

The Destructions of the Palace of Nestor at Pylos and Its LH IIIA Predecessor as a Methodological Case Study

Salvatore Vitale¹ – Sharon R. Stocker² – Jack L. Davis³

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to reassess and refine the chronology of two significant destruction horizons that occurred in the area of the Palace of Nestor at Pylos between the 14th and the early 12th centuries BC. This contribution also provides a methodological case study concerning the use of pottery for chronology within its broader archaeological context. The bases of our analysis are the contexts brought to light during the old excavations carried out by the University of Cincinnati under the direction of Carl Blegen. This information is integrated with and enhanced by preliminary data from ongoing archaeological investigations conducted at Pylos by Sharon Stocker and Jack Davis, again under the aegis of the University of Cincinnati. Our results suggest the existence of possible compositional and functional differences between the assemblages recovered in different areas located within and around the Palace of Nestor. Our understanding of the data indicates that the first destruction occurred shortly after the start of LH IIIA2. The final destruction, on the other hand, is assigned to the very beginning of LH IIIC. Our refined chronological sequence also allows a reliable synchronization of the Pylian horizons with other relevant deposits from the southern Peloponnese and the wider Greek mainland.

Keywords: Palace of Nestor at Pylos, pottery analysis methodology, formation processes of archaeological contexts, Mycenaean relative chronology

The aim of this paper is to reassess and refine the chronology of two significant destruction horizons that occurred in the area of the Palace of Nestor at Pylos during the second half of the Late Bronze Age.⁴ The bases of our analysis are the contexts brought to light during the old excavations carried out by the University of Cincinnati under the direction of Carl Blegen.⁵ This information is integrated with and enhanced by preliminary data from ongoing archaeological investigations conducted at Pylos by Sharon Stocker and Jack Davis, again under the aegis of the University of Cincinnati.⁶ Our contribution also provides a methodological case study concerning the use of pottery for chronology within its broader archaeological context.

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Research Background

In 1966, Carl Blegen and Marion Rawson assigned the final destruction of the Palace of Nestor to ‘a time when pottery of Mycenaean IIIC was beginning to be made and to displace the wares of IIIB’.⁷ In the same volume, Blegen and Rawson also suggested that in an earlier destruction, dating towards the end of LH IIIA, the structures that existed on the Pylian acropolis before the final

¹ Department of Civilizations and Forms of Knowledge, University of Pisa, Italy; e-mail: salvatore.vitale@for.unipi.it.

² Classics Department, University of Cincinnati, USA; e-mail: sharon.stocker@uc.edu.

³ Classics Department, University of Cincinnati, USA; e-mail: jack.davis@uc.edu.

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⁵ Blegen – Rawson 1966; Blegen et al. 1973.

⁶ Davis – Stocker 2016, 608, fig. 1.

⁷ Blegen – Rawson 1966, 421.

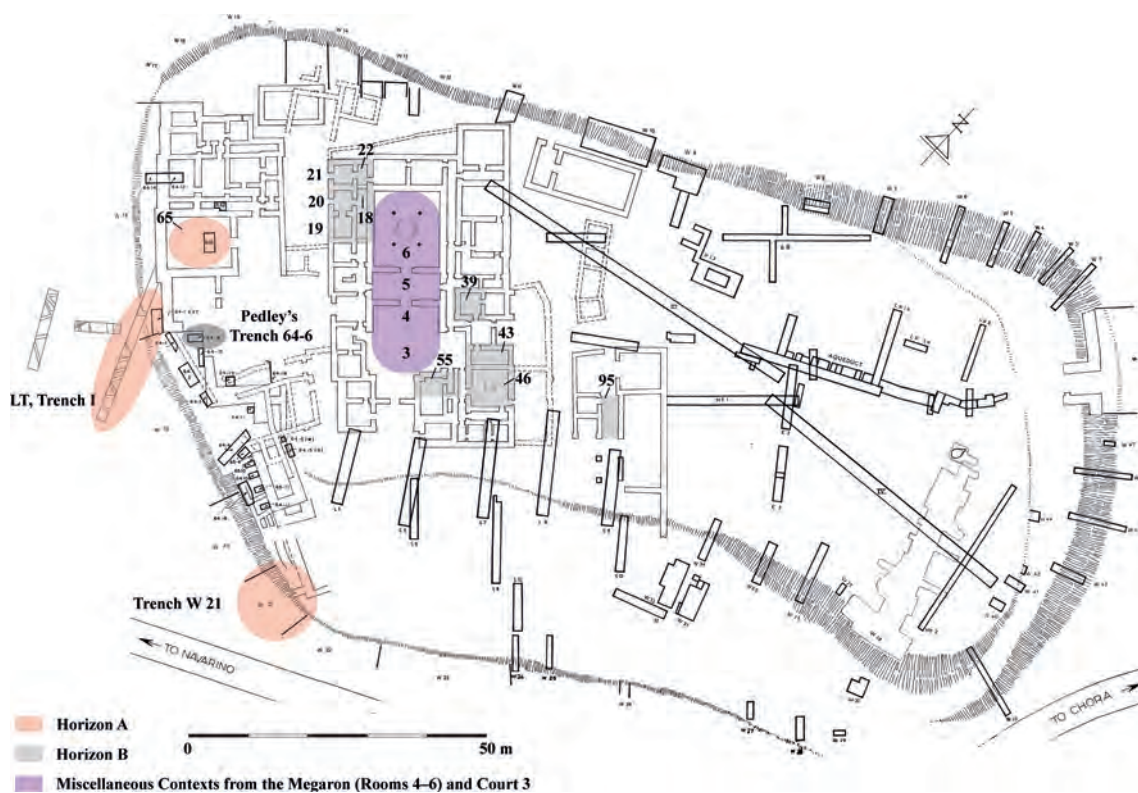


Fig. 1 Locations of relevant contexts recovered during Blegen's excavations at the Palace of Nestor (after Blegen et al. 1973, 36, fig. 302, with additions by S. Vitale).

palace was built had burned down. According to Blegen and Rawson, these structures included the residence for a king.⁸

The date of the earlier destruction (hereafter Horizon A) was based on a variety of deposits that were partially published by Blegen and his team in 1973 (Fig. 1). These assemblages include floor deposits from some incompletely excavated structures in the so-called Lower Town (LT), as well as fills excavated beneath the palace, such as the materials recovered underneath Hall 65.⁹ The dating of the final destruction (hereafter Horizon B) was based on the large assemblage of complete vessels recovered on the floor levels of the palace.¹⁰

The new investigations conducted at Pylos by Stocker and Davis (Palace of Nestor Excavations, hereafter PONEX) have already received worldwide attention for the discovery of an extremely rich burial, known as the grave of the Griffin Warrior (Fig. 2).¹¹ In addition to this extraordinary find, however, PONEX is also bringing to light a new detailed sequence of stratified contexts that will significantly enhance our understanding of the region around the Palace of Nestor, as well as our wider knowledge of Mycenaean civilization.¹²

As far as pottery is concerned, PONEX investigations have produced a large amount of material covering the whole time span between late MH I and the final destruction of the palace. Particularly relevant to this paper are three pits from PONEX Area A, located on the acropolis, and several

⁸ Blegen – Rawson 1966, 19, 24, 32, 423.

⁹ Blegen et al. 1973, 36–37, 52–57, figs. 139, 141, 155.11–13.

¹⁰ For the first comprehensive classification and quantification of the pottery from the final destruction of the Palace of Nestor see Blegen – Rawson 1966, 350–418, figs. 349–398.

¹¹ Davis – Stocker 2016; Stocker – Davis 2017; Davis – Stocker 2018; Stocker et al. 2022.

¹² For an outline overview of PONEX excavations see GWA (Griffin Warrior, Acropolis); GWTF (Griffin Warrior, Tsakonas Field).

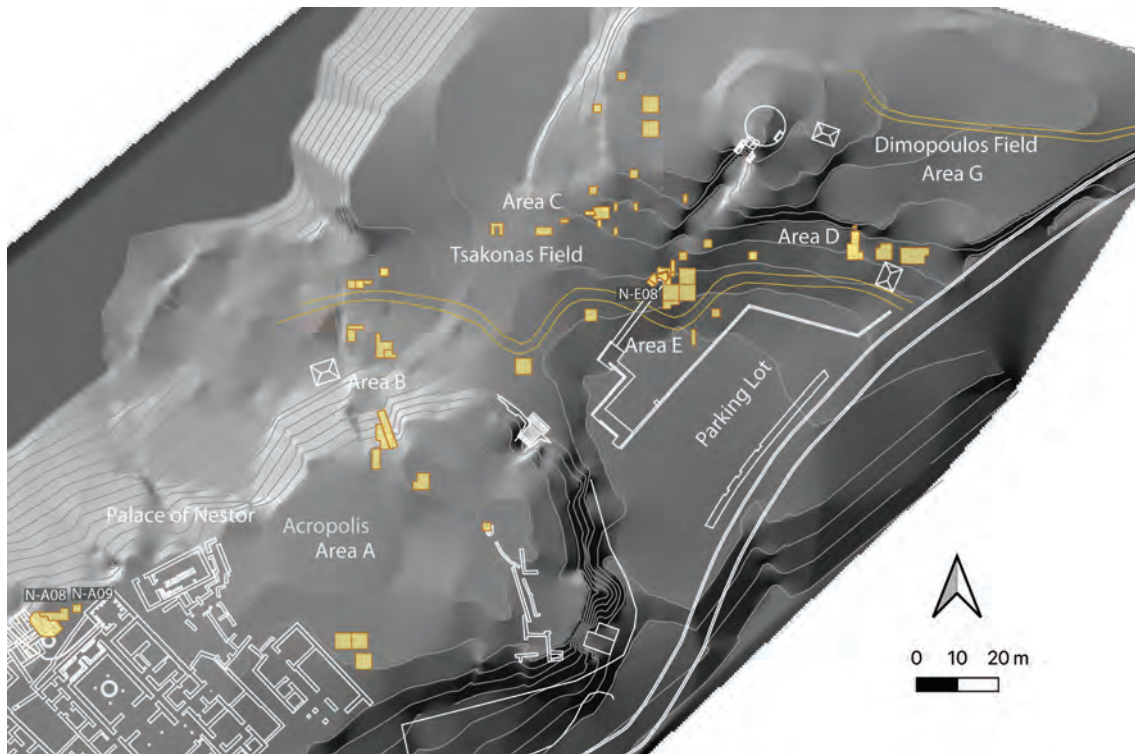


Fig. 2 Locations of relevant contexts recovered during PONEX excavations at the Palace of Nestor. Area A is situated on the acropolis. Areas B, C, D, and E are situated in the Tsakonon field. Area G is situated in the Dimopoulos field (D. Nenova – J. Wallrodt).

contexts from the Tsakonon and the Dimopoulos fields (Tab. 1; Fig. 2). The pits from PONEX Area A include materials related to destruction Horizon A. The contexts from the Tsakonon and the Dimopoulos fields include respectively a stratified sequence of LH IIIA2 Early to LH IIIB1 deposits, brought to light in PONEX Area E, and one deposit dating to LH IIIC Early 1, recovered in PONEX Area G. These freshly excavated materials represent a range of different types of formation processes (Tab. 1), which provide new significant data on both Horizons A and B.

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Methodology

Since Blegen and Rawson's original publication, different dates have been proposed for the final destruction of the Palace of Nestor, ranging from the first half of LH IIIB to LH IIIC.¹³ In addition, it has also been suggested that some of the vessels with possible late characteristics may belong to a reoccupation of the palace in advanced LH IIIC or the Early Iron Age (EIA) after a LH IIIB destruction.¹⁴

The occurrence of such conflicting proposals is surprising, if one considers that the Palace of Nestor provides the ideal context for a reliable chronology: a destruction layer containing thousands of vessels found in situ on the floors of interconnected and fully excavated rooms. We believe that the debate over the date of the final destruction reflects an approach to periodization

¹³ For a detailed discussion of the destruction dates proposed by different scholars for the Palace of Nestor see Mountjoy 1997; Mountjoy 1999, 36, 309–311; Vitale 2006, 190–191.

¹⁴ Popham 1991; Cassola Guida 1996; Carrington-Smith 1999; Cosmetico 1999, 240–242.

that overemphasizes the importance of ceramic typology at the expense of the comprehensive analysis of archeological contexts and their formation processes.¹⁵

Our study of Pylian destruction horizons is based on the combined observation of two interrelated factors: (a) the stratigraphic and functional characteristics of the contexts; and (b) the quantitative distribution of diagnostic features and their variations through space and time.¹⁶ Through this methodology, all the chronological components of a given deposit are integrated within a wider understanding of context.

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Contextual Approach to Pottery Chronology

In this section, we provide a few selected examples of how our approach to pottery chronology can enhance our understanding of Pylian ceramics. Recent studies by Julie Hruby have demonstrated that the vessels from Rooms 18 to 22 of the palace, the so-called Pantries, were intended for use at state sponsored feasts.¹⁷ According to Blegen and Rawson's published counts, these materials included 6667 vessels, forming 84.4% of the total assemblage (Tabs. 1–2). This wide array of specialized eating/drinking and serving vessels produces important biases.¹⁸ One of the most obvious is the overrepresentation of plain pottery. This feature, which has previously been regarded as a Pylian idiosyncrasy,¹⁹ simply corresponds to the first of six criteria recognized as typical of Mycenaean feasting assemblages by Mary Dabney, Paul Halstead, and Patrick Thomas.²⁰

Location	Formation Process	Chronology	Quantification	Painted	Plain	Total
Acropolis Palace of Nestor ¹	Destruction deposits	Horizon B	Nos.	163	7734	7897
			%	2.1%	97.9%	100.0%
Dimopoulos Field Trench N-G11 ²	Construction fill	Horizon B	Nos.	266	3755	4021
			%	6.6%	93.4%	100.0%
Acropolis Trenches N-A08, -09 ³	Pit fills (from destruction events)	Horizon A	Nos.	25	1958	1983
			%	1.3%	98.7%	100.0%
Tsakonas Field Trench N-E08 ⁴	Fill	Horizon A	Nos.	58	589	647
			%	9.0%	91.0%	100.0%

¹ Blegen – Rawson 1966, 350–418.

² N-G11-26, -27.

³ N-A08-07; N-A08-65, -66, -67, -68; N-A09-05, -07.

⁴ N-E08-53.

Tab. 1 Distribution of painted and plain pottery from Horizons A and B at Pylos.

¹⁵ For a similar approach to the use of pottery for chronology see Vitale 2012, 1234; Vitale et al. 2021 (all with previous bibliography).

¹⁶ For the importance of a quantitative approach to ceramic chronology see Schönfeld 1988, 156, 208–210; Kilian 1988, 118; R. Jung in: Deger-Jalkotzy – Zavadil 2003, 252; Vitale 2006, esp. 197–202; Podzuweit 2007; Kardamaki 2017, 79–80.

¹⁷ Hruby 2006; Hruby 2008. Before and since Hruby's research, many other scholars have suggested that feasting activities played an important role at the Palace of Nestor (see Graham 1967; Säflund 1980; McCallum 1987; Isaakidou et al. 2002; Bendall 2004; Halstead – Isaakidou 2004; Stocker – Davis 2004; Wright 2004; Lis 2007; Lis 2008).

¹⁸ Blegen – Rawson 1966, 119–134, figs. 93–104, 323–325, 328.

¹⁹ See Mountjoy 1997, 109; Podzuweit 2007, 242, Beil. 71c.

²⁰ See Dabney et al. 2004, 203–205.

Location	Formation Process	Chronology	Quantification	Painted	Plain	Total
Acropolis Palace of Nestor ¹	Destruction deposits	Horizon B	Nos.	130	1100	1230
			%	10.6%	89.4%	100.0%
Dimopoulos Field Trench N-G11 ²	Construction fill	Horizon B	Nos.	266	3755	4021
			%	6.6%	93.4%	100.0%

¹ Blegen – Rawson 1966, 350–418.

² N-G11-26, -27.

Tab. 2 Distribution of painted and plain pottery from Horizon B at Pylos
(vessels from Rooms 18–20 of the Palace of Nestor are excluded from these counts).

Comparison between the final destruction deposit from the palace and the materials from PONEX excavations in the Dimopoulos field demonstrates that, outside of the acropolis, Pylian deposits had a much higher incidence of painted ceramics (Tab. 1). At the same time, if the materials from the Pantries are excluded, the occurrence of painted pottery from the palace is even higher than that from the Dimopoulos field (Tab. 2). Comparable trends also occur at the time of the earlier destruction horizon, when relevant assemblages from the acropolis contain less than 1.5% painted pottery, while the materials from the Tsakonas field have significantly higher concentrations (Tab. 1).

Differences in the composition of Pylian assemblages are not limited to decorative treatments, but also include the frequency of specific shapes. For example, during Horizon A, conical cups FS 204 represent 44.0% of fine open shapes on the acropolis, but only 13.1% of fine open shapes from the LT and the Tsakonas field (Tab. 3; Figs. 1–2). These data imply the occurrence of different consumption patterns and functional trajectories and, at the same time, reflect the complex internal organization of social spaces and arenas within discrete areas of the site.

Location	Conical Cups FS 204	Total Open Shapes	Incidence of Conical Cups
Acropolis Trenches N-A08, -09 ¹	73	166	44.0%
Trench W 21, S. Corner, Trench I + Tsakonas Field ²	39	298	13.1%
Total	112	464	24.1%

¹ N-A08-07; N-A08-65, -66, -67, -68; N-A09-05, -07.

² Blegen et al. 1973, 51–57 + N-E08-053.

Tab. 3 Incidence of conical cups from Horizon A at Pylos.

Our analysis is not aimed at denying the occurrence of local trends in the pottery from Pylos. In fact, the incidence of painted pottery recovered outside the acropolis remains smaller than at other Mycenaean sites (Tabs. 1–2, 4–5). The selected list of examples provided above simply demonstrates how a comprehensive contextual approach to ceramic assemblages may challenge traditional views, enrich the range of our research questions, and improve our analysis.

Location	Formation Process	Chronology	Quantification	Painted	Plain	Total
Acropolis Trenches N-A08, -09 ¹	Pit fills (from destruction events)	Horizon A	Nos.	25	1958	1983
			%	1.3%	98.7%	100.0%
Tsakonias Field Trench N-E08 ²	Fill	Horizon A	Nos.	58	589	647
			%	9.0%	91.0%	100.0%
Tsoungiza EU 9 ³	Refuse dump	LH IIIA2 Middle	Nos.	2161	8452	10613
			%	20.4%	79.6%	100.0%
Mitrou Trench LE795 ⁴	Dump + pit fill	LH IIIA1	Nos.	64	106	170
			%	37.6%	62.4%	100.0%
Asine Room D, Stratum 2 ⁵	Floor deposit	LH IIB– LH IIIA1	Nos.	884	3271	4155
			%	21.3%	78.7%	100.0%

¹ N-A08-07; N-A08-65, -66, -67, -68; N-A09-05, -07.

² N-E08-53.

³ Thomas 2011.

⁴ Vitale 2013.

⁵ Frizell 1980, 34–41.

Tab. 4 Distribution of painted and plain pottery in selected deposits from Pylos (Horizon A) and other sites on the Greek mainland.

Location	Formation Process	Chronology	Quantification	Painted	Plain	Total
Acropolis Palace of Nestor ¹	Destruction deposits	Horizon B	Nos.	163	7734	7897
			%	2.1%	97.9%	100.0%
Dimopoulos Field Trench N-G11 ²	Construction fill	Horizon B	Nos.	266	3755	4021
			%	6.6%	93.4%	100.0%
Mycenae Causeway Deposit ³	Cumulative dump	LH IIIB2 Late	Nos.	825	3604	4429
			%	18.6%	81.4%	100.0%
Tiryns Zone IV ⁴	Aggregate of selected stratified deposits	LH IIIB1	Nos.	270	613	883
			%	30.6%	69.4%	100.0%
Tsoungiza EU 2 ⁵	Pit fill	LH IIIB1	Nos.	2626	15123	17749
			%	14.8%	85.2%	100.0%

¹ Blegen – Rawson 1966, 350–418.

² N-G11-26, -27.

³ Wardle 1973.

⁴ Podzuweit 2007, 210–211, Beil. 38.

⁵ Thomas 2005.

Tab. 5 Distribution of painted and plain pottery in selected deposits from Pylos (Horizon B) and other sites on the Greek mainland.

S. V.

Ceramic Assemblages and Their Chronology

As stated previously, Blegen and Rawson dated destruction Horizon A to the end of LH IIIA.²¹ Recent studies of Mycenaean relative chronology have provided an extremely detailed sequence for

²¹ Blegen – Rawson 1966, 423.

the pottery of the 14th century BC.²² As a result, LH IIIA2 can now be divided into three subphases, termed respectively Early, Middle, and Late. The diagnostic features of these subphases were originally identified by Cynthia Shelmerdine at Nichoria and have subsequently been defined in greater detail by the author of this section for the entire Greek mainland, based on the pottery from Mitrou.²³ The development of the painted kylix, specifically the appearance of the types known as FS 264, 256, and 257, plays a major role in the identification of each of the three subphases.²⁴

PONEX excavations, especially in Area E, have revealed that this tripartite subdivision of LH IIIA2 is fully represented at Pylos. The deposits defining destruction Horizon A (Tabs. 1, 3–4, 6–7; Figs. 1–2) lack any of the defining features of LH IIIA2 Middle and Late. In fact, the deposits from Horizon A include features that can be stylistically assigned to LH IIIA1, LH IIIA2 Early, or both.

LH IIIA1 vessels include patterned mugs FS 225 (Fig. 3.1) and monochrome goblets FS 263 (Fig. 3.2). LH IIIA2 Early vessels consist of patterned alabastra FS 85, piriform kraters FS 7 (Fig. 3.3), and bowls with high-swung handles FS 241,²⁵ as well as monochrome kylikes FS 264 (Fig. 4.1–4). Shapes that can be assigned to either LH IIIA1 or LH IIIA2 Early include patterned shallow cups FS 219 (Fig. 4.5), carinated cups FS 230 (Fig. 4.6), and experimental kylikes with horizontal strap handles (Fig. 4.7–9), as well as plain stirrup jugs FS 150 (Fig. 5.1), conical cups FS 204 (Fig. 5.2–3), goblets FS 263, kylikes FS 264, 266, 267, 272 (Figs. 5.4–5, 6.1), basins FS 294 (Fig. 6.2), conical bowls (Fig. 6.3), and shallow angular bowls FS 295 (Fig. 6.4).

Because kylikes gradually replace goblets as the most popular drinking vessels in the Mycenaean painted and plain tableware assemblage,²⁶ the safest way to separate LH IIIA1 from LH IIIA2 Early is to consider the quantitative distribution of these two shapes (Tabs. 6–7). Our dataset demonstrates that, during Horizon A, kylikes were largely prevalent over goblets in the fine painted, as well as in the fine plain fraction. This indicates that Horizon A can be assigned to LH IIIA2 Early.

Location	Shape	Patterned	Linear	Mono-chrome	Total	Incidence
Pylos, Acropolis Trenches N-A08, -09 ¹	Goblet FS 263	0	1	7	8	14.0%
+	Goblet/Kylix FS 263/264	0	0	10	10	17.6%
Trench W 21, S. Corner ²	Kylix FS 264	0	0	11	11	19.3%
+	Kylix patterned*	2	0	0	2	3.5%
LT, Trench I ³	Other open shapes	3	6	17	26	45.6%
+	Total	5	7	45	57	100.0%
Tsakonas Field Trench N-E08 ⁴						22.8%%

¹ N-A08-07; N-A08-65, -66, -67, -68; N-A09-05, -07.

² Blegen et al. 1973, 51–52.

³ Blegen et al. 1973, 52–57.

⁴ N-E08-053.

* At Pylos, during LH IIIA2 Early, patterned kylikes exclusively include ‘experimental types’, traditionally assigned to LH IIIA1 (see Mountjoy 1986, 65–66, fig. 75; Mountjoy 1999, 332 nos. 54–57, fig. 112). As is typical for the rest of the Greek mainland, patterned kylikes FS 256 and 257 appear at Pylos in LH IIIA2 Middle and Late respectively.

Tab. 6 Distribution of painted goblets and kylikes from Horizon A at Pylos.

²² Shelmerdine 1992; Mountjoy 2008; Thomas 2011; Vitale 2011.

²³ Shelmerdine 1992, 495–503, figs. 9.39–50; Vitale 2011, esp. 339–343, tab. 5. The LH IIIA2 pottery phase was initially divided by Arne Furumark into an early and a late stage (Furumark 1941a, 505–522; Furumark 1941b, 56–64, 99–101).

²⁴ See Mountjoy 1986, 88–90, figs. 106–108.

²⁵ Blegen et al. 1973, 55, fig. 155.12.

²⁶ Mountjoy 1986, 67; Shelmerdine 1992, 495–497; Vitale 2011, 332–338, tab. 2A. See also Thomas 2011, 196–201.

Location	Shape	Total	Incidence
Pylos, Acropolis Trenches N-A08, -09 ¹	Goblet FS 263	4	0.9%
+	Goblet/Kylix FS 263/264	37	8.0%
Trench W 21, S. Corner ²	Kylix FS 264/266/267/272	217	46.7%
+	Conical cup FS 204	112	24.1%
LT, Trench I ³	Other open shapes	94	20.3%
+			
Tsakonas Field Trench N-E08 ⁴	Total	464	100.0%

¹ N-A08-07; N-A08-65, -66, -67, -68; N-A09-05, -07.

² Blegen et al. 1973, 51–52.

³ Blegen et al. 1973, 52–57.

⁴ N-E08-053.

Tab. 7 Distribution of popular plain open shapes from Horizon A at Pylos.

Turning to Horizon B, we provide a critical discussion of some of the main chronological arguments mentioned previously. A date in the first half of LH IIIB, proposed by Peter Warren, Mervyn Popham, Patrick Thomas and, most recently, Louis Godart and Anna Sacconi, is untenable for at least three reasons.²⁷ First, the absence of painted kylikes FS 258, 264, 265 and the occurrence of the deep bowl FS 284 among painted open shapes from the destruction layer in themselves suggest a date no earlier than LH IIIB2 Early (Tab. 8).²⁸ Second, preliminary analysis of the unpublished materials excavated by John Pedley in Trench 64-6 has documented the presence of LH IIIB2 Late to LH IIIC Early 1 features underneath the final floor of one of the rooms from the South-western Building.²⁹ These features include fragments from Transitional Type (TT) 1 (Fig. 7.1) and monochrome deep bowls FS 284 (Fig. 7.2).³⁰ The occurrence of these sherds underneath the

²⁷ Warren 1975, 134; Popham 1991; Thomas 2004; Godart – Sacconi 2020.

²⁸ See French 1969; Wardle 1973; Mountjoy 1986, 121; Vitale 2006, 178; Vitale – Van de Moortel 2020, 30–33 (with previous bibliography). According to Thomas, the absence of Zygouries kylikes FS 258A at Pylos implies that the destruction of the Palace of Nestor occurred at such an early stage of LH IIIB1 that simply not enough time had passed to allow for the adoption of this distinctively Argolid shape at Ano Englianos (Thomas 2004, 217–221, especially 220–221). Specifically, Thomas wonders why “... if the palace was functioning for nearly the entire duration of LH IIIB, as Blegen suggested ... do we not find a single example of the FS 258A kylix, especially as local imitations of them were manufactured at smaller Messenian sites such as Nichoria?” (Thomas 2004, 220). A major problem with this argument is that it does not take into account the occurrence of deep bowls FS 284 in the palace’s destruction deposits. Deep bowls FS 284 are basically a LH IIIB innovation and they remain less popular than decorated kylikes during the first part of the 13th century BC everywhere on the Greek mainland (Vitale – Van de Moortel 2020, 11–15, 30–33). Should the absence of decorated kylikes at Pylos imply an early LH IIIB1 destruction date, then one would also expect to find no deep bowls. This said, recent PONEX excavations in the area of the palace have uncovered several specimens of decorated kylikes FS 258B, which overlap chronologically more or less exactly with Zygouries kylikes FS 258A. Thus, the lack of the latter type (FS 258A), which significantly parallels the lack of Ephyrean goblets FS 254 at the site during LH IIIB, has no chronological meaning and must be interpreted as a deliberate rejection of Argolid drinking fashions (Vitale et al. 2021, 199, 208). It again underlines the role of the Palace of Nestor as a repository of specific cultural behaviors, which were intimately connected to the local Mycenaean identity, so powerfully endorsed through the performance of large-scale feasting activities in the area (see Hruby 2006; Vitale et al. 2021, 199, 207–209).

²⁹ Blegen et al. 1973, 38–39.

³⁰ Mountjoy 1997, 111, fig. 7.32–44; Mountjoy 1999, 37.

floor of the Southwestern Building implies that the final destruction of the palace must postdate LH IIIB1. Finally, the recent discovery by Emily Egan of Group B deep bowl fragments FS 284 (Fig. 7.3–4) among the unpublished finds from Blegen’s excavations in the Portico of the Megaron (Room 4) also indicates that the palace was functioning after the end of LH IIIB1.³¹ These Group B deep bowl sherds come from mixed layers including MH to LH IIIC Early 1 and EIA pottery and exhibit a heavy degree of wear and a fragmentary state of preservation.³²

Shape ¹	Patterned + Linear	Monochrome	Total	Incidence
Basin FS 294	1	0	1	2.3%
Bowls, miscellaneous	5	0	5	11.6%
Cups, miscellaneous	1	0	1	2.3%
Dipper, diminutive	13	0	13	30.2%
Dipper FS 236	6	0	6	14.0%
Mug FS 226	2	0	2	4.7%
Deep Bowl FS 284	8	2	10	23.3%
Krater FS 9	5	0	5	11.6%
Total	41	2	43	100.0%
%	95.3%	4.7%	100.0%	

¹ Blegen – Rawson 1966, 350–418.

Tab. 8 Distribution of painted open shapes from Horizon B at the Palace of Nestor at Pylos.

Popham’s suggestion that the complete vessels from Room 46 belong to a reoccupation of that area of the palace in advanced LH IIIC or the EIA (Fig. 8), is not supported by the stratigraphy.³³ Careful reanalysis of the original excavation data by Stocker and Davis clearly demonstrates that the vessels from the so-called Queen’s Megaron were found in situ on the original floor of the Mycenaean palace rather than above the floor, as speculated by Popham.³⁴ On the other hand, the EIA sherds recovered in the area of Room 46 come from a distinct layer located well above the floor and, in contrast to the vessels found on the floor, which are complete and heavily burnt, they exhibit a fragmentary state of preservation and do not show any traces of contact with fire.

Recent examination of old and newly excavated EIA ceramics from the palace area also indicates that these materials date between William Coulson’s Dark Ages II and III, with some vessels extending into the Late Geometric period.³⁵ The complete vessels from the destruction

³¹ Egan 2015, 66–67, 429–430, 452–454, 466–467, nos. P-242, 315–322, 373–374, pls. 79, 98–100, 115. It seems likely that future in-depth study of unpublished finds from Blegen’s excavations in areas of the Palace of Nestor other than the Megaron will produce additional evidence for the existence of this shape at Pylos during the second half of LH IIIB.

³² Egan 2015, 95–97, 490, tab. 15.

³³ Blegen – Rawson 1966, 201, 354, fig. 332; Popham 1991, 321; Mountjoy 1997, 131–135; Mountjoy 1999, 310.

³⁴ Davis et al. in press.

³⁵ Blegen – Rawson 1966, 64, 185–186 nos. 615–618, 827, fig. 347; Coulson 1983; Coulson 1986, 67–68, 109–111 nos. 359–364, fig. 20, pl. 15a–f; Davis – Lynch 2017, 56–60, 63–65, figs. 5.1–2.

floor deposit of Room 46 are incompatible with such a late time span based on their technological features, which include relatively thick walls, lightly burnished surfaces, and the use of dull to moderately lustrous paints.³⁶

If LH IIIB1 and advanced LH IIIC or the EIA are ruled out, the final destruction of the Palace of Nestor must be placed either late in LH IIIB or at the very beginning of LH IIIC Early. Stylistic analysis of the 163 decorated vessels found on the floors of the palace demonstrates that LH IIIC Early 1 features are prominent and suggests that the very beginning of the 12th century remains the only possible date for the final destruction, as proposed by the author of this section in 2006 (Tab. 9).³⁷ The most diagnostic LH IIIC Early 1 painted shapes from destruction Horizon B include linear and patterned juglets FS 111 (Fig. 9.1), linear mugs FS 226 (Fig. 9.2), and belly-handled amphorae FS 58 (Fig. 8.1), a patterned collar-necked jar FS 63 (Fig. 9.3), as well as monochrome (Fig. 10) and dark-ground TT 2 deep bowls FS 284 (Fig. 8.5).

Quantification	Non-Diagnostic	LH IIIB	LH IIIB / LH IIIC Early 1	LH IIIC Early 1	Total
Nos.	21	25	65	52	163
%	12.9%	15.3%	39.9%	31.9%	100.0%

Non-Diagnostic: Blegen – Rawson 1966, Shapes 9, 19, 42, 45, 50, 54:a–b, 56, 57, 65:e.

LH IIIB: Blegen – Rawson 1966, Shapes 44, 52, 53, 63, 64, 65:c–d.

LH IIIB/LH IIIC Early 1: Blegen – Rawson 1966, Shapes 20, 21, 38, 43, 45, 52, 60, 65:a–b, f.

LH IIIC Early 1: Blegen – Rawson 1966, Shapes 1, 33, 34, 37, 45, 49, 52, 60, 63, 68.

Tab. 9 Styles represented in the pottery from Horizon B at the Palace of Nestor at Pylos (painted vessels only).

Such a conclusion is also indirectly supported by the recently identified Group B deep bowls from the area of the Portico of the Megaron (Room 4; Fig. 7.3–4). The state of preservation of these fragments (see above) strongly indicates that they represent artifacts used some time before the final catastrophe occurred.³⁸ In fact, the absence of complete Group B deep bowls from the floor deposits marking the final destruction of the palace indicates that by that time, as one would

³⁶ See Coulson 1983, 61–63, 72, 90–91, 96; Coulson 1986, 12, 28, 66–67; Davis – Lynch 2017, 64–65. The only two vessels from the area of the palace that date to LH IIIC Late are: a hydria FS 128 with a wavy band FM 53 on the vertical handle and a possible scroll FM 48 on the shoulder (Blegen – Rawson 1966, 65, fig. 345.4; Popham 1991, 317; Mountjoy 1999, 310 n. 68); and an unpublished jug or hydria FS 106/128 with a twisted handle and a possible tassel FM 72 on the shoulder. These vessels both come from Court 3 and are only partially mendable. While they demonstrate occasional visits to the ruins of the palace during LH IIIC Late, they cannot be used to suggest a re-occupation of any area of the Main Building at that time. The unpublished jug or hydria is typified by a distinctive soft white fabric that is remarkably different from all the complete vessels from the destruction deposits found on the floor levels of the Palace of Nestor, including that from Room 46. In this respect, it is noteworthy that Coulson drew a sharp distinction between the dark-ground deep bowl from Room 46, which he assigned to LH IIIC Early, and vessels characteristic of LH IIIC Late in Messenia (Coulson 1986, 19). The fabric of the unpublished LH IIIC Late jug or hydria from Court 3 may be a forerunner of a soft white and crumbly fabric that Coulson considered typical of his Dark Age I phase (Coulson 1986, 9, 12).

³⁷ Vitale 2006, 190–191.

³⁸ According to Egan's analysis, only three vessels can be definitely assigned to the destruction deposit found in situ on the floors of the Megaron at the moment of the final destruction: a plain neck-handled amphora FS 70, a patterned Group A deep bowl FS 284 with running spiral FM 46, and a plain basin FS 294 (Egan 2015, 100, 134–135, 396–397, 428, 463, 491–494, tabs. 16–17, nos. P-136, 235, 367, pls. 51, 75–76, 113). Unlike the fragments from the Group B deep bowls, these three vessels are either complete or highly mendable and exhibit traces of burning from the final catastrophe, with the Group A deep bowl being almost vitrified as a result of exposure to very high temperatures.

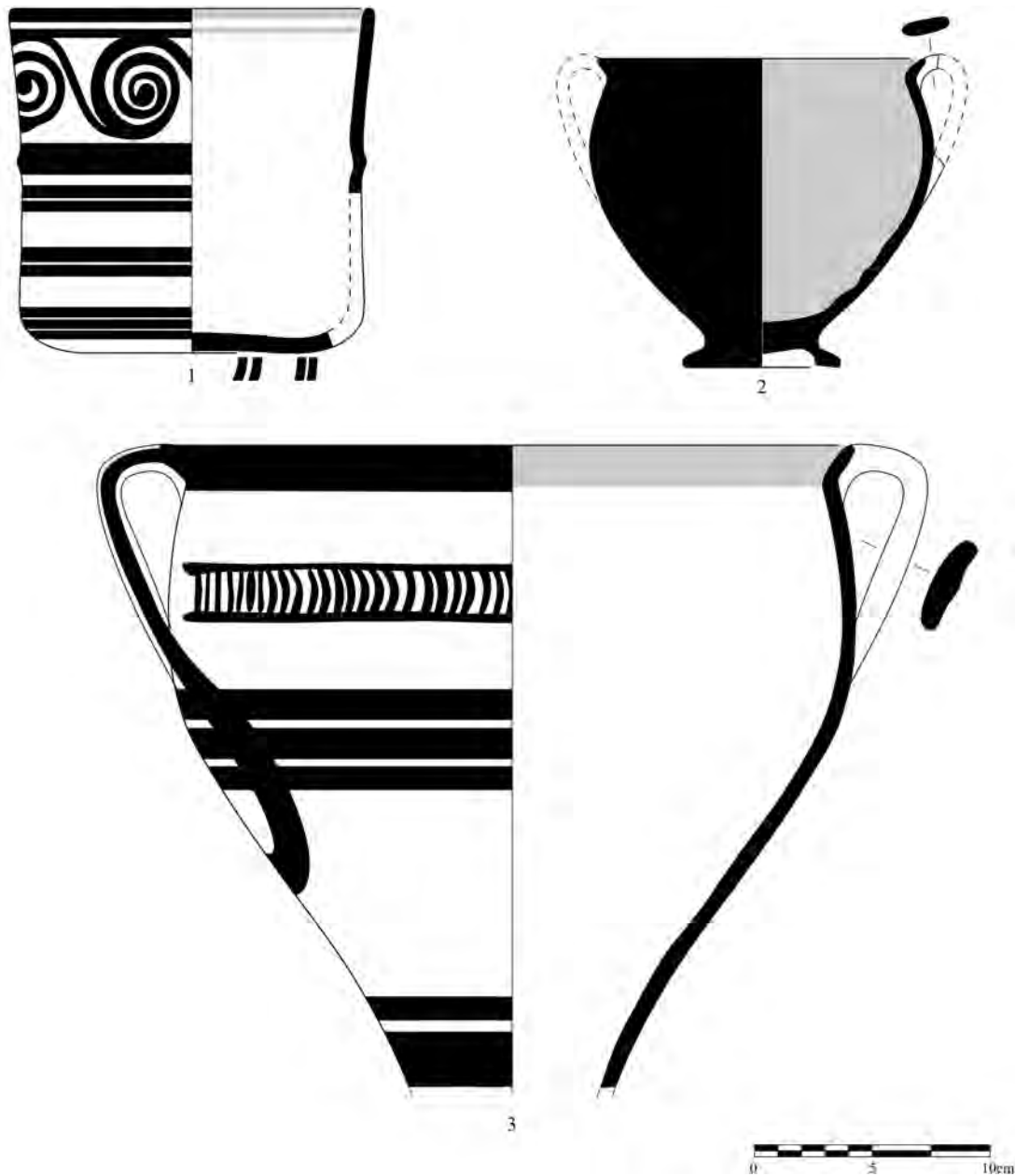


Fig. 3 LH IIIA2 Early Mycenaean lustrous decorated pottery from Horizon A at Pylos (all from Blegen's excavations). 1. Patterned mug FS 225 decorated with running spiral FM 46 (CM 2854), LT, Trench I; 2–3. monochrome goblet FS 263 and patterned krater FS 7 decorated with foliate band FM 64 (CM 1908, 1637), Trench W 21, S. Corner (digitization T. Ross, after Mountjoy 1999, 330–332 nos. 45, 49, 58, figs. 111–112). Scale 1:3.

normally expect during LH IIIC Early 1 outside the Argolid, this shape was no longer used in Pylos.

There is much variety in the typological and functional range of fine plain open shapes from Horizon B.³⁹ A detailed discussion of this wide array of vessels is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, while many specimens in use at the time of the destruction of the Palace of

³⁹ Blegen – Rawson 1966, 350–418, figs. 349–398.

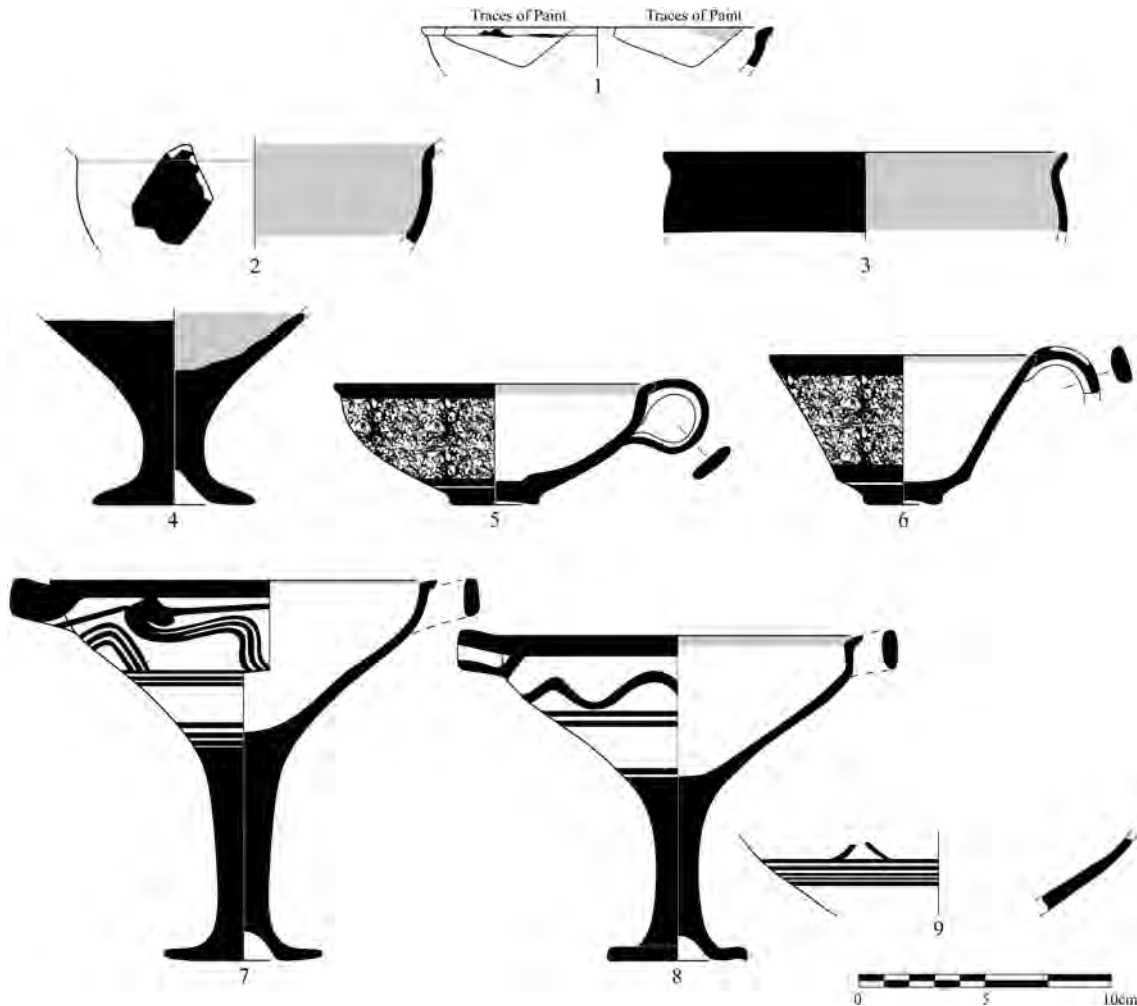


Fig. 4 LH IIIA2 Early Mycenaean lustrous decorated pottery from Horizon A at Pylos. 1. Monochrome kylix FS 264 (N-A08-65-P07) from PONEX excavations, Area A; 2–3. monochrome kylixes FS 264 (unnumbered) from Blegen's excavations, underneath Hall 65; 4. monochrome kylix FS 264 (N-E08-53-P21) from PONEX excavations, Area E; 5–6. patterned shallow cup FS 219 and carinated cup FS 230 decorated with stipple FM 77 (CM 1721, 1712) from Blegen's excavations, LT, Trench I; 7–8. patterned kylikes with horizontal strap handles decorated with ivy FM 12 and wavy line FM 53 (CM 1734, 1732) from Blegen's excavations, LT, Trench I; 9. patterned kylix decorated with an unidentified motif (N-E08-53-P10) from PONEX excavations, Area E (1–4, 9: drawings T. Ross, 5–8: digitization T. Ross, after Mountjoy 1999, 331–332 nos. 46, 52, 56–57, figs. 111–112). Scale 1:3.

Nestor have profiles that would normally be at home in LH IIIA2 and/or LH IIIB1,⁴⁰ many others are consistent with LH IIIC Early 1.⁴¹ This is especially true for plain open shapes with beaded, lipless, and/or flaring lipless rims, including shallow cups FS 220/222 (Fig. 11.1), kylikes FS 259/265/266/267/274 (Fig. 11.2–5), and shallow angular bowls FS 295 (Fig. 12).

⁴⁰ See, for example Blegen – Rawson 1966, 356–357, 366–367, 369–374 (Shape 4, FS 295, nos. 455–456; Shape 5; Shape 27, FS 267, nos. 426, 176; Shape 28, FS 269; Shape 29:a, FS 264/265, no. 721; Shape 29:c, FS 259/264/265, nos. 186, 187, 190, 588; Shape 29:d, FS 264/265; Shape 29:e, FS 263/264; Shape 29:f, FS 264; Shape 29:g, FS 274, no. 215; Shape 29:h, FS 264; Shape 29:i, FS 264/265; Shapes 30–32, FS 273), figs. 349–350, 359–366.

⁴¹ See, for example Blegen – Rawson 1966, 356, 360, 366–369, 371 (Shape 4, FS 295, nos. 75, 100, 142, 199, 570; Shape 12, FS 220/222; Shape 26; Shape 27, FS 267, nos. 63, 425; Shape 29:a, FS 265, no. 701; Shape 29:b, FS 266; Shape 29:c, FS 259/265; Shape 29:g, FS 274, no. 284), figs. 349–350, 353–354, 359–364.

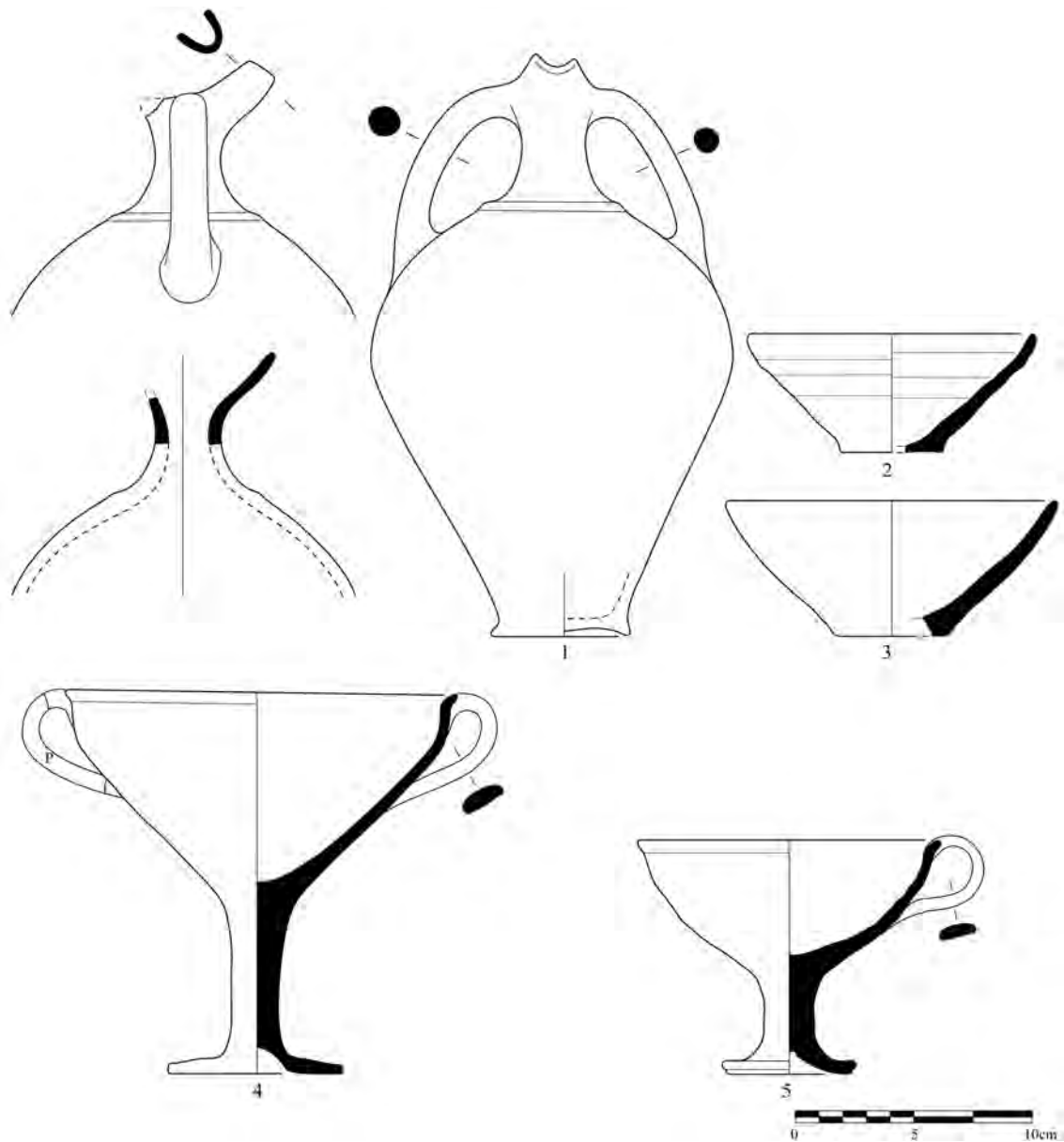


Fig. 5 LH IIIA2 Early fine pale plain pottery from Horizon A at Pylos. 1. Stirrup jug FS 150 (CM 1789) from Blegen's excavations, Trench W 21, S. Corner; 2. conical cup FS 204 (unnumbered) from Blegen's excavations, underneath Hall 65; 3. conical cup FS 204 (N-A08-07-P12) from PONEX excavations, Area A; 4. deep rounded kylix FS 264 (CM 1740) from Blegen's excavations, LT, Trench I; 5. one-handed kylix FS 267 (unnumbered) from Blegen's excavations, underneath Hall 65 (drawings T. Ross). In this and all following figures, the letter 'P' indicates areas that have been restored with plaster. Scale 1:3.

The occurrence of shapes stylistically assignable to LH IIIA2 and LH IIIB1 in a context otherwise datable to LH IIIC Early 1 may be explained by considering the special function of the assemblage. The partial continuation of old vessel types may have been favored by the need to perform long-standing eating and drinking ceremonial practices. In fact, recent excavations carried out during the construction of the new roof for the Palace of Nestor have suggested that feasting activities had been taking place on the acropolis of Pylos since the second half of LH IIIB.⁴²

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⁴² Egan 2021; Karapanagiotou et al. 2021; Vitale et al. 2021.

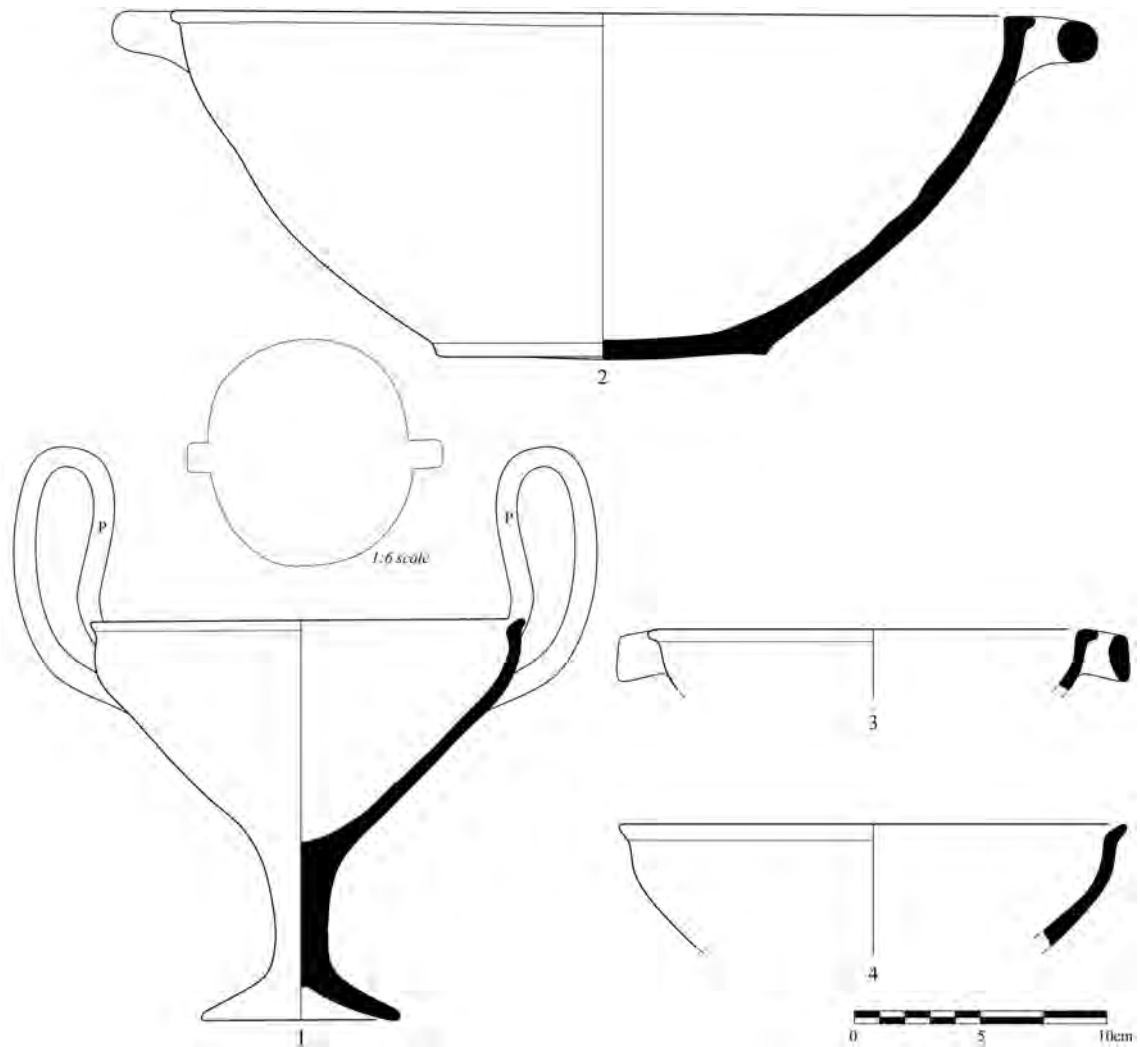


Fig. 6 LH IIIA2 Early fine pale plain pottery from Horizon A at Pylos. 1. Kylix with high-swung handles FS 272 (CM 1742) from Blegen's excavations, LT, Trench I; 2. basin FS 294 (CM 1641) from Blegen's excavations, Trench W 21, S. Corner; 3-4. conical bowl and shallow angular bowl FS 295 (N-A08-07-P09, N-A09-05-P07) from PON-EX excavations, Area A (drawings T. Ross). Scale 1:3 (except where indicated otherwise).

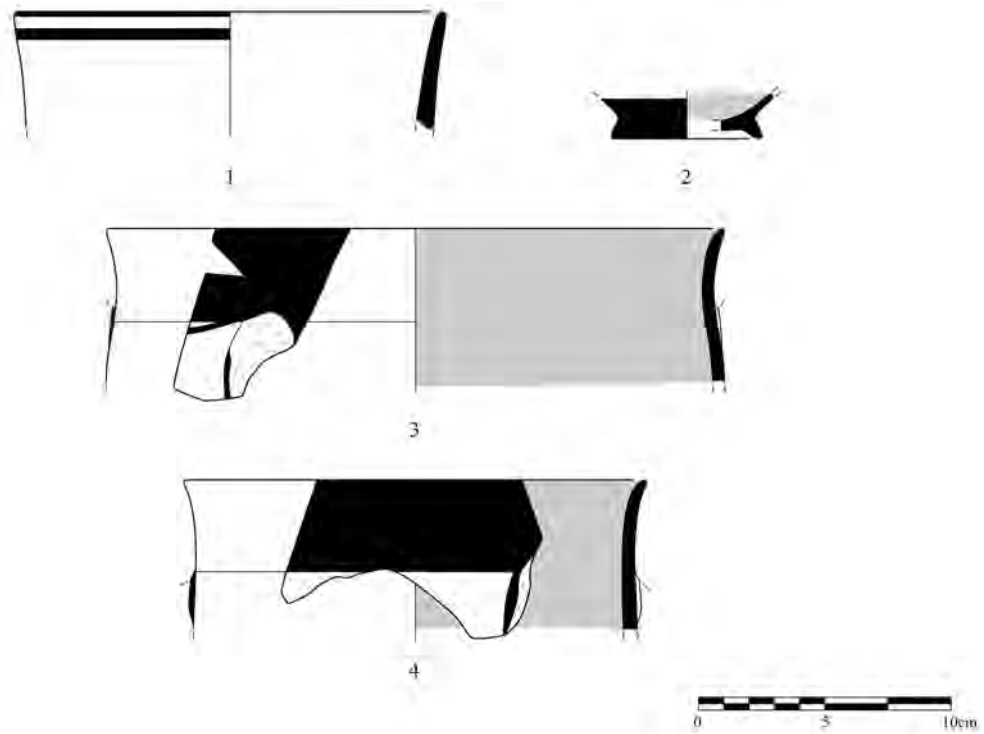


Fig. 7 LH IIIB2 to LH IIIC Early 1 Mycenaean lustrous decorated pottery from Pylos (all from Blegen's excavations). 1–2. LH IIIB2 Late to LH IIIC Early 1 linear TT 1 deep bowl FS 284 and monochrome deep bowl FS 284 (unnumbered) from Pedley's Trench 64-6; 3. LH IIIB2 patterned Group B deep bowl FS 284 decorated with running spiral FM 46 (unnumbered) from the Portico of the Megaron; 4. LH IIIB2 Group B deep bowl FS 284 with no preserved decorative pattern (unnumbered) from the Portico of the Megaron (1–2: drawings T. Ross; 3–4: drawings E. Egan with additions by T. Ross – S. Vitale). Scale 1:3.

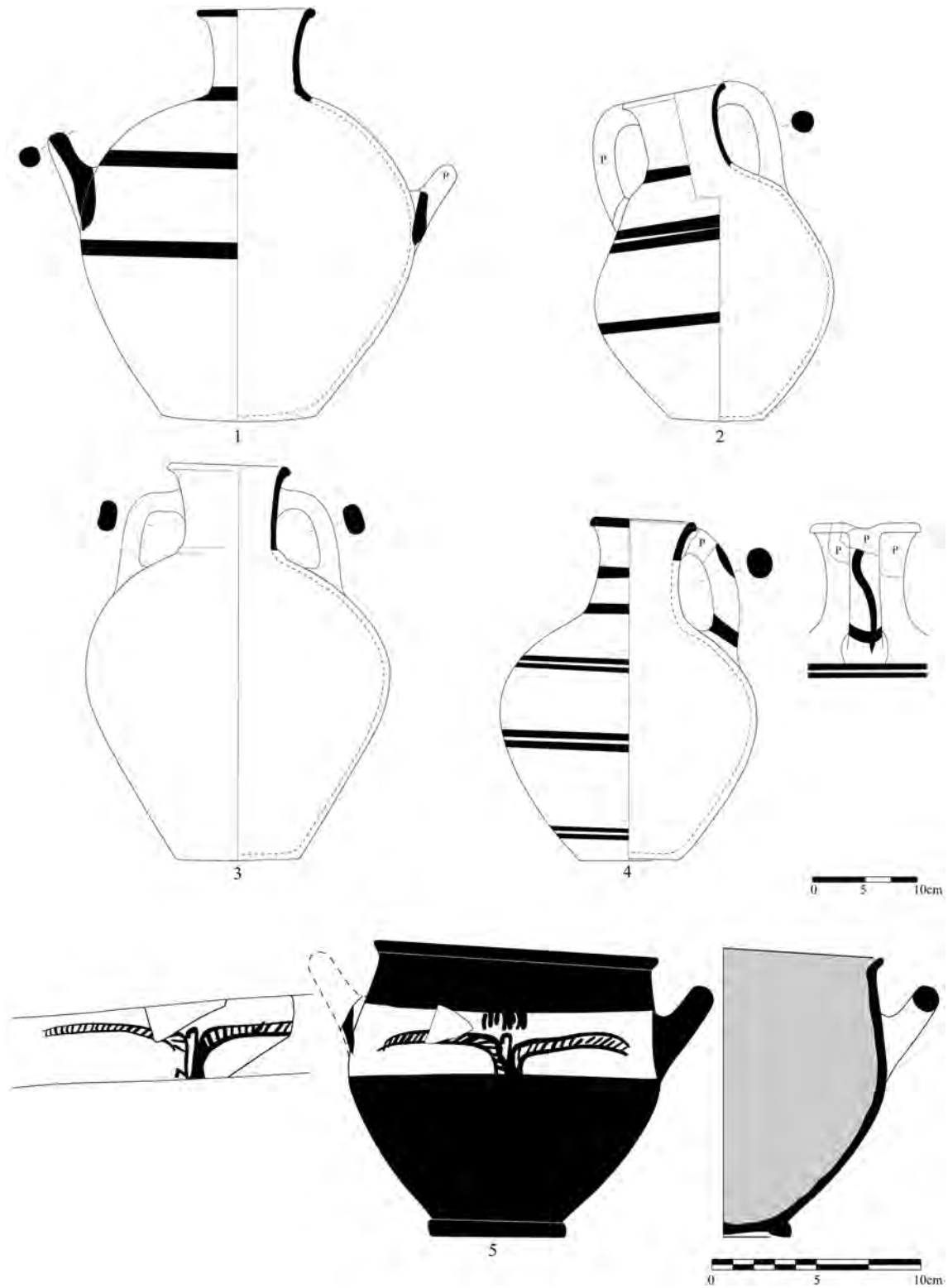


Fig. 8 LH IIIC Early 1 Mycenaean lustrous decorated and fine pale plain pottery from Horizon B at Pylos (all from Blegen's excavations in Room 46 of the Palace of Nestor). 1. Linear belly-handled amphora FS 58 (CM 1947); 2. linear amphora FS 69 (CM 1944); 3. plain neck-handled amphora FS 70 (CM 1483); 4. patterned jug FS 105/106 decorated with wavy line FM 53 (CM 1484); 5. dark-ground patterned TT 2 deep bowl FS 284 (CM 1485) decorated with dashed semicircles FM 43 (drawings T. Ross). 1–4. Scale 1:6; 5. Scale 1:3.

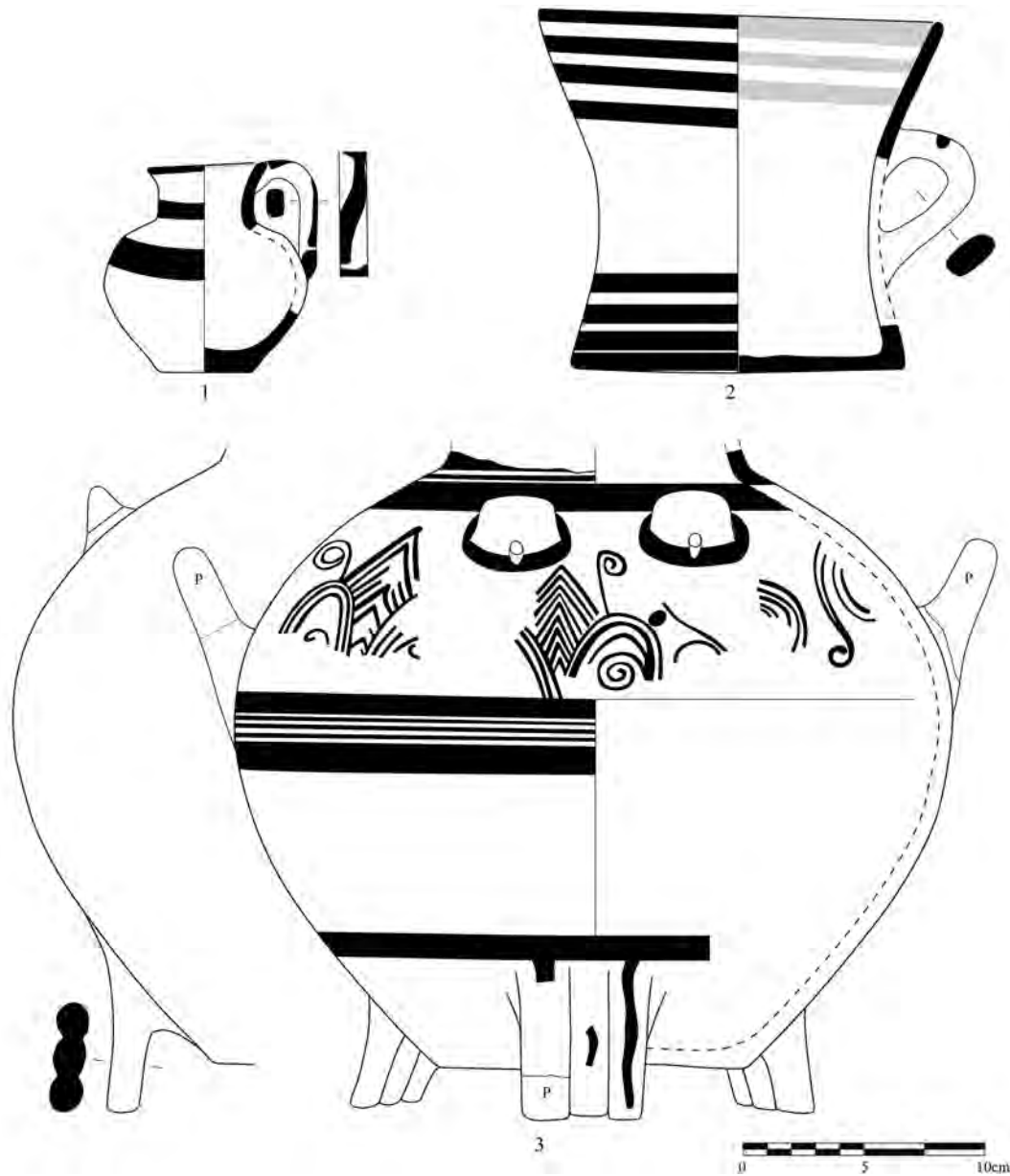


Fig. 9 LH IIIC Early 1 Mycenaean lustrous decorated pottery from Horizon B at Pylos (all from Blegen's excavations). 1. Patterned juglet FS 111 decorated with wavy line FM 53 (CM 0947); 2. linear mug FS 226 (CM 1143); 3. patterned collar-necked jar FS 63 decorated with semicircles FM 43 linked by chevrons FM 58 with fill of stemmed spirals FM 51 (CM 1265), Rooms 20 and 39 of the Palace of Nestor (1–2: digitization, T. Ross, after Mountjoy 1999, 347, 349 nos. 94, 105, figs. 116, 119; 3: drawing T. Ross). Scale 1:3.

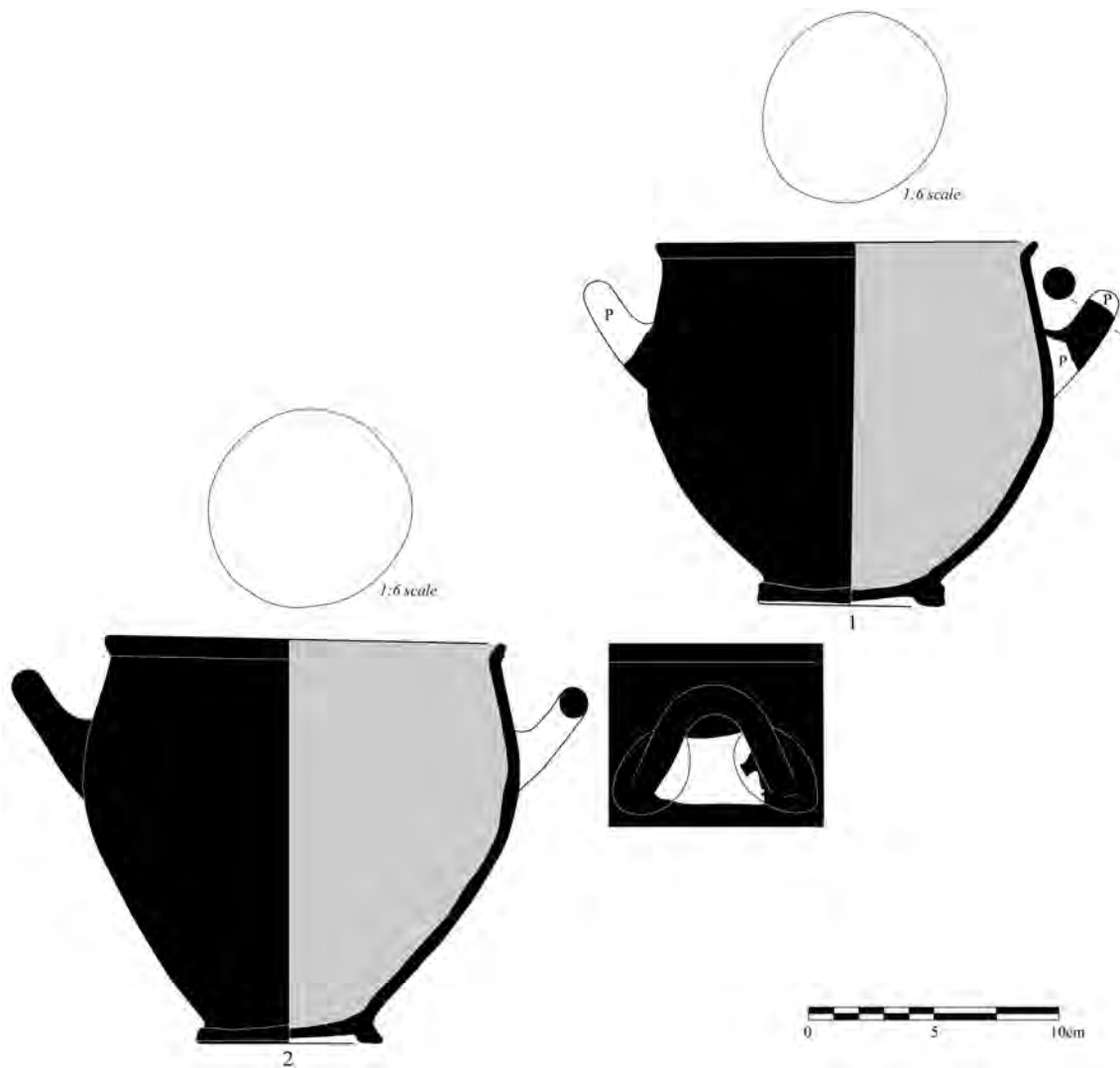


Fig. 10 LH IIIC Early 1 Mycenaean lustrous decorated pottery from Horizon B at Pylos (all from Blegen's excavations). 1–2. Monochrome TT 2 deep bowls FS 284 (CM 1402, 1976), Rooms 43 and 95 of the Palace of Nestor (drawings T. Ross). Scale 1:3 (except where indicated otherwise).

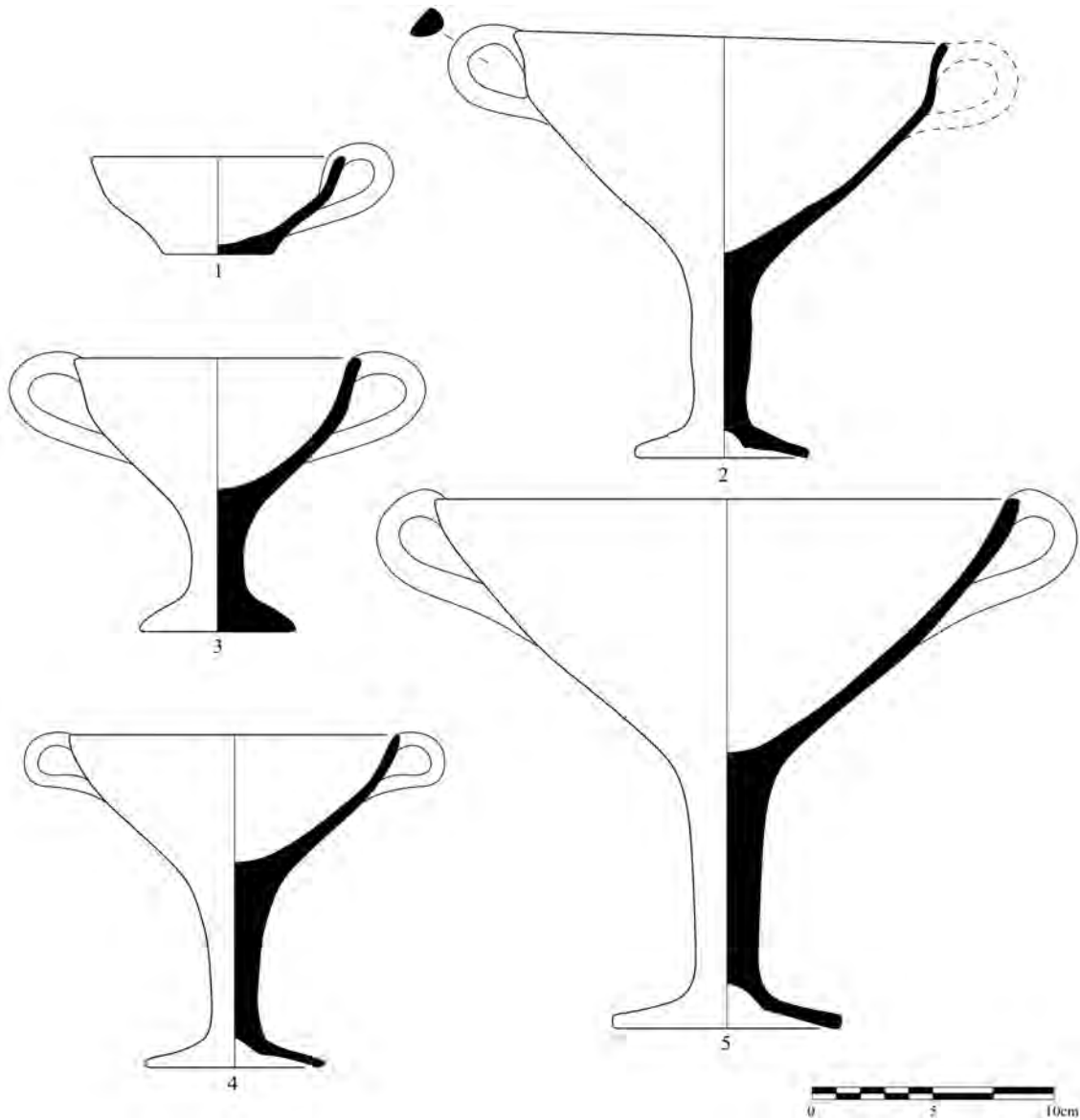


Fig. 11 LH IIIC Early 1 fine pale plain pottery from Horizon B at Pylos (all from Blegen's excavations). 1. Shallow cup FS 222 (no. 2); 2. deep kylix FS 259/265 (unnumbered); 3. deep rounded kylix FS 265 (no. 701); 4. shallow kylix FS 266 (no. 203); 5. conical kylix FS 274 (no. 264), Rooms 18, 19, 21, and 55 of the Palace of Nestor (digitization T. Ross, after Hruby 2014, 50, fig. 4; Blegen – Rawson 1966, 122, 132, 225, 366–369, 371, figs. 360–362). Scale 1:3.

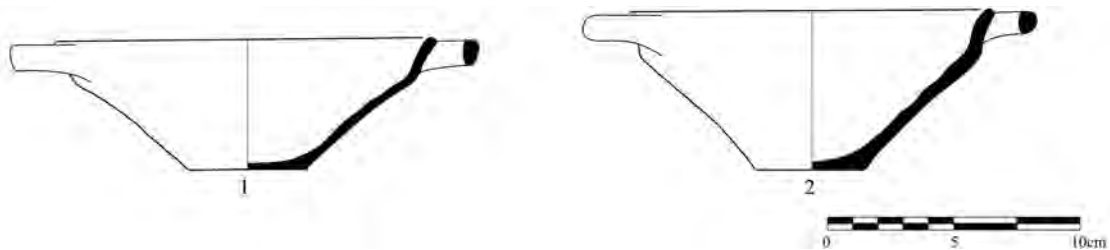


Fig. 12 LH IIIC Early 1 fine pale plain pottery from Horizon B at Pylos (all from Blegen's excavations). 1–2. Shallow angular bowls FS 295 (nos. 75, 199), Room 21 of the Palace of Nestor (digitization T. Ross, after Blegen – Rawson 1966, 132, 356, fig. 350). Scale 1:3.

Synchronisms across the Greek Mainland

Based on the data provided in the previous section of this article, Pylian Destruction Horizons A and B can be roughly synchronized with a relatively large number of deposits from different regions of the Greek mainland.⁴³ Horizon A is approximately contemporary with the end of the LH IIB to LH IIIA2 Early phase at Iklaina,⁴⁴ the materials from Trench L23 at Nichoria,⁴⁵ the construction fill of Mansion 2 at the Menelaion,⁴⁶ Floor 3 of Building B and the construction fill below the West Stoa at Ayios Vasileios,⁴⁷ as well as several assemblages from Mitrou including destruction deposits from Buildings D and F, the construction fills of Road 1 (Levels 7–9), and some dumps located in the northeast excavation sector (Tab. 10).⁴⁸ There are no published settlement deposits from the Argolid, Attica, and Boiotia assignable to LH IIIA2 Early. However, several tomb assemblages from these regions can be attributed to this subphase.⁴⁹ They come from Mycenae,⁵⁰ Prosymna,⁵¹ Athens,⁵² and Thebes.⁵³

Pylos	Pylos Chronology	Pottery Date	Significant Contemporary Settlement Deposits from the Greek Mainland
Acropolis Palace of Nestor	Horizon B	LH IIIC Early 1 or Rutter's LH IIIC Phase 1	Mycenae, destruction deposits at the end of Phase IX Tiryns, West Staircase Terrace, Zone 1 Korakou, Trench P VI–V Athens, Northeast Ascent Thorikos, Mine No. 3
Dimopoulos Field Trench N-G11	Horizon B		Dimini, destruction of Megaron A, Megaron B, and settlement (labeled as LH IIIB2 by the excavator) Thebes, Floor 5 above the “Linear B Archive” Eutresis, House V
Acropolis Trenches N-A08, -09	Horizon A	LH IIIA2 Early	Mitrou, destruction deposits from Buildings D and F; Road 1, Levels 6–8; NE Sector dumps Nichoria, Trench L23 PQfg, Level 23 Iklaina, end of the LH IIB to LH IIIA2 Early phase Menelaion, Mansion 2, construction fill Ayios Vasileios, Building B, Floor 3; below West Stoa, construction fill
Acropolis Trench W 21, S. Corner LT, Trench I	Horizon A		
Tsakonas Field Area E	Horizon A		

Tab. 10 Correlation between destruction horizons at Pylos and other significant pottery deposits from the Greek mainland.

⁴³ Vitale 2006, 197–201, tabs. 2–3; Vitale 2011, 340–341, tab. 5.

⁴⁴ Cosmopoulos 2018, 99–100, 102–103.

⁴⁵ Shelmerdine 1992, 495–503, 537–538, figs. 9.39–40.

⁴⁶ Catling 2009, vol. 1, 42–43 nos. ET 62–63; Catling 2009, vol. 2, 88, fig. 92. See also Kardamaki 2017, 113, tab. 4.

⁴⁷ Kardamaki 2017, 87–104, 111, 113–114, 134 nos. 97–118; 139 nos. 313–317, tabs. 4, 6, figs. 7, 20.

⁴⁸ Vitale 2011, 332–338, 340–341, tabs. 2A–2B, 5, figs. 2, 3.1–4 (with revisions).

⁴⁹ Vitale 2011, 340–341, tab. 5.

⁵⁰ For Chamber Tombs 520–521 at Mycenae see Wace 1932, 21–28 nos. 15, 17, 25–27, 30–31, figs. 9–10, pls. 16–17; 28–31 no. 1, figs. 9, 15.

⁵¹ For Tomb XLII at Prosymna see Blegen 1937, 147–152, fig. 368.

⁵² For Tombs XVIII, XXVIII, XXXII, and XXXIX from the Athenian Agora see Immerwahr 1971, 209–211 nos. XVIII-1–7; 230–231 no. XXVIII-1; 234 nos. XXXII-1–3; 241–242 nos. XXXIX-1–3, pls. 48, 54, 56, 58.

⁵³ For Kolonaki Tomb 21 at Thebes see Keramopoulos 1917, 181–183, fig. 130.

Pylos Horizon B is roughly contemporary with the destruction deposits at the end of Phase IX at Mycenae,⁵⁴ Tiryns' West Staircase Terrace, Zone 1,⁵⁵ Phase 4 at Korakou,⁵⁶ the deposits from the Northeast Ascent of the Athenian Acropolis,⁵⁷ the destruction of Building Complex I at Kontopigado,⁵⁸ the earlier materials from Thorikos Mine No. 3,⁵⁹ Floor 5 above the 'Linear B Archive' at Thebes,⁶⁰ the floor level from House V at Eutresis,⁶¹ as well as the destruction of Megaron A, Megaron B, and the settlement at Dimini (Tab. 10).⁶² These deposits date to LH IIIC Early 1 or Jeremy Rutter's LH IIIC Phase 1.⁶³ They possibly postdate the destructions of the palaces of Mycenae, Tiryns, and Thebes, as well as those of the citadels of Midea (West Gate Area and Southwest Slope) and Glas.⁶⁴ These data may imply a slight chronological difference between the destructions of the palaces located in the central area of the Greek mainland, extending from the Argolid to Boiotia, and the palaces or palatial structures located in Messenia and Thessaly at the southwest and northeast edges of this core area. Based on the chronology recently proposed for the destruction of the palace of Ayios Vasileios (LH IIIB1 Late),⁶⁵ the data presented in this paper may also indicate that during the second half of the 13th century BC, Pylos was the only palatial center in the southern Peloponnese.

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Summary and Results

At the current stage in our research, it is probably wise to contain our interpretative efforts and hold back from grand historical reconstructions. Such an attitude is suggested at Pylos by the ongoing status of PONEX excavations. The same consideration may apply to other important sites, such as Iklaina and Ayios Vasileios. In addition, caution is also necessary at the theoretical level. Recent research by Jorrit Kelder, Birgitta Eder, and Reinhard Jung has challenged peer polity interaction models accepted by most scholars in the last 30 years, arguing for a unified administrative palatial organization under a single *wanax* for most of the Mycenaean world from the Greek mainland to the east Aegean.⁶⁶

Despite these problematic aspects, the data presented in this paper have important implications for our understanding of significant phases of cultural and sociopolitical transitions at Pylos and, more generally, on the Mycenaean mainland. Five points emerge. First, our study demonstrates the value of a comprehensive contextual approach to ceramic analysis and its potential benefits for a refined chronology. Second, our work allows, for the first time, a precise date for what we have termed destruction Horizon A at Pylos, when, according to Blegen and Rawson, the predecessor of the Palace of Nestor had burned down. Third, our results firmly indicate that the Palace of Nestor was definitively destroyed in LH IIIC Early 1, thus ending a long debate. Fourth, our proposed synchronisms show the existence of some discrete LH IIIA2 Early destruction horizons, involving such sites as Pylos and Mitrou. At the same time, this

⁵⁴ French 2011, 1–4, 35–51, 300–533, tab. 1, figs. 9–14, 17.

⁵⁵ Kardamaki 2009, 62–153, pls. 15–37; Kardamaki 2015, 88–93, figs. 7–9.

⁵⁶ Rutter 1974, 147–166, figs. 39–51.

⁵⁷ Broneer 1933; Rutter 1977, 1–2; Gauß 2003, 98–102.

⁵⁸ Kaza-Papageorgiou – Kardamaki 2014, 79–81, 94, 110, figs. 14–16, 23, 34.

⁵⁹ Mountjoy 1995.

⁶⁰ Andrikou et al. 2006, 50, 80–81 nos. 256–270, pls. 15–16, 72–74.

⁶¹ Goldman 1931, 68, 189–190, figs. 77, 263.

⁶² Adrimi-Sismani 2013, 212–247, figs. 54–76; Adrimi-Sismani 2014, 333–496.

⁶³ Rutter 1977, 1–2.

⁶⁴ Vitale 2006, 199–202, tabs. 2–3 (with previous bibliography).

⁶⁵ Kardamaki 2017, 114; Vasilogamvrou et al., this volume. For the chronology and terminology of the LH IIIB phase see Vitale – Van de Moortel 2020, especially 11–15, 30–33 (with previous bibliography).

⁶⁶ Cherry – Renfrew 1986; Kelder 2010; Nakassis et al. 2010; Eder – Jung 2015; Jung 2015.

phase may have marked important construction activities at the Laconian centers of the Menelaion and Ayios Vasileios. Whether these different events are connected at a supra-regional level remains unclear, as we lack contemporary settlement data from the Argolid, Attica, and Boiotia. The fifth point emerging from our analysis is that Pylos and Dimini may have been destroyed slightly later than Mycenae, Tiryns, and Thebes.⁶⁷ The potential political implications of these later destructions, located at the edge of the central area of Mycenaean palatial society, remain to be explored further in the future.

Concluding this paper, a final issue must be addressed. While PONEX is bringing to light new solid evidence concerning LH IIIA2 Middle and Late activities in Area E from the Tsakonas field near Tholos IV, the picture from the acropolis during these subphases remains poorly understood. This time span is of crucial importance, as it includes the period between destruction Horizon A and the construction of the Main Building of the final Mycenaean palace, which is currently dated to LH IIIB.⁶⁸ Additional information about human activities on the acropolis during LH IIIA2 may come from future analysis of the materials recovered underneath the floors of the Palace of Nestor, as well as from future study of the assemblages from the excavations recently carried out for the construction of the new roof over the Main Building of the palace.⁶⁹

A better understanding of the Pylian acropolis during the 14th century BC is crucial for at least two reasons. First, it may shed new light on the political relationships between major centers in the southern Greek mainland during the second half of the 14th century BC, such as Pylos, Iklaina, the Menelaion, and Ayios Vasileios. Second, addressing this issue may provide valuable information about the conditions that may have left Pylos, after the destruction at Ayios Vasileios, as the only palatial center in the southern Peloponnese during the second half of the 13th century BC.

S. V. – S. R. S. – J. L. D.

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⁶⁷ See Vitale 2006, 190–191, 197–202, tabs. 2–3.

⁶⁸ Blegen – Rawson 1966, 32–33.

⁶⁹ Egan 2021; Karapanagiotou et al. 2021; Vitale et al. 2021.

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