

IV. AN EARLY HELLADIC SETTLEMENT IN THE APOLLON MALEATAS SITE AT EPIDAUROS

by

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A. Introduction¹

An Early Helladic settlement at Kynortion Mountain near Epidauros has been known for a long time. The site is located on the hill above the site of the sanctuary of Asklepios, about 1 km away from it. The altitude is 482 m above sea-level and it is approximately 6.500 m from the sea to the northeast as the crow flies. In archaeological research it is known as the site of the Classical Sanctuary of Apollon Maleatas, one of the few cult sites in the Aegean world which have yielded evidence for continuity from the late Bronze Age to Iron Age.

Excavations conducted in the first half of the twentieth century by I. Papadimitriou brought to light small amounts of characteristic prehistoric pottery.² P. Kavvadias had already excavated the area (in 1896) but he did not find any prehistoric material³. Moreover, in 1977–78 professor V. Lambrinoudakis dis-

¹ I thank Prof. V. Lambrinoudakis who assigned me the excavation, study and publication of the Early Helladic remains of the Sanctuary of Apollo Maleatas. I also thank Prof. K. D. Vitelli for her help and inspiration, Prof. N. Papalexandrou and Dr. A. Vlachopoulos for checking the English text and advising me. Last but not least, I thank Dr. E. Alram for her help and encouragement and for giving me the chance to present the latest finds in the present article. My husband, I. Mavrommatidis, is the architect of the excavation; I owe him a lot, far more than technical support. The artists H. Koini and D. Oikonomou were responsible for the site plans. The conservators N. Anastasatou, N. Dasakli and A. Tsigri took care of the finds. The pictures are made by the author. The dedication of the archaeology students and the excavation workers made everything worthwhile and, nothing would have been possible without them.

² Papadimitriou I., «Ανασκαφή εν τῷ Ασκληπιείῳ καὶ ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος Μαλεάτα ἐν Ἐπιδαύρῳ», *Prakt* 1948, 90–111, «Ανασκαφαὶ ἐν τῷ Ασκληπιεῖῳ τῆς Ἐπιδαύρου», *Prakt* 1949, 91–99, «Ανασκαφαὶ τοῦ ἱεροῦ τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος Μαλεάτα ἐν τῷ Ασκληπιεῖῳ τῆς Ἐπιδαύρου», *Prakt* 1950, 194–202.

³ Καββαδίας, Π., *Τὸ ἱερόν τοῦ Ασκληπιοῦ ἐν Ἐπιδαύρῳ*, Αθήνα 1900, 179.

covered remnants of buildings dating to the Early Helladic II⁴. In 1995 a new program of systematic exploration was undertaken by the author.⁵ The new evidence enlightens our knowledge of prehistoric life and it supplements recent investigations of the Early Helladic period in the Asklepieion and the surrounding area⁶.

The earliest finds are sherds that can be dated to the Final Neolithic period. By the EH I and EH II period the settlement was an active community in which more than one building phase is recorded. Unfortunately the EH III and MH periods are not represented by buildings. In LH the site became home to an important Mycenaean shrine that included an open air altar and a large terrace for ritual meals.⁷ In the following centuries the site developed into the famous sanctuary of Apollo Maleatas which functioned, without interruption, until the end of antiquity.

The excavation is currently in its final stage. The conservation and the study of both the artifacts and the architecture of the site are not yet complete, so an all-encompassing attempt to assess the significance of the various assemblages is not yet possible. The aim of the present article is to focus on the architectural remains in order to highlight processes of change underlying the transformation of this site from a purely domestic settlement to an archaeologically visible religious establishment.

⁴ Lambrinoudakis V., «Ιερόν Μαλεάτου Απόλλωνος εις Επίδαυρον», *Prakt* 1975, 162–175; «Ανασκαφή στο Ιερό του Απόλλωνος Μαλεάτα», *Prakt* 1976: 202–209; «Ανασκαφή Ιερού του Απόλλωνος Μαλεάτα» *Prakt* 1977: 187–194; «Ανασκαφή στο Ιερό του Απόλλωνος Μαλεάτα», *Prakt* 1978, 111–121; «Επίδαυρος, Ιερό Απόλλωνος Μαλεάτα», *Prakt* 1996, 125–128; *Prakt* 1998, 155–156; *Prakt* 1999, 113–115, «Επίδαυρος Ιερό Απόλλωνος Μαλεάτα», *Έργον* 1977, 98–105; *Έργον* 1978, 37–42; *Έργον* 1998, 68–70; *Έργον* 1999, 56–58; *Έργον* 2000, 52–54; *Έργον* 2001, 44–45.

⁵ Theodorou A., «Τα προϊστορικά κτίσματα» in: *Το Ασκληπιείο της Επιδαύρου. Η έδρα του θεού γιατρού της αρχαιότητας, η συντήρηση των μνημείων του, Περιφέρεια Πελοποννήσου* 1999, 62–63; Theodorou-Mavrommatidi 2003, 247–262.

⁶ Early Helladic sherds were found in the lower layers at “Loutra Asklipiou” in Asklepieion. Two more early Helladic sites, the hilltops Stochos and Pouliou Rachi, were spotted in the area. Remains of the EH II period were discovered in Palaia Epidaurous (the ancient city of Epidaurous) in the lowest layers to the south of the Sanctuary of Artemis, Archontidou-Argyri A., «Οικόπεδο Κατομυλή», *ADelt* 1977, B 1 Chron, p. 46.

⁷ Lambrinoudakis, V., *Staatskult und Geschichte der Stadt Epidaurous*, *Archaïognosia* 1, 1980, 43–63. Lambrinoudakis, V., *Remains of the Mycenaean Period in the Sanctuary of Apollo Maleatas*, in: Hägg, R. – Marinatos, N. (eds.), *Sanctuaries and Cults in the Aegean Bronze Age. Proceedings of the First International Symposium at the Swedish Institute in Athens*, 12–13 May, 1980, Lund, 59–65.

B. The settlement

The remains of the buildings are poorly preserved and some of them are now on the surface because of their position on top of the hill, and therefore the soil that covered them has been washed away. Consequently the approach proposed here is based on the stratigraphy of the excavated area where the soil was restricted by walls, mainly the floor, and foundation levels

1. *Final Neolithic (strata 8 and 9)*⁸ (pl. 1: A7–A8; pl. 4c: 8)

Recent discoveries date the first traces of habitation on the site earlier than what was previously believed. Two trial trenches dug at the south area of the top of the hill, inside the early Helladic building A (discussed in detail below), reached layers containing pottery from the Final Neolithic along with Early Helladic I pottery. Only a few sherds were recovered but these were characteristic. Red-brown slipped and burnished-ware sherds, fragments of the so-called “cheese-pots” (coarse ware pans with perforations below the rim) (pl. 6a: 9) and coarse ware were found in this layer. Architectural remains were not found, either because the building materials had not been preserved (organic materials/light construction) or because later construction on the site destroyed all pre-existing structures. However, it should be noted that the trenches that reached strata 8 and 9 were small, as they were restricted by the walls of Building A. It is, therefore, possible that even if some structures did exist during this phase, their remains might not be situated on the particular spot of the aforementioned trenches.

2. *Early Helladic I (burials and stratum 7)* (pl. 1: I, II, III, 1; pl. 4c: 7)

So far the site has produced no architectural remains that can be clearly dated to the EH I. There is, however, sufficient evidence to suggest dense habitation on the hill: numerous fragments of pottery and three undisturbed burials situated to the northeast of the excavated area indicate some sort of organized existence of a group of people during the EH I period.

⁸ The numbering followed here is that of the field notebooks, that means that n. 1 is the surface layer, n. 9 is the one above bed rock, whereas numbers 5 and 6 are only found in certain trenches. The final numbering will take place when the excavation is completed. Walls are numbered with the excavation number, whereas buildings in this publication are marked with a letter.

2.1 *The settlement*

The possibility that some of the walls revealed during our excavation can be dated to this period can not be neglected. The successive and repeated usage of the same building materials (mostly crude local lime stones) makes the distinction of the building phases a difficult process. Two walls with the same building technique and building materials can look similar but may belong to different phases. Only stratigraphical observations can lead to more or less accurate conclusions.

Most of the pottery can be dated to EH I. Bowls, fruit stands (pl. 6a: 11), jars (pl. 6b: 2), pithoi, basins and cooking pots are characteristic shapes. Almost all seem to be made of local clays⁹. The surface is carefully burnished and usually features a red shiny slip. Sometimes brown and black burnished slip (pl. 5b: 2) also occurs as well as red and black mottled ware (pl. 6a: 10)¹⁰. Cooking pots are made of coarse clay tempered with non-plastic materials, usually crushed local stone, and bear no slip. On pithoid pots we note the application of a plastic rope-shaped band decoration.

Interestingly enough, a few sherds belong to imports from the Cyclades, such as sherds belonging to “frying-pans” (pl. 6a: 5–6)¹¹. These finds may be associated with the head of an EC marble idol discovered in the Late Helladic open air altar¹². By comparison only a few stone tools were found. Melian obsidian blades were found but not cores, maybe because they were not made in situ. A total of six arrowheads (pl. 7b: 1), all found in the same area, were also made of this material. Furthermore, some andesite mill stones were found¹³. In two cases, broken mill-stones were used as building material.

2.2 *The burials*

All three tombs consist of simple pits, about 30 cm deep dug into the ground covered with crude limestone slabs (pl. 2: b). No soil was added on the corpse but significant *kterismata* accompanied the deceased. This feature is strongly reminiscent of Cycladic graves of the same type¹⁴ and the cemetery complex of Ag. Kosmas in Attica¹⁵. In one case (grave II), a row of stones had been placed at each

⁹ This is macroscopically observed, based on the degree of uniformity of the clay in most of the cases and the clusters of crushed local stone included in the body.

¹⁰ A parallel of the Argolid area in: Pullen 1995: 159, n. 189 (Δ33–1–12), fig.12.

¹¹ Another “frying-pan” sherd is discussed by Coleman 1985, 215, originally published in Papadimitriou I., *Prakt* 1949, 95, fig.5.

¹² Unfortunately the idol (EC II) was not found in a EH layer but in the ashes of the open air Mycenaean altar. Lambrinouidakis I., «Ανασκαφή Επιδαύρου, Ιερό Απόλλωνος Μαλεάτα», *Prakt* 1981: 159, pic. 129b.

¹³ Runnels 1981.

¹⁴ Doulas 1977.

¹⁵ Mylonas, G.E., Aghios Kosmas. An Early Bronze Age settlement and cemetery in Attica, Princeton 1959.

of the narrow ends of the pit, in order to hold the covering slabs in place. The three tombs are close to one another. It is possible that they were part of a larger group, which has since been destroyed. This assumption is based on the fact that additional covering slabs were scattered in the area not far from the tombs under discussion. The slabs must have been brought up to the hill from a spot lower on the west slope. They were recovered near Building B¹⁶, the first of the three apsidal buildings found, to the north of which the three burials are situated. More specifically, Building B is only at a distance of half a meter from grave III and it is possible that the construction of the former caused the destruction of several graves. The close vicinity of the building and the graves may suggest that during building construction, the existence of the graves was ignored.

North of the burials and almost touching Grave I, was a cavity in the natural rock of the site (see n.1 on the general plan). It was covered with stones forming a low “tumulus-like” construction, approx. 0.5m high. A rim was formed with stones (finally not visible) arranged in a circle, the interior of which had been filled with rubble.¹⁷ Except for a few sherds, no other finds were retrieved from inside this feature. It is perhaps a construction related to mortuary rituals, but nothing more specific can be said about this matter in the present context¹⁸.

Grave I (dimensions 0.85 × 105 m) was oriented on a N-S axis with the skeleton in a contracted position, lying on the right side, face turned to the west (pl. 3: 1). It did not contain any offerings.

Grave II (dimensions 0.85 × 190 m) is situated 0.65 m south of grave I (pl. 3: 2). It was rich in offerings. A young woman was buried here¹⁹ in a contracted posi-

¹⁶ The field notebooks' reference of Building B is Apsidal Building 1.

¹⁷ The filling of the cavity was an intended act and it must have been accomplished in one brief episode because two parts of a broken stone were found, one at the bottom and the other at the top of the cavity.

¹⁸ I think that it can be compared to the platforms mentioned by Doumas 1977, 35–36, 64.

¹⁹ The skeleton was examined macroscopically by the physical anthropologist Dimitris Giannisis who concluded that it belonged to a young adult female (20–30 years old). She probably suffered two serious episodes of growth disruption during her early years. This conclusion is drawn from the presence of dental enamel developmental defects, known as linear enamel hypoplasias (LEH), due to the interruption of the dental enamel formation process at a specific point in time during tooth development. The exact causes of these episodes cannot be determined with precision but appear to be due to systemic metabolic stress, that is, related to nutritional problems or infectious diseases or a synergistic action of both. A further and more detailed osteological analysis following the restoration of the skeletal material could confirm the information above and allow us to create a more comprehensive biological profile of the Maleatas' people in that period (sex, age, nutritional and health conditions, activity and behavioural patterns).

tion, lying on her right side, looking north. In front of her face an obsidian blade was found (pl. 7b: 2) whereas on her chest a clay whorl lay. She was buried with a grinder/crusher in her right hand, this use of the pebble being indicated by fine scratches²⁰ (pl. 7b: 3). Some sherds, a few small pieces of charcoal and traces of organic materials were also found in this grave.

An important assemblage of objects was revealed to the east of this burial, undoubtedly placed there at the same time as the burial, as part of the funeral ceremonies that accompanied it. Large fragments of ceramic vessels, including a red-slipped burnished basin (pl. 5b: 3a–b), a large bowl with mending holes (pl. 5b: 2), and more than two coarse-ware closed pots were placed near the dead person's head, but outside the area covered with the slabs. Only two stones were placed on top of the finds. The evidence for ancient repairs probably indicates their high value during the period of their use and shows that they were not made for funeral purposes only. Traces of burning and decomposed organic materials were found in the pots. Bones of a lamb were found on one of the large sherds that were apparently used for the last time for a food offering (pl. 5a; 5b: 1). Above the pottery assemblage a large (18.5 cm high, 8.5 cm base diameter) conical andesite grinder with a millstone was found, and a small spherical crusher made of local reddish stone²¹.

Grave III (dimensions 0.85 × 1 m) also contained a skeleton in a contracted position, lying on the left side, head to the east, the face looking south (pl. 3c). The only thing found in this grave, and the only metal object up to now from the EH layers, is a copper pin, 0.072 m long with a diameter of 0.001 m (pl. 7b4).²² It was

²⁰ This is a rare case. Parallels from the Cyclades: a) in tomb 25, at Lakkoudhes cemetery on Naxos, the dead person's hand was touching a pot, but it seems that it was not an intended position. Doulas 1977a, 80, fig. 14, pl. IV a, b) in tomb 145, at the Akrotiraki cemetery on Siphnos, the dead person is holding a pyxis. Tsountas Ch., *KYKAAΔIKA*, *Αρχαιολογική Εφημερίς* 1899, 74.

²¹ The closest parallel with regards to offerings of food is a grave in Platygiali Astakou: Haniotes – Voutiropoulos 1996, 59–80. About funerary rituals: Cavanagh – Mee 1998, 103–120. Pullen 1990a, 9–12.

²² The possibility that the pin was made of alloyed copper was discussed with Panagiotis Zervas (Department of Chemical Engineering, NTUA) who suggested that copper could not have been preserved in such a good condition. According to chemical examinations all copper items dated in EH I are made of arsenical bronze. The pin from grave III is under research with non-destructive techniques, such as optical microscopy. The physical properties, such as the magnetic features of the pin, were also examined. Our aim, by applying non-destructive methods, is to determine the composition of the pin (and as a result the origin of the component materials), to find out some possible construction methods of the examined material and finally to establish a non-destructive methodology for the identification of archaeological finds which require special treatment because of their sensitive nature.

found in place, on the shoulder of the dead where it was presumably used to keep the dress in place²³.

The cluster of burials and the stone accumulation are the only burial finds of the early Bronze Age for the whole Epidauria area. Indeed, no other EH I graves are published from Greece at all²⁴.

3. *Early Helladic II (strata 2, 3 and 4)*

Three building phases are recognised, and there may be more, not counting repairs that are identifiable only in the floors of the buildings.

3.1 *Building A* (pl. 1; pl. 4a–b)

Most of the architectural remains of the settlement can be dated to EH II. The most significant is a large building (approximate dimensions, not including open-air areas: dimensions 8 × 5 m) with rectangular and trapezoidal rooms²⁵. The building's foundation is fairly well preserved. Where the walls have not been destroyed by later activities, one can see the building technique that consists of big stones for the two faces of the wall, small stones and soil fill. In one case there is also the herring bone system (wall 8). In many cases the upper layer is flat in order to provide a surface for mud brick walls built on top of it. Traces of these unfired bricks are found in some spots. Some walls form triangular areas, not rooms but retaining walls forming small terraces.

More specifically:

Room **A1**:

Formed by walls 7, 10 and 11, the east wall is not preserved, surface extent: 12 m². Only the lowest part of the walls is preserved. The floor is paved with crude

Related bibliography: McGeehan-Liritzis 1996. Kayafa 2001–2002. Papadimitriou G.D., «Η εξέλιξη των κραμάτων χαλκού στον ελληνικό χώρο μέχρι το τέλος της Γεωμετρικής Εποχής, κραματικές προσμίξεις και τεχνολογική εξέλιξη», in: Μπασιάκος, Ι., Αλούπη, Ε., Φαρορέλης, Γ. (eds), *Αρχαιομετρικές μελέτες για την ελληνική προϊστορία και αρχαιότητα*, Αθήνα 2001, 587–681

²³ It is classified as type I, the simplest one, according to: Branigan, K. *Aegean Metalwork of the Early and Middle Bronze Age*, Oxford 1974, p. 34. Banks, E.C., *The Early and Middle Helladic small objects from Lerna*, Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Cincinnati, Univ. Microfilms 67 – 15948, Ann Arbor, Michigan 1967, p. 40.

²⁴ Cavanagh – Mee 1998, 15.

²⁵ A re-evaluation of the domestic architecture of this period in Harrison 1995.

limestone slabs (pl. 1: 12). Considering the size and the construction quality, this room appears to be an important part of the building.

Room A2:

Formed by walls 7, 8, 10 and 11, the northwest corner is badly preserved, partially destroyed by the ceremonial pit (discussed in section C), surface extent: 3 m². An important detail is the building technique of wall 8 that consists of herring-bone masonry, characteristic of Early Helladic II buildings²⁶. This is a small oblong room.

Room A3:

Formed by walls 7, 8 and 9, the west wall is not preserved, surface extent: 12.5 m². This is a large room but partially destroyed even at the foundation level by the ceremonial pit. It is clear that wall 7 is an external one. Traces of mud bricks are seen here, at the western part of the room, a clear element of the superstructure (see n.10 on the general plan).

Room A4:

Formed by walls 9 and 14, only the east corner is preserved. It is not possible to estimate the surface. It seems to be analogous to room 3.

Room A5:

Formed by walls 10 and 14 and construction 13. Only the north part of this small oblong space is preserved, estimated surface 1.5 m². It seems to be a narrow corridor rather than a proper room because of its small size.

Room A6:

Formed by walls 10 and construction 13. Estimated surface: > 10 m². The plan of this room is obscure, as it is indicated by the floor and not by the walls. Construction 13 could be a bench or the surviving part of another pavement. The floor consists of yellowish compact soil (layer 4) based on a layer of stones (layer 3).

Room A7:

Formed by retaining walls 22 and 23, forming a triangular shaped area²⁷, surface ~ 15 m². Under the floor a drainage pipe is built (see n.2 on the general

²⁶ Further discussion in Rénard 1995, 145–146.

²⁷ Triangular spaces, although rare, are dated to EH II: Kalogerakou P., *Εξέλιξη, χρήση των χώρων και οργάνωση των πρωτοελλαδικών οικισμών*, PhD Αθήνα 1995, τόμος II: 125.

plan)²⁸, which was covered with limestone slabs. The exact starting point of the pipe has not yet been revealed but maybe it is related to the limestone pavement located in room A1. That is a desideratum for the research. The construction is interesting as the pipe is dug inside a thick stone drainage layer²⁹. The two oblong sides are built with two rows of stones; the bottom is made of compact soil. The covering slabs are uneven in size. This kind of construction implies that its purpose was just to lead water away from the building and not necessarily be watertight. There is a strong possibility that A7 was not in fact a “room” but a semi-out-door space, perhaps the main entrance to the building.

Room A8:

Formed by retaining walls 22 and 25 this oblong space (dimension 1 × 5 m) is a corridor that can be combined with A7 and belongs to the monumental entrance of Building A. To the south, in the trial trench, some stair-steps (see n.3 on the general plan; pl. 4b) are revealed, thus enhancing the suggestion that this spot could be the entrance to Building A.

3.2. *Apsidal buildings B, C and D*³⁰

Three apsidal houses are dated to an advanced phase of the early Helladic II period, according to the pottery found on the floor of the apsidal building D³¹. The houses were built after the demolition of the previous structure, building A. The apsidal buildings B and C were oriented from east to west, with the apse to the

²⁸ Further discussion in Renard 1995, 132–133. Drainage systems were found in Ag. Gerasimos Korinthias, Protonotariou-Deilaki E., *Άγιος Γεράσιμος*, ADelt 26, 1971, B' Chron 69. Also in EH III, Palamari Skyrou: Theochari – Parlama 1997, 349, pic.2 and Poliochni Yellow, Bernabo-Brea, L., *Poliochni, Città Preistorica nell' isola di Lemnos*, Vol II, 1, Roma 1976, 30, fig. 25–27, 146, 148–150.

²⁹ The drainage layer will be discussed further in “Chronology” as part of the stratigraphy of the site. It is a constructive feature attested also at Kouphovouno Laconia (Renard 1989, 31, pl. XXXVa).

³⁰ Two more apsidal buildings were revealed in 2003 excavation period. A total of five houses were built on the hill, two of them (buildings B and C) had the apse to the east, two (buildings D and H) had the apse to the south and one (building I) to the west. They appear to have been constructed in pairs, leaving a free space at the central part of the hill. The excavation to the west is not yet finished, unfortunately the most recent architectural finds are not included at the site plan. Further discussion about apsidals and free space in Yiannouli, E., *Reason in Architecture, the component of space, A Study of Domestic and Palatial Buildings of Bronze Age Greece*, Cambridge 1992, p. 80–82.

³¹ Apsidal buildings 1, 2 and 3 (according to field notebooks) correspond to Buildings B, C, D (publication).

east while apsidal D is oriented to the north – south with the apse to the south. They are all simple constructions: one room, with a stone foundation base and mud-brick superstructure. In the interior there is a compact soil floor, with successive layers of yellowish-reddish soil. It is the same material and the same technique used for the floors of Building A. No traces of doors are found. The roof could have been made of branches forming a ridge-roof.

Building B: Curvilinear wall 15

Dimensions: internal diameter of the apse ~ 3 m – length extent ~ 4 m well preserved floor. A rectangular hearth³² was discovered beside the south wall (see n.5 on the general plan; pl. 2b). Its preserved SE corner is made of little stones. Charcoal and a clay cube (probably wedged under the pot during cooking) were found inside the hearth. Another accumulation of charcoal and ashes was found near the north wall of the apse (see n.6 on the general plan; pl. 2b). Pottery was found in abundance, not only sherds but broken vessels in situ, mainly coarse ware.

Building C: Curvilinear wall 20

Dimensions: internal diameter of the apse ~ 2.80 m – length extent ~ 9 m. Here the situation is rather complicated due to later building activities. A later wall is built above the remains of the apse, partially reusing its material. The floor is fragmentarily preserved in some spots. An interesting feature here is the herring-bone masonry in the north long wall, although only fragments are preserved.

Building D: Curvilinear wall 29

Dimensions: diameter of the apse ~ 3 m – length extent ~ 3 m. The excavation of this building has not yet been completed. Although the south end of the apse was found partially destroyed, the floor is almost intact. Another constructional element of great interest is a stone built base (?) the purpose of which is unknown (see n.7 on the general plan; pl. 4c). It resembles column bases but is situated very close to the west wall.

3.3 *Rectangular buildings E, F and G*³³ (pl. 1; pl. 2a–b)

After the phase of the apsidal buildings a series of rectangular buildings was constructed. One of these is currently under investigation. The crude stone base is preserved up to 20 cm. It is probable that the buildings belong to the same

³² Hearths are quite rare. References in Renard 1995, 160–161.

³³ As already mentioned more buildings were found. Walls belonging to rectangular buildings of this phase were revealed to the west but any conclusion would be premature as the excavation is still in progress.

culture as the previous ones, slightly later in dating. Unfortunately the finds (mostly coarse ware) do not permit a more specific dating so far. It is possible that they belong to a later phase of EH II, according to the pottery found.

Building E:

It consists of walls 1, 2, 3 and 4. Internal surface = 17.5 m².

Building F:

It consists of walls 5 and 16, forming the north-east corner of a large rectangular building. Surface extent: > 45 m². The large surface indicates a possible division into rooms, but nothing can prove this theory.

Building G:

It consists of walls 24 (7.5 m long) and 27 (2 m long), vertical, forming the north-east and north-west corners of a two-room large rectangular building. Surface extent: > 14 m². This area is also under study.

3.4 Interpretation of the evidence.

In light of the diverse data regarding the EBA II period of Maleatas, the choice of the architectural plan of each structure is not related to chronological differentiation but it depends on the function each building was meant to serve.

In particular, the first building (Building A) seems to be related to some form of social differentiation. That is based on the existence of only one building, carefully constructed, and the high level of technical knowledge required. Features like the drainage pipe imply that its purpose was communal not individual, so we may have to reckon here with some sort of central authority.

The apsidal buildings, on the other hand, seem to be houses for small groups. They all have the same shape, quality of structure, approximately the same dimensions; nothing indicates that one of them is more special than the others.

The same happens with the last phase, that of the rectangular buildings.

Difficult to identify, yet very important for the interpretation of the settlement as a whole, are the activity surfaces. At least two such surfaces were located on the hill area, outside the buildings. They are identified by the hardness of the soil and the abundance of sherds on it.

The first of these (see n.4 on the general plan) can be dated to the early Helladic II period by a broken EH II sauce-boat in situ with dark brown urfirnis slip (pl. 6a: 1). The area where this pot was found roughly corresponds to the open space north of Building B, one of the three apsidal buildings.

4. *Early Helladic III/Middle Helladic*

The development of the site after EH II is not very clear. Particular buildings or remnants thereof can not be related, with certainty, to datable finds.

The other case of activity surface -still under study- can be dated to this period (see n.9 on the general plan). It is located at the west of building E. A layer of stones covers the area that was possibly an open space of the settlement during the third building phase. The stones are presumably derived from a collapsed wall. A whole pot was found here, and should provide a more secure date. It is a pedestalled, one handled cup, with perforations, a so called “brazier”³⁴ of EH III (pl. 7a). As it was found among the ruins of the third phase buildings, it provides a terminus ante quem for the rectangular buildings E, F and G, and an almost certain connection of this layer with the ceremonial pit (see below) which produced similar finds.

A large pit (see below - n.8 on the general plan) was dug at the centre of the top of the hill area, partially destroying the earlier buildings. There is strong evidence that this feature is the result of the religious use of the site from EH III to the MH period.

C. Ritual

When can we date the dawn of the ritual activity on this site?

Furthermore, what circumstances account for the change of use from purely domestic to religious?

As already mentioned, cult activity at the site before Mycenaean times can be traced in two different cases. The first one is the easily recognizable funerary ritual attested at the EH I graves, the very first human presence on the hilltop. The other is dated to EH III times, when the houses had been abandoned but when people still returned to the place. Later on, during the Mycenaean Period, the site became a prosperous and important cult place, if judged by the various and rich finds of the ash-altar and the open-air shrine. It seems that during this period the site was used exclusively as a sanctuary³⁵.

³⁴ Rutter 1995, 326–334.

³⁵ Lambrinoudakis, V., “Remains of the Mycenaean Period in the Sanctuary of Apollon Maleatas”, in Hägg, R.- Marinatos, N., (eds) Sanctuaries and Cults in the Aegean Bronze Age, Proceedings of the First international Symposium at the Swedish Institute Athens, 1980, 59–65.

Regarding the first case, in the Early Helladic period there is very little evidence of ritual activity. It is plausible that the grave offerings reported above indicate a spectrum of beliefs regarding the afterlife or death in general³⁶. Objects offered to the dead can be interpreted in many ways. Fear, of course, is a factor to reckon with. The belongings of the dead person are integral to his/her existence and there is always a fear that he/she might return to claim his/her belongings. Another way to think about these deposition practices is to consider that these personal objects were thought to be unclean or polluted, so they had to be ritually disposed of during the funeral. But the offerings can also imply a gesture of care and love; they supply the deceased with objects that will be necessary afterwards as they were needed during lifetime. This might be the case for the Maleatas' people. The young woman with the grinder in grave II indicates her community's belief that this tool could be useful in another world. The same belief may underlie the evidence discussed above about food offerings in the funeral context.

As for the second case, we have to deal with the common habit of the people who were forced to leave their village and who nevertheless returned to the abandoned settlement from time to time, perhaps to perform religious ceremonies of some sort.³⁷ Scholars have concluded that towards the end of the Early Helladic period, the situation in mainland Greece changed.³⁸ There was an abrupt fall in numbers of population and the settlements became fewer and smaller. On the central part of the hill we note the pit to which reference has already been made above (see n.8 on the general plan). It is an irregular shaped pit, 3m × 4m (approximate dimensions) and 0.80 m. deep, cutting through the EH remains, mainly destroying the south external wall 7 of building A. It is a stratified deposit containing remnants of burning, clay objects (some anchor-shaped items, an almost complete one-handled cup and parts of an Early Helladic III pithos; pl. 6b: 4), a matt-painted MH jar (pl. 6b: 3) and animal bones. Among the bones, the antlers of a deer are especially noteworthy. This part of the animal's skeleton is not related to nutrition and furthermore it could be used for tool making or even serve as a status symbol. The antlers were placed in the pit detached from the skull, and other deer bones were found nearby. This could be interpreted as an act of ritual character, a sacrifice or a dedication.

According to Hägg,³⁹ the archaeological record in Greece has yet to produce appropriate evidence about religious activity and beliefs during the Middle Helladic

³⁶ Renfrew, C. and Bahn, P., *Archaeology. Theories, Methods and Practice*, 1996, 390.

³⁷ Bintliff, J. L., *Natural Environment and Human Settlement in Prehistoric Greece*, Oxford 1977, 145.

³⁸ In detail in: Forsén 1992.

³⁹ Hägg, R., "Did the Middle Helladic People have any religion?", *Kernos* 10, 1997, 13–18.

period. In contrast to this situation and in view of the analysis presented above, we would argue that the Kynortion site may well have been an early “shrine,” a cult site which has no parallels in the period concerned. It is important to mention that this kind of finds is not found in quantities elsewhere on the hill and certainly not in the context of the buildings. Consequently, the change of use from domestic to religious can be dated to this period, EH III. But we should always have in mind that given the nature of the preserved evidence and the current status of study, a complete picture of the site cannot be developed without significant gaps.

Afterwards, although the Mycenaean shrine was flourishing, nothing was built on the top of the hill. Even in later periods, such as the Classical and the Roman, periods of intensive building activity at Maleatas, the top of the hill remained undeveloped. This was certainly intentional because of the need for space around the sanctuary. Furthermore, in the late Classical period we note the construction of a poros stone enclosure wall around the site of the EH settlement, as well as a mortar-masonry phase of this wall from Roman times.

Given as a fact that literary sources do not exist, that legends are obscure, that the finds are few and many arguments can be raised against the hypothesis that the pit, which was opened and filled with this kind of objects and layers of stones, was really a ceremonial pit, let us consider whether the proof and the answer that we are seeking has not already been given by the people that succeeded the first inhabitants of the hill. The notion of the sacred nature of the hill place that was still alive, and even as a memory, was respected and important, so important to exclude this area from any kind of use.⁴⁰

D. Chronology

In addition to the preliminary assessment of the architectural remains presented above, it is important to turn to the evidence of undisturbed stratified layers in order to provide a tentative outline of the nature and history of the EBA settlement on the Maleatas hill.

The transition from Final Neolithic to EH I must have been peaceful. The same holds true for the subsequent periods EH II and then EH III/MH⁴¹.

⁴⁰ Lambrinouidakis, V., “Conservation and research: new evidence on a long-living cult. The Sanctuary of Apollo Maleatas and Asklepios at Epidauros”, in M. Stamatopoulou-M. Yeroulanou (eds.), *Excavating Classical Culture, recent archaeological discoveries in Greece*, Oxford 2002: 214.

⁴¹ Further discussion on transitions: Wiencke 1989, 495–509.

In detail:

- Final Neolithic pottery exists at the same layer as EH I pottery.
- EH I and EH II pottery are found together in two different cases. In the first case, EH I sherds outnumber EBA II sherds. This is a fact at the stone-fill (stratum 7) for the erection and drainage of the first large EH II building A and the floor bed (stratum 3) in its interior. In the latter, EH I are fewer and more EH II are found, because they correspond to the period of use in the EH II era and they were found at floor level and above (strata 4/floor, strata 1 and 2).
- Furthermore, EH III sherds were found in the same context with MH pottery, in the ceremonial pit and on the ground level at this time. This was observed mainly at the northern area that bears traces of occupation after the later rectangular buildings were destroyed.

A general observation should also be noted, that is, early Helladic I and II (mostly) sherds are very small and worn, broken many times. This is a sign of intensive use and activity at the site. In contrast, Early Helladic III and Middle Helladic pottery consists of larger parts of the vessels sometimes even complete vessels –although in pieces. This can be explained as the remains of the last phase of activities on the hill and which were subsequently not disturbed after their final deposition in situ.

No certain signs of any kind of violent destruction are found in any of the phases. In general, traces of fire did not occur except for a few very specific spots. Small quantities of charcoal scattered around the area are certainly leftovers of every day use. Nothing whatsoever gives any grounds to assume the settlement had an artificial defensive system; however its position on top of the hill is a strategic one. Maybe this was related to the abandonment of the place when danger possibly occurred. Probably, that was what happened. People might have left the settlement, taking with them every valuable possession and the household items. It is amazing how little of what one should expect, still exists. No bone tools and stone tools have been found with the exception of rather few obsidian blades and millstones. There are neither metallic objects from the settlement, nor ornaments.

E. Conclusions

People lived on Mount Kynortion from the Final Neolithic onwards. During EH I this community was a small group of people, exact numbers are almost impossible to be calculated. They were in touch with the outside world, mainly with the Cyclades and the southern Argolid. Three of them, buried in their simple graves, were well taken care of by their families who believed that something happened after death and provided the deceased with what they thought useful.

A large and monumental building was constructed afterwards. Many questions arise: Could it be a simpler version of the so-called corridor house type? Did only one building exist during this phase? The fact is that Building A is surprisingly large and well built (herring-bone masonry, slab pavements), featuring functions, like the drainage pipe, that exist only at large urbanized settlements of slightly later date.

The succeeding phase was smaller than a village, five simple apsidal houses (Building B, C, D, H and I), differently oriented from the previous construction, implying a rather rural community.

Is there a gap between the monumental Building A phase and the humbler apsidal buildings? There is a difference in the planning concept, of course, but the pottery seems to be the same, the building materials and the way they constructed the floors are the same.

The rectangular buildings E and F have the same orientation as the apsidal houses B and C and they seem to be stronger and larger constructions. The concept seems to be the same, which is, independent buildings and a free communal space.

Maybe this communal spirit is the point for the sacral and ritual approach later on, as has already been proposed. As Prof. Lambrinoudakis has stated for the Mycenaean shrine, we can suppose a rural and popular character of the shrine, due to the pilgrimage of the community to their old homes for the EHIII/MH period as well.

The evidence of the find contexts can only provide a ground for speculation and thought. Research has not yet been completed; a lot of work must be done. The conservation and evaluation of the pottery and the small finds is in progress, the skeletal material, metallic and organic samples have to be examined.

For the time being, the questions posed are more than any possible answers. But maybe in cases as unique as the Kynortion settlement, having new questions is very important, even more important than trying to answer the old ones.



a) Epidauros, Apollon Maleatas: view from the east



b) Epidauros, Apollon Maleatas: building B and the graves from the south east

Plate 3



a) Epidauros, Apollon Maleatas: burial I



b) Epidauros, Apollon Maleatas: burial II



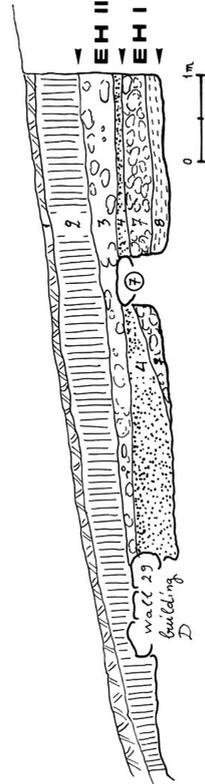
c) Epidauros, Apollon Maleatas: burial III



a) Epidauros, Apollon Maleatas: building A from the southeast



b) Epidauros, Apollon Maleatas: drainage pipe in Building A from the east

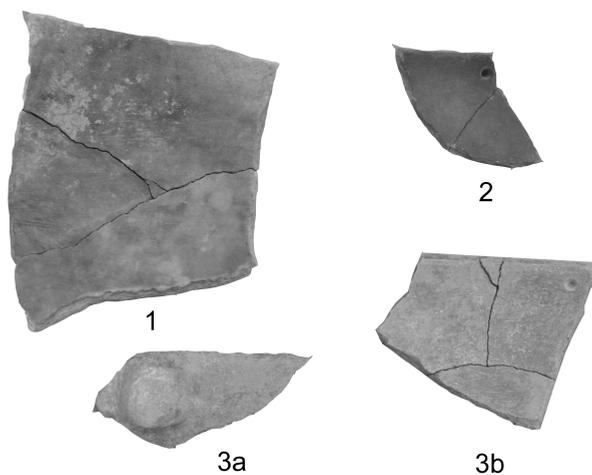


c) Epidauros, Apollon Maleatas: layers in building D, west profile

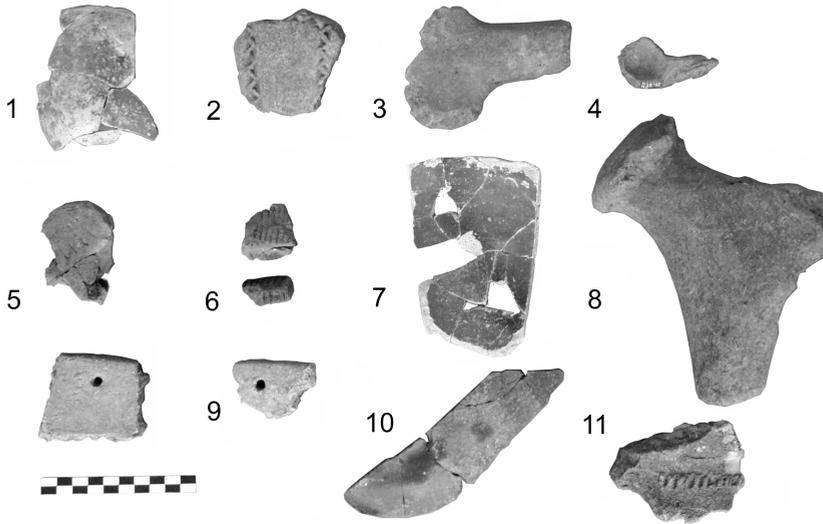
Plate 5



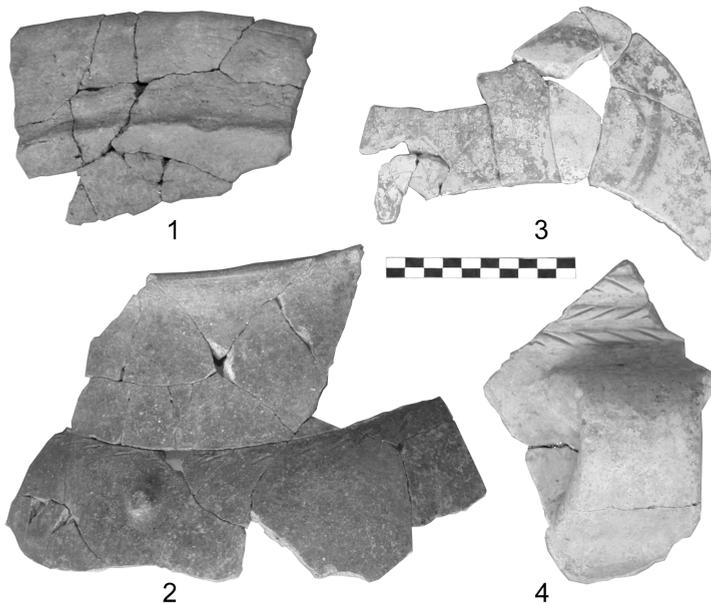
a) Epidauros, Apollon Maleatas: offerings from grave II



b) Epidauros, Apollon Maleatas: EH I sherds from grave II



a) Epidauros - Pottery: 1. EH II sauceboat, 2. EH II foot with "kerbschnitt" decoration, 3. EH II scoop, 4. EH II spoon, 5. part of the body and the handle of a Cycladic "frying pan", 6. parts of the body of mainland-type "frying pans", 7. EH II bowl, 8. EH II stand, 9. FN "cheese pots", 10. EH I red and black mottled ware, 11. EH I "fruit-stand" with plastic decoration, "Talioti Ware"



b) Epidauros - Pottery: 1. EH II "baking - pan", 2. EH I jar with incised and plastic decoration, 3. MH matt-painted jar, 4. EH III pithos with plastic and incised decoration

Plate 7



a) Epidauros, Apollon Maleatas: EH III one - handed pedestalled cup with perforations



b) Epidauros, Apollon Maleatas: 1) obsidian arrowheads, 2) obsidian blade from grave II, 3) grinder from grave II, 4) EH copper pin from grave III