some new defensible settlements in the Cyclades.⁴⁷ Koukounaries on Paros, however, was founded by immigrants, possibly from a palatial center of the mainland (Ch. 14, p. 368).⁴⁸ Smaller sites in the Argolid were abandoned and populations concentrated at large and long established sites; the Lower Town at Tiryns may even have expanded.⁴⁹ A similar concentration of population ("nucleation") has also been suggested for Ialysos on Rhodes, although it cannot be excluded that large cemeteries may have been reused by new settlers, possibly from the Greek mainland (Ch. 14, pp. 368–9).⁵⁰ Population also seems to have increased in eastern Attica, Euboea, and Kephallenia.⁵¹ It is generally assumed that these regions were sought out by refugees.

At the end of LH IIIC Early, several sites were destroyed again. In fact, instability seems to have prevailed throughout the postpalatial period, as destruction levels and evidence for population movements mark the history of many settlements. For instance, the Lower Town at Tiryns was reduced in size after a destruction at the end of LH IIIC Early, and population groups may have left again.⁵² In the course of LH IIIC Middle, Koukounaries on Paros, after a short life that began only in LH IIIC Early, was destroyed by enemy action and then abandoned. Phylakopi on Melos met the same fate. In contrast, Grotta on Naxos was resettled and developed, in LH IIIC Middle, into a sizeable town with strong fortifications.⁵³ At the end of LH IIIC Middle/Advanced, Mycenae, Tiryns, Lefkandi, Aigeira, Kynos/Livanates, and several other sites suffered severe destruction.⁵⁴ Korakou was abandoned. In the course of LH IIIC Late, settlements in the Argolid, Laconia, Euboea, and Attica

and on several islands declined, and many sites were abandoned before the end of the period.⁵⁵ In contrast, new settlements were founded on Salamis, and a Mycenaean colony flourished at Emporio on Chios.⁵⁶ In the northwest Peloponnese, on Kephallenia, and in central Greece, Mycenaean communities also reached a pinnacle. These examples may suffice to suggest that the postpalatial Mycenaean era was by no means a peaceful period in the history of Greece.

The so-called “handmade burnished ware” or “Barbarian ware” in Mycenaean contexts may also be connected with population movements. This non-Mycenaean pottery of prehistoric character had first appeared in LM IIIB contexts in Crete, and in the final phase of the Argive palaces (above, p. 389). In LH IIIC Early, handmade and burnished pottery was found at Tiryns and Mycenae and at Lefkandi, Korakou, Aigeira, Teichos Dymaion, the Menelaion, Dimini, and several other sites. It even occurred in twelfth century BCE contexts in Cyprus. The quantities found are always very small. The origin of this pottery has been the subject of much debate.⁵⁷ In view of its widespread occurrence, it cannot have been a local phenomenon. It was made locally, though, even at Chania in Crete; it is only at Kommos that handmade and burnished vessels were imported from Sardinia.⁵⁸ However, handmade burnished ware did not have a Mycenaean pedigree, nor was it a complement to the Mycenaean repertoire of coarse household pottery. Because it is unlikely that it met the demands of a population used to the standards of Mycenaean ceramics, its production has been ascribed to the presence of a foreign population element in the Aegean. Its provenance has been sought in southeast Europe, in north-west Greece, in regions on both sides of the Adriatic, or in the northern Balkans. The role of people from these areas within the Mycenaean communities remains unclear, however. It is much debated whether or not they had been involved in the catastrophes of the palaces and, in any case, the small quantities of handmade burnished ware do not suggest the presence of large groups of foreigners. Continuity of LH IIIC handmade burnished ware into the Early Iron Age has also been suggested, but at many sites this pottery class disappeared in the course of LH IIIC.

The island of Cyprus was also afflicted by destruction and abandonment of sites around the turn of the thirteenth to the twelfth century BCE. The subsequent cultural phase of Late Cypriot (LC) IIIA was marked by various novelties that exhibited a distinct Aegean character. LC IIIA pottery, in particular, shows Mycenaean influences.⁵⁹ Moreover, the Cypriot Greek dialect of the first millennium BCE had several features in common with Mycenaean Greek. It was therefore

assumed that Mycenaean population groups fled from the disasters of the palaces to Cyprus and introduced the Greek language to the island (Ch. 14, pp. 375–7). Recent research has shown, however, that LC IIIA pottery was already marked by the influence of Aegean LH IIIC Early pottery.⁶⁰ Moreover, the cultural novelties of LC IIIA were not exclusively of Mycenaean character. **Horns of consecration** (a symbol shaped like abstract bull horns; Ch. 6, p. 148) found at Myrtos, Kition, and Palaipaphos were Minoan features. Even handmade burnished pottery appears in LC IIIA contexts. It is therefore likely that people from various parts of the Aegean banded together and set off for Cyprus. The question of whether they were part of, or identical with the ominous “Sea Peoples” and furthermore whether they were responsible for the widespread destruction in Cyprus, is the topic of longstanding discussion (Ch. 14, p. 376).⁶¹ At Maa–Palaiokastros, at any rate, they settled peacefully. Be that as it may, their move was not prompted by the fall of the Mycenaean palaces, because it took place too late, during or toward the end of LH IIIC Early. Moreover, the arrival of people from the Aegean (artisans?) seems to have given a boost to the Cypriot civilization of the twelfth century BCE. Contrary to the postpalatial cultures of the Aegean, complex social systems and a high level of material culture continued in Cyprus. However, the island’s culture remained essentially Cypriot. It was not until the eleventh century BCE that the “Greekness” of Cyprus was inaugurated by immigrants from mainland Greece.⁶²

THE MATERIAL CULTURE

Settlement and Architecture

Although settlement was resumed or continued at many sites in LH IIIC, the demise of the palatial system caused a fundamental transformation of the Mycenaean way of life and material culture. As might be expected, this was particularly true in the former palace states. No palace was restored. Pylos remained in ruins. At Thebes a reoccupation of the general area is attested by LH IIIC burials in the chamber tombs, but a modest reoccupation of the palace site, and extends to the early part of LH IIIC Middle.⁶³ Dimini, too, was reoccupied and destroyed again in LH IIIC Early.⁶⁴ At Midea the lower terraces were reoccupied in LH IIIC Early and Middle. At the end of LH IIIC Early a comparatively large building, subdivided by a row of columns, was set into the remains of an LH IIIB **megaron** (an axial building unit consisting of main room with anteroom and/or porch).⁶⁵

Of the palatial sites only Tiryns and Mycenae remained in use throughout LH IIIC. Inside the citadel of Mycenae, repair and reuse of earlier structures such as the so-called Granary in the vicinity of the Lion Gate took place, and new structures were built. By LH IIIC Middle, splendid pottery such as the famous Warrior Vase (Pl. 15.3) was produced, so that some prosperity had apparently returned (below, pp. 399–401).⁶⁶ There is also evidence that the southwestern part of the palace continued to be used for religious purposes.⁶⁷ As a matter of fact, fragments of wall paintings (among them a beautiful picture of a woman holding a lily) were found in a building of LH IIIC Late in this area.⁶⁸ However, the architectural standards of the palace period were never regained.

The best evidence for LH IIIC architecture comes from Tiryns, where a complete settlement sequence has been excavated in the Lower Citadel.⁶⁹ Apart from the fortification walls, though, neither monumental structures nor house designs of the palace period were restored. Outside the Citadel, an extensive and well-planned town of ca. 25 **hectares** (a hectare is 10,000 sq. m. or about 2.5 acres) existed in LH IIIC Early. The settlement plan displayed self-contained household units that consisted of domestic structures, storerooms, and workshops arranged around a courtyard. Continuity of a palace period structure, albeit on a much inferior level, is suggested by Building T, a small megaron-like building on the Upper Citadel, now dated to LH IIIC (below, p. 404). It was set into the ruin of the great megaron of the former palace, and in front of it the altar of the Great Court was remodeled.⁷⁰ Another building dated to LH IIIC Early stood out in the northeastern sector of the Lower Town. It was large in size and subdivided by colonnades.⁷¹ An even larger building called Megaron W was founded in LH IIIC Middle at the southeastern foot of the citadel. Each megaron-like LH IIIC buildings found so far at Tiryns and Midea had its main room subdivided by a row of columns. They seem to reflect a process of social ranking within the community (below, p. 403), and a remarkable sequence of LH IIIC shrines in the Lower Citadel of Tiryns bears witness to the transformation of palace sanctuaries into public places of worship.⁷²

Evidence for the regions outside the former palace states is very limited. House plans of newly founded sites in LH IIIC Early such as Lefkandi and Aigeira resemble those of Tiryns.⁷³ At other sites such as Korakou in the Corinthia and Ayios Kosmas in Attica houses were rebuilt on their earlier layout, although on a more modest scale, and settlement also continued in the citadel of Teichos Dymaion in Achaëa.⁷⁴ In LH IIIC Middle, settlement plans might consist of complex buildings

with several rooms. Moreover, Naxos and Aigeira were fortified. On Crete square house plans were preferred, but east Cretan settlements situated at high elevations, such as Karphi, Kavousi, and Vrokastro, had to adapt their layouts to the steep terrain. Long rectangular house units clustered closely together, separated by narrow alleys, and no apparent alignment was maintained. Isolated and rectangular buildings played a role in cult architecture.⁷⁵ Defensive sites on hilltops were fortified.⁷⁶

Cemeteries and Burial Customs

Mycenaean cemeteries continued to be used in LH IIIC or were reused after a period of abandonment.⁷⁷ Some chamber tomb cemeteries were newly founded. The best published example is Perati in eastern Attica, where the sequence of burials was divided into three phases dating to LH IIIC Early, Middle, and Late. Some **tholos** tombs (round domed tombs; Fig. 13.2) of the palace period were reused in LH IIIC Middle and Late. Otherwise no new ones were built in LH IIIC, except for the small tholoi and vaulted rectangular tombs founded in some regions of the former Mycenaean periphery, such as Thessaly, Phokis, Kephallenia, and Crete. Regional varieties in tomb architecture and burial customs were as manifold as they had been during earlier periods (Ch. 13, pp. 328–30). There were, however, some novelties. At Olympia and Aigeira–Psila Alonia, and on Kephallenia, parallel rectangular trenches were dug into the tomb floors to receive the bodies (“dormitories”). In newly founded cemeteries such as Perati, pit graves were dug, along with chamber tombs. Cist graves and intramural single burials start late in the period. Cremation, although not altogether a new phenomenon in the Aegean, occurred more frequently in LH IIIC. Both cremation and **inhumation** (burial) were practiced on the mainland, as well as on the islands, but cremation always remained a minority rite. The same applies to a **tumulus** (burial mound) recently found at Argos that contained both cremations (some in handmade pots) and inhumations. In contrast, the walled tumulus excavated at Chania near Mycenae contained only cremations in ash urns. Both tumuli were dated by their burial gifts to LH IIIC Middle and Late.⁷⁸ They certainly were a remarkable feature of twelfth century BCE burial architecture in a central region of Mycenaean Greece.

Novelties in grave pottery include the lekythos (a narrow-necked jug), flasks, ring-shaped and bird-shaped vases, and the kalathos (a deep conical open vase), with small terracotta figurines of wailing women on

its rim, arms raised to their heads. In LH IIIC Middle and Late, lavishly decorated stirrup jars and other closed shapes join the ensembles. The array of burial gifts in LH IIIC tombs was generally modest. However, a certain degree of social differentiation seems to be reflected by burials with gifts of special value or foreign origin, as well as by objects for personal grooming (below, pp. 403–4). Even more conspicuous were the so-called “warrior burials” of LH IIIC (Ch. 13, p. 335), of which the region of Achaea has provided the most splendid examples.⁷⁹ The most conspicuous elements of these burials were swords, spears, and other elements of excellent LH IIIC weapons and armor (Pls. 15.1, 15.2). In contrast to the popularity of “heirlooms” in the realm of precious objects and “exotica” (below), weapons deposited in LH IIIC burial contexts were never old-fashioned.

Arts and Crafts

Except for pottery-making, bronze work, and shipbuilding, there is no evidence that the fine arts and skills of the palatial culture survived into LH IIIC. Artisans may have perished or fled together with their patrons, or their skills were no longer in demand. Jewelry, seals, and objects of carved bone manufactured in LH IIIC were simple and unassuming. The contents of the cemetery at Perati provide a good example.⁸⁰ Production of glass and faience objects seems to have ceased altogether. Attempts to apply advanced techniques such as repoussé to produce human and animal forms in sheet gold were not very successful. In fact, objects of fine craftsmanship and precious materials may have been manufactured in the palace period and passed down into LH IIIC as heirlooms. The same applies to many objects of Egyptian and Near Eastern origin found in LH IIIC contexts.

Fresco painting may have enjoyed a limited survival in cult buildings, as suggested by the fragments found at Mycenae.⁸¹ Otherwise, craftsmen trained in fresco painting may have transferred their skills in LH IIIC to other artistic media, as suggested by a limestone stele from Mycenae covered in LH IIIC Middle with stucco and decorated with warriors and animals, or by the famous Warrior Vase from Mycenae (Pl. 15.3)⁸².

The general loss of crafts and technology is reflected by the lexical disappearance of the Linear B terminology relating to specialized crafts, particularly in the textile industry, and to the production of luxury goods. Most of the Mycenaean professional terms vanished with the

palaces. Those terms which carried on into the later first millennium refer to essential domestic and agricultural activities, to livestock breeding, and to the basic crafts required by a rural community, such as bronzesmith, potter, fuller, baker, woodcutter, and mason.⁸³

This artistic decline in LH IIIC contrasts with the flowering of the minor arts in Cyprus in the twelfth century BCE. In fact, it was there that Aegean style and techniques in ivory carving, gem cutting, and jewelry survived. They were integrated into the cultural physiognomy of LC IIIA, probably as a result of the immigration of Aegean population groups in Cyprus, and even survived into the Early Iron Age.

Pottery

The diachronic development of LH IIIC pottery types and decorative patterns has been extensively treated.⁸⁴ Pottery of LH IIIC Early did not differ greatly from that of LH IIIB2, except for a few new types and a marked tendency toward linear decoration and monochrome surfaces. The occurrence of handmade burnished ware has already been mentioned (above, p. 395). Wheelmade Mycenaean pottery was not affected by the general technical and artistic decline of the period. Indeed, vase painting of LH IIIC Middle was marked by a spirit of vitality and innovation to a degree that has been regarded as a last blossoming of Mycenaean representative art. In almost every Mycenaean province, distinct styles of copious vase decoration were created. It seems that artisans, who during the palace period would have worked as fresco painters, ivory workers, or gem cutters, now found a ceramic outlet for their artistic abilities.

The most successful creations were the close style of the Argolid (Pl. 15.4), the octopus style of coastal areas and islands, and the pictorial style that depicted humans, animals and fantastic creatures (Pls. 15.5, 15.6).⁸⁵ Copiously decorated stirrup jars (Pl. 15.4), traditionally used as containers for valuable liquids such as perfumed oils and wine, were exchanged throughout the Aegean and obviously played a role in gift-exchange relationships. They were also deposited in tombs as gifts to the deceased. Ceramic sets used for feasting and drinking parties, too, carried pleonastic decoration, thus indicating value, as well as the status of their owners. The huge kraters (mixing bowls), in particular, are decorated with pictures that seem to reflect the self-awareness of social elites. Representations of warriors walking in file or riding chariots, fighting scenes, a chariot race, seafaring and single combat on ships,

hunting scenes, and dancers refer to predominantly male conduct characterized by military prowess and aristocratic behavior.⁸⁶ Contacts and cultural exchange between the various centers of pottery production also promoted stylistic developments that were common to all Mycenaean provinces. They counterbalanced a marked tendency of LH IIIC pottery styles toward regional idiosyncrasies. The same observation also applies to the ordinary pottery of everyday use. When the flamboyant pottery styles gradually died out in LH IIIC Late, the basic similarities between the ceramics of all Mycenaean regions became apparent again as in LH IIIC Early. At the end of the postpalatial period, shapes and decorative patterns showed much restriction and uniformity. In some regions, for example, parts of central Greece, this repertoire survived into the Early Iron Age.

Metalwork

In contrast to the decline in gold and silver work, the bronzesmiths of the postpalatial period were able to keep up a high standard of their craft. In fact, weaponry reached a pinnacle of achievement. In LH IIIC a complete array of new weapons found widespread distribution in the Mycenaean world. Their origin has been traced back to Italy and other regions around the Adriatic, like that of the handmade burnished ware (above, p. 395). The first specimens had already appeared, at palace sites, before the end of LH IIIB. After the fall of the palaces, not only was a wider range of weapons introduced, but also new types of knives and various tools and implements. It appears that regular contacts and exchange between the Aegean and the west survived the demise of the palaces or were reestablished soon after. In fact, Mycenaean smiths quickly learned how to make the new weapons. As a consequence, in LH IIIC the Mycenaean world became a branch in its own right of a wide zone of advanced metalwork with shared features. The new set of weaponry (Pl. 15.1) comprised the cut-and-thrust sword of the flange-hilted Naue II type, long and short types of socketed spearheads, spear butts, greaves, shields, and the so-called Peschiera (Pertosa) dagger with a forked, flanged hilt.⁸⁷ New types of body armor and helmets and a new type of chariot were depicted on pictorial style vases (Pls. 15.5, 15.6).⁸⁸ Swords of the traditional Aegean type, too, were developed further, but the Naue II weapon was more successful. Iron knives, probably of Cypriot origin, were a novel feature that appeared during the later part of LH IIIC.⁸⁹ Fibulae, of northern origin, were produced in greater varieties in LH IIIC. Rings with antithetic spiral terminals

and shield rings with embossed dots also came from the north. They were introduced at the end of the period and became popular in post-Mycenaean times.⁹⁰

BEYOND THE MATERIAL CULTURE

Religion and Cult Practice

The very fact that all the Olympian gods with the exception of Aphrodite and Apollo are mentioned in the Mycenaean texts (Ch. 13, pp. 348–50) bears witness to the survival of Mycenaean religion after the fall of the palaces. However, changes in cult architecture and religious practice were inevitable after the demise of the palaces and of Mycenaean theocratic kingship. Although some rites such as libation, burnt animal sacrifice, and ritual banquets continued to be practiced, most religious ceremonies mentioned in the Linear B texts fell into oblivion. Offerings deposited in sanctuaries were also marked by both continuity and change. Female terracotta figurines, of both the small and the large wheelmade type, remained popular, as did small bovine figurines. However, the small female figurines were confined to the psi type, with curving upraised arms, and novelties such as male figurines and wheelmade bovine figures were introduced. Sanctuaries of the postpalatial period were self-contained and accessible to the general public. The small sanctuary in the Lower Citadel at Tiryns provides a good example.⁹¹ It was built in LH IIIC Early and remodeled twice, in LH IIIC Middle and again in LH IIIC Late. Among the offerings deposited on its cult bench, the famous large wheelmade female figures dated to LH IIIC Middle and Late stand out (Pl. 15.7). In its last phase, the ground plan of the shrine was that of a small megaron. Shrine architecture, cult equipment, and votive gifts varied from region to region, as demonstrated by the twin sanctuary at Phylakopi, the last phases of the age-old Temple at Ayia Irini on Keos (Ch. 8, p. 196), and House G at Asine.⁹² A rural sanctuary was excavated at Kalapodi in Phokis.⁹³ At Mycenae the area of the palatial Cult Center seems to have kept its religious significance (Chs. 11, pp. 264, 270; 13, p. 350).

Cretan sanctuaries and cult practices were also affected by the turbulence at the end of the thirteenth century BCE. In LM IIIC, Mycenaean features such as psi-type figurines appeared at Phaistos, Gortys, and Chamalevri. However, in many places the genuinely Minoan urban bench sanctuary prevailed, associated with certain sets of cult objects

such as large clay female figures (the so-called “Goddess with Upraised Arms”), stands, snake tubes, and certain types of receptacles. Open-air sanctuaries operated at Kato Syme and at Ayia Triada. Worship in peak sanctuaries and sacred caves continued in LM IIIC on Mount Iuktas and in the caves of Psychro and on Mount Ida. Offerings included wheel-made terracotta figures of animals and fantastic creatures (monsters), objects of personal ornament, and pottery.⁹⁴ Most sanctuaries did not survive the end of LH/LM IIIC, except in peripheral regions such as Kato Syme in Crete or Kalapodi in central Greece.

Social Organization, Economy, and Interregional Contacts

Research into these aspects of the postpalatial period is still in its infancy. However, there can be no doubt that the collapse of the palace states led to a deep-rooted change in social organization and economy. The lexical disappearance of Mycenaean political, social, and administrative terms is even more pronounced than in the field of work and production.⁹⁵ Judging from the archaeological evidence (above, pp. 396–9), postpalatial settlements were inhabited by village-like communities that consisted of self-contained and economically independent households. Communal productivity, as indicated by the existence of potters’ kilns and granaries, does not appear to have extended beyond the limits of self-sufficiency.

Autonomous communities of the postpalatial period may well have prompted the shift of the political term **dāmos** (body politic), which once had been a designation for local administrative units of the palace system (Chs. 12, pp. 300–301; 13, pp. 334, 353), to its later use in Greek political terminology (“community,” “municipality,” “district,” “people”). Moreover, the disintegration of the unified territories of palace states promoted the rise in status of the **basileus** from a local dignitary (Mycenaean **g^wasileus**, Ch. 12, p. 293) to a position of elite and even chiefly rank; in the first millennium the word eventually came to mean “king.” There is evidence that the period of LH IIIC had a part in this transformative process. Social ranking is reflected by buildings that, by their size and by special features such as colonnades, outgrew the general plainness of postpalatial architecture (above, pp. 396–8). In funerary contexts, elite status was expressed by the deposition of prestige objects consisting of valuables (gold and ivory objects, bronze vessels, sealstones, splendidly decorated stirrup jars) and objects that may be called “exotic,” such as amber, as well as objects of Egyptian, Syro-Palestinian, and Cypriot origin (above, p. 399). Many of them were

heirlooms or antiques that had been manufactured in earlier periods. Objects for personal grooming (tweezers, razors, combs, mirrors) also indicated elite status. Moreover, the elite funerary rite of **prothesis** (mourning the deceased on a bier), which later on became a favorite theme of Attic geometric vase painting, was already practiced in LH IIIC (and earlier, Chs. 11, p. 272; 13, p. 338; Pl. 13.2).⁹⁶ Images painted on pictorial-style vases further suggest that military excellence was of paramount importance for the achievement of rank and political power (Pls. 15.5, 15.6),⁹⁷ hardly surprising in view of the unstable conditions of the period. In fact, military prowess may well have paved the way to political rule, as the “warrior burials” of LH IIIC Middle and Late seem to indicate (above, p. 399; Ch. 13, p. 335). No cemetery had more than one or two tombs containing warrior burials, even if elite burials occurred in several or all other tombs. Claim to political power may have also been expressed by the possession of objects commonly interpreted as “scepter heads” and of signet rings, which were often of Early Mycenaean origin. A fine analysis of the famous Tiryns Treasure and of Building T at Tiryns (above, p. 397), which occupied the site of the former royal megaron and even integrated the place of the throne in its layout, has recently suggested that some families managed to rise up to kingship by claiming descent from the monarchs of the palace period.⁹⁸ As a matter of fact, the precious Early Mycenaean sword pommels found in the LH IIIC Middle “megaron” at Midea may have underlined, in a similar way, a claim for power by descent.⁹⁹ It is therefore likely that during LH IIIC, just as in the Homeric epics, the title of *basileus* was adopted both by the members of social elites and by those who managed to establish monocratic rule.

Representations of ships were a popular theme of pictorial vases and testify that there was no decline in Mycenaean ship construction (Pl. 15.5).¹⁰⁰ Overseas contacts were quickly reestablished after the fall of the palaces, as shown for example by the mutual influences between Minoan and Mycenaean pottery in LH IIIC Early,¹⁰¹ and by the general mobility of population groups mentioned earlier (above, pp. 393–6). Though the decline in the fine arts and luxury crafts had curtailed the need for regular importation of precious raw materials, bronze and copper were still highly desired for the production of weapons and other items. Furthermore, the exchange of splendidly decorated vases and of prestige objects is attested particularly by the evidence from tomb contexts. It has therefore been suggested that metals and prestige goods were obtained by way of small-scale trading and via a network of gift exchange, both dominated by the social elites.¹⁰² Representations of

warrior-rowers and of fighting on shipboard suggest that contacts were not always friendly. Even sea raiding may not have been alien to the warrior elites of the period.

External contacts with the regions across the Adriatic and to the north along the Great Isthmus Corridor Route were soon revived in LH IIIC and remained intact throughout the period.¹⁰³ In contrast, the Aegean played a peripheral role in economic relations between the mighty Cypriot states and the West. Contacts between Cyprus and the Aegean became closer again during the later stages of LH IIIC and probably inaugurated the introduction of iron objects and iron working into the Aegean.¹⁰⁴ However, they may have also laid the foundations for the immigration of Greek population groups and the establishment of the Greek language in Cyprus in the eleventh century BCE.¹⁰⁵

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE, LOSSES AND GAINS: A SUMMARY

The fall of the palaces and the catastrophes in its wake must have had a traumatic impact on individuals, as well as on the communities of the Mycenaean world. Many people left their homes, seeking security or trying their luck elsewhere. Others remained at home, repaired their dwellings, and continued with their day-to-day lives. Yet nothing was the same as before. Not only had the political and economic conditions fundamentally changed, but also material culture and spiritual life were deeply affected by the collapse of the palace states. Arts and crafts, technology, social behavior, cult practice, burial customs, and other cultural features were no longer maintained by an advanced and complex political system commanding highly developed economic and cultural potentials. Nor did artisans have to meet the demands of theocratic monarchs and sophisticated courtiers. Looked at from the height of the palatial civilization of the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries BCE, the postpalatial period certainly gives the impression of impoverishment.

However, it must be remembered that many developments of LH IIIC, such as a certain cultural decline and changes in settlement patterns, had already begun during the final phase of the palaces. It is conceivable that during the critical situation in LH IIIB2, the general population felt that increased investments to preserve the system no longer yielded the benefits that were expected in return. The demise of the palace system may well have been welcomed in some quarters as a relief from strain (above, pp. 387–90). Moreover, local communities

may then have found themselves free to reorganize their social structure and to dispose of their own resources and products. The natural environment, too, seems to have recovered from exploitation by the palace economies: In LH IIIC the quality of grains improved again in the Argolid, and in Messenia the tree population increased.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, the Mycenaean regions outside the palace states must have welcomed the termination of the economic, cultural, and presumably also political predominance that had been exercised by the palace states. A marked cultural regionalism suggests that those areas that had been formerly reduced to “provinces,” in the disparaging sense of the word, could now develop their own economic and artistic potentials. Supra-regional cultural developments furthermore bear witness to regular contacts and exchange across the Aegean and beyond.

Looked at in its own right, the Mycenaean postpalatial period was by no means devoid of creativity and innovations. New settlement plans emerged, reflecting new political and economic structures. Technologies were promoted, particularly in the field of bronzework. In fact, in LH IIIC, Middle Mycenaean culture had its final flowering. Large wheelmade terracotta figures of humans and animals deposited in sanctuaries bear witness to the artistry of craftsmen working in ceramics. Revival in the representational arts is also revealed in the flamboyant decorations of LH IIIC Middle clay vessels. Narrative scenes anticipated themes and motifs that are found, later on, on Late Geometric vases. Cypriot pottery of the eleventh century BCE was also indebted to the LH IIIC pottery tradition, and the same is true of Early Iron Age pottery styles of the various provinces of Greece.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, linguistic analyses, as well as the image of a figure playing a small lyre depicted on a vase fragment from Tiryns,¹⁰⁸ suggest that during the twelfth century BCE the legacy of Mycenaean poetry was transformed into a tradition of oral poetry, which, several centuries later, Homer found at his disposal.¹⁰⁹ It thus appears that, during the last phase of Mycenaean civilization, people came to terms, apparently quite well, with the vicissitudes of their time.

EPILOGUE

LH IIIC Middle ended again in destruction at many sites. Prosperity seems to have continued for a while in LH IIIC Late, but then the history of the various provinces of Mycenaean Greece diverged (above, pp. 393–6). Settlement declined in the eastern regions of the

Peloponnese, such as the Argolid and Corinthia, and on several island sites, such as Lefkandi, Keos, and Naxos, whereas sites on Salamis and Emporio on Chios flourished. The numbers of burials in the tombs of Perati decreased, and the cemetery was eventually abandoned. On the other hand, cemeteries in Arcadia, Elis, and Achaea and on the Ionian islands were used until the very end of LH IIIC.¹¹⁰ They were all then abandoned, quite abruptly. It has been suggested that Greek population groups set off for Cyprus, and they may also have sought out the western coast of Asia Minor during the eleventh century BCE. In those regions that were later known under the name of Ionia, Greek colonization did not begin before the Submycenaean and Protogeometric periods.¹¹¹ Further south, however, Miletos, Iasos, and Mūskebi had already been well integrated into the Mycenaean world from LH IIIA2 until LH IIIC.¹¹² In contrast, settlements and cemeteries of the Mycenaean periphery of central and northern Greece remained in use beyond the transition from the Mycenaean era to the Early Iron Age.¹¹³ However, several phenomena of Mycenaean survivals notwithstanding, scholars unanimously agree that the close of the Mycenaean Age may be defined with the end of LH IIIC Late or during the Submycenaean period, at the latest.

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