

Pottery and Stratigraphy at Iklaina in the 14th–13th Centuries BC

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Abstract: Iklaina is fulfilling the prediction that it would be an important Mycenaean site, and one of the major second-order centers of the Pylos state. Several different sectors are being uncovered, differentiated by function. This paper concentrates on the South Sector, where excavation has produced evidence for a monumental structure with frescoes, as well as other buildings, an outdoor pit shrine, roads and a gateway. The North Sector, which includes both residential and industrial buildings, is still under study, as is the residential East Sector. Iklaina is clearly a larger and more complex site than Nichoria, the other excavated second-order center in Messenia. Four architectural phases can now be distinguished. This paper outlines these phases and their ceramic dating. In the light of this ceramic and stratigraphical evidence, the paper addresses current thinking about the town's historical development and particularly about its relationship with the palatial center at Pylos (Englianos).

Keywords: Iklaina, pottery, Pylos, administration, destruction

The site of Iklaina lies about 6km as the crow flies from the palace at Pylos (Englianos) in Messenia. Excavation, under the auspices of the Archaeological Society at Athens and the direction of Michael Cosmopoulos, began in 2006 and is ongoing. Finds to date include a monumental platform, with ashlar blocks and fresco fragments from the substantial building it once supported. A number of smaller buildings have also come to light, with signs of residential and industrial activity, as well as drains, roads and an outdoor pit shrine. As excavation continues, our theories are evolving about the town's history and its relationship with the palatial center. This paper presents an interim report on these topics, based on the interplay of ceramic and stratigraphical evidence (Fig. 1).

So far the fieldwork has focused on three areas of the site. The South Sector includes the monumental platform, the shrine, and the roads; the North Sector has both residential and industrial structures; and a residential East Sector came to light in 2016. This paper is based on material from the South Sector, which was just published in late 2018.² Excavation and study of the other sectors is still under way, but the evidence available so far is consistent with the observations made here.

Four main architectural phases have been identified at Iklaina, starting in LH II. MH and LH I pottery is present at the site, but without associated buildings.

Phase 1 (LH IIA–B)

The earliest phase of occupation is represented chiefly by Terrace V in the South Sector.³ The terrace is defined by the adjacent walls CT-031 and CT-032. Both inside this corner and outside to the west of CT-031 there are a few pieces of LH IIIA1 date in the upper layers, but the main fill deposit dates to LH IIA–B, with some LH I sherds mixed in. Pottery dates the construction of the

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² Cosmopoulos 2018.

³ Cosmopoulos 2018, 44–50, pls. 83–89.

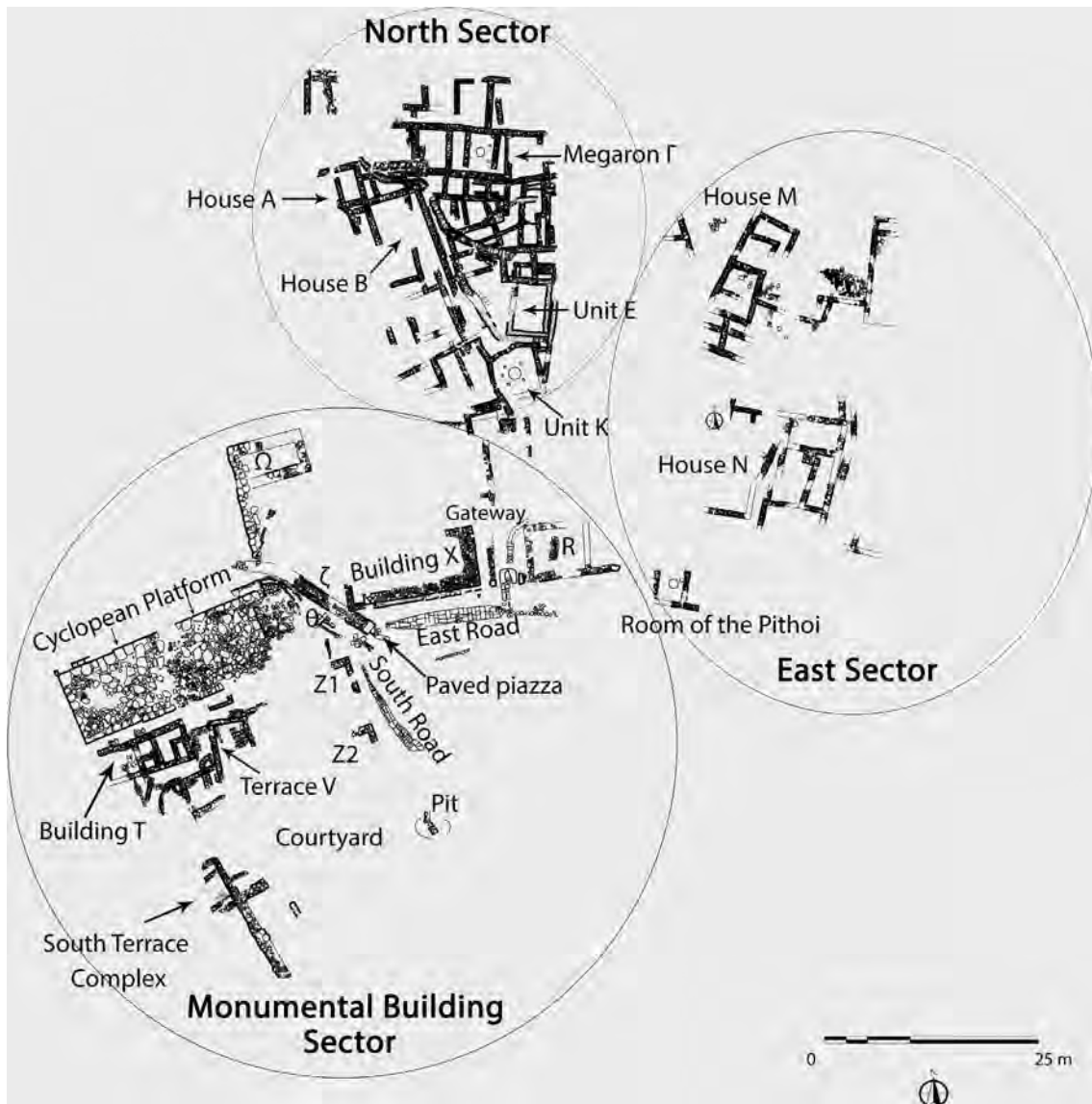


Fig. 1 Plan of Iklaina (drawing M. Nelson).

terrace itself to LH IIA.⁴ The deposit extends down to the foundation of Wall CT-031; below it is a layer containing sherds dating to MH III, LH I and LH II. The diagnostic pottery of this phase consists mostly of goblets and bowls in semi-fine orange fabrics.⁵ The goblets have tall, thin lips, and include several of the shoulder-handled type FS 268 (P3662) and one with high-swung handles FS 270 (P3750) (Fig. 2).⁶ The fine decorated ware consists mostly of Type II and III Vapheio cups with characteristic motifs like spirals (P3638, P3644), foliate band (P3635, P3643) and straight or rippled vertical lines (P3295, P3640), as well as fragments of alabastra, squat jugs (P2721) and cups (P3777) (Fig. 3).⁷

⁴ Cosmopoulos 2018, 101.

⁵ For ceramic fabrics at Iklaina see Shelmerdine – Gulizio 2016; Gulizio – Shelmerdine 2017, 29, tab. 4.1.

⁶ Cosmopoulos 2018, 47.

⁷ Cosmopoulos 2018, 47.

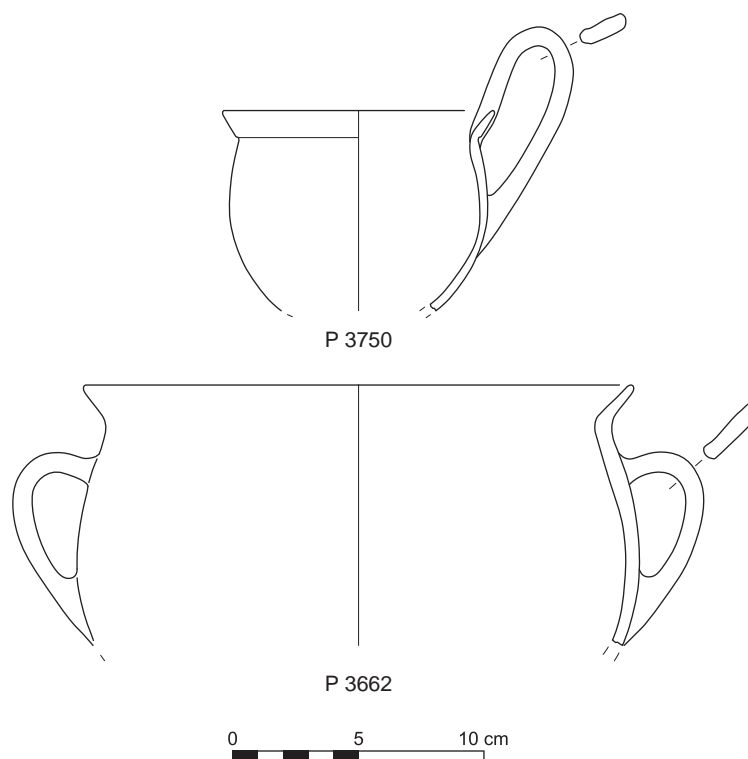


Fig. 2 Pottery of Phase 1. Scale 1:3 (drawings Y. Nakas).

Phase 2 (LH IIB/IIIA1–IIIA2 Middle)

This phase is much more substantial than Phase 1. In the North Sector it is represented most clearly by Houses A and B and Megaron Unit K. A rubbish pit east of House B contained pottery from LH II–IIIB1 and a fragment of a Linear B tablet, IK X 1, preserved by burning.⁸ Only the earlier sherds from the pit show signs of fire, not the LH IIIA2 Late–IIIB1 material. Further, the paleography of the tablet is early, so it too should belong to Phase 2.

In the South Sector, several buildings were constructed in Phase 2, most oriented NW-SE or SW-NE. The five-room Building T was constructed in LH IIIA1 over a paved courtyard of LH II, putting it out of use. The lower levels of Building T belong to this phase, its upper levels to Phase 3.⁹ Phase 2 is also represented by Building A to the east of Building T, and by Building B2 and the South Terrace Building to its south.¹⁰ An open air pit shrine southeast of these buildings also dates to this phase.¹¹ In it were found offering tables, charcoal, a lead sheet and numerous bones of young animals, chiefly piglets. Pottery dates the use of the pit to LH IIIA1–2 Early and includes more than 40 conical cups and 30 kylikes. Wall CT-035 marks the west edge of the pit, and the east edge of a pebble floor, with pottery from LH II–IIIA2 Early. East of the large platform of Phase 3 (see below), Wall CT-025 is the original south wall of the Phase 3 Building X, which seems to have begun in Phase 2 as a platform.¹² It is dated to Phase 2 by a handful of sherds found among its stones. These range from LH I/II to LH IIIA2 Early, the latest piece being a tall triangular-lipped kylix rim (Fig. 4.P4684).¹³

⁸ Shelmerdine 2012.

⁹ Cosmopoulos 2018, 29–41, pls. 55–77.

¹⁰ Cosmopoulos 2018, 45, fig. 19.

¹¹ Cosmopoulos 2015b; Cosmopoulos 2018, 80–84, pls. 138–147.

¹² Cosmopoulos 2018, 90–91, 107.

¹³ Cosmopoulos 2018, 92.



P 2721



P 3295



P 3638



P 3643



P 3777

Fig. 3 Pottery of Phase 1 (photos G. Vdokakis).

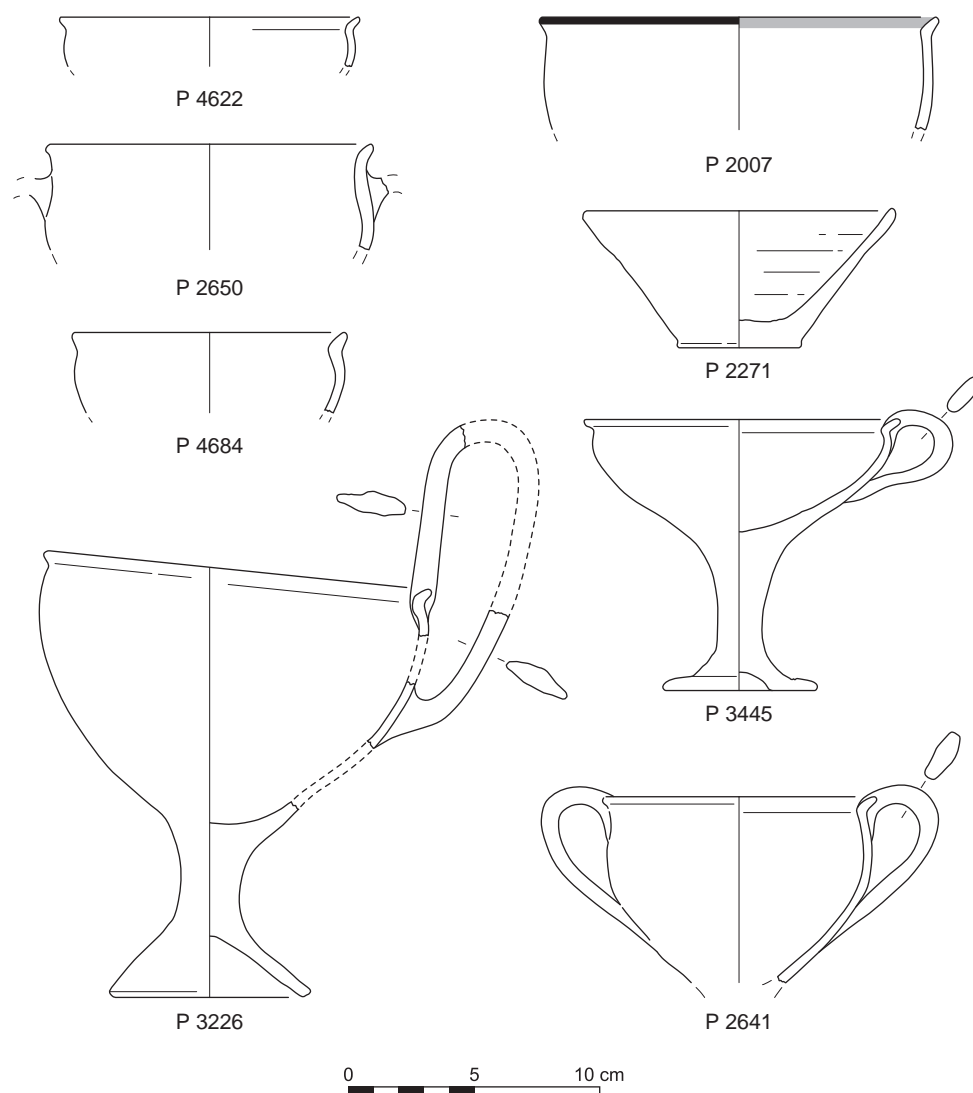


Fig. 4 Pottery of Phase 2. Scale 1:3 (drawings Y. Nakas).

The beginning of Phase 2 seems to overlap ceramically with the end of Phase 1. Most LH IIB goblets are made of orange semi-fine fabrics typical of LH I–II; there are very few fine ware goblets, and only one fragment of the Ephraean type FS 254 (Fig. 5.P3753 from Room T2).¹⁴ Some kylikes we call ‘transitional’: they have kylix stems, but they are made in the semi-fine orange fabrics of Early Mycenaean goblets, rather than the Late Mycenaean fine ware of LH IIIA–B. The rest of the Phase 2 pottery is typical of LH IIIA1 and LH IIIA2 Early in Messenia. Most of the fine ware is unpainted, and once painted sherds are often worn and encrusted, making it hard to discern their original appearance. There are, however, a few fragments of both closed and open decorated vessels, including a kylix of FS 256, a LH IIIA2 Early form, with a rim band and a deep upper body (Fig. 4.P2007).¹⁵ Unpainted kylikes are both rounded (P2641) and angular (P3445), though the carination on some of the latter is very gentle (Fig. 4).¹⁶ Many of the rounded examples are small enough that they may have had a single handle like, for

¹⁴ Cosmopoulos 2018, 34.

¹⁵ Cosmopoulos 2018, 70.

¹⁶ Cosmopoulos 2018, 83.



Fig. 5 Pottery of Phase 2 (photos G. Vdokakis).

example, most of the LH IIIA1 kylikes at the Menelaion,¹⁷ rather than two handles like the conventional FS 264. There are only a few examples of the types with high-swung handles FS 272 (P3226) and with shoulder handles FS 269 (P2650) (Fig. 4).¹⁸ The full range of Phase 2, LH IIB/IIIA1–IIIA2 Early, is represented in material from Building T, and probably also the pit shrine, which may extend into LH IIIA2 Early. P3226 comes from rubble on the south side of the platform, in the eastern part with much pottery from LH II–IIIA1 and little from LH IIIA2–B. This is interesting, since a destruction layer below the rubble was predominantly LH IIIA2–B in date. Shallow cups (P4622) and conical cups (P2271) are common (Fig. 4), as are shallow angular bowls (Fig. 5.P3471).¹⁹

Phase 3 (LH IIIA2 Late–IIIB Middle)

Phase 3 is marked by extensive construction in both the North and South Sectors. While Houses A and B went out of use in the North Sector, Megaron Γ and Unit E were added, on a more cardinal

¹⁷ Catling 2009, vol. 1, 403–404.

¹⁸ Cosmopoulos 2018, 23 (P3226), 31 (P2650).

¹⁹ Cosmopoulos 2018, 37 (P4622), 83 (P2271), 84 (P3471).

orientation than the buildings of Phase 2. In the South Sector, the most notable addition was a massive platform (referred to in early Iklaina publications as a terrace). This is a 24.3×8.2m structure oriented SW-NE, like most buildings of Phase 2, parallel to the slope of the hill on which it stands. It extended the level area north of Building T, and supported a large building, the so-called Cyclopean Terrace Building, of which some ashlar blocks survive along with pottery and fresco fragments.²⁰

South of this platform, the South Terrace Building remained in use during Phase 3 and Buildings Z1 and Z2 were added. Building T also continued; its second phase is marked architecturally by the construction of Wall CT-001 to replace the earlier north walls of the building. Building T may have been incorporated into the Cyclopean Terrace Building during this phase, or it may have continued to be a separate building.²¹ Several structures were also added north and east of the platform, notably Building X and a Gateway to the east. Originally a platform in Phase 2, Building X took shape as a building in Phase 3, and Wall CT-026 was added along the original south Wall CT-025.

In ceramic terms, Phase 3 extends from latest LH IIIA2 into LH IIIB2. The start of the phase is exemplified by pottery from foundation trenches on both the north and south sides of the platform, dating its construction to the LH IIIA2/IIIB transition.²² Some kylix rims from these assemblages have a short rounded profile typical of LH IIIA2 Late/IIIB1 (e.g. P4708), while others are of the LH IIIB1 lipless variety (e.g. P4641, P4644) (Fig. 6). The only possible deep bowl fragment in these foundation deposits is Fig. 7.P4643, a round horizontal handle with black paint, attached to a body coated on the interior. The wall is thinner and the handle smaller than is typical of stemmed bowls, but a deep bowl with coated interior would require a date much later in LH IIIB, inconsistent with the rest of the foundation material. It is therefore more likely to be a stemmed bowl.

Most of the LH IIIA2–B1 pottery from Iklaina is unpainted. The decorated material is canonical in both shapes and, where preserved, motifs. Kylikes of both LH IIIA2 Late FS 257 and LH IIIB1 FS 258B types are attested (Fig. 7); a spiral pattern is preserved on one of the former (P3679), and two of the latter have vertical whorl-shell decoration (P3534, P3684).²³ Spirals also appear in this phase on a stemmed bowl (Fig. 7.P3667) and a mug (Fig. 6.P1611).²⁴ Except for the destruction material that marks the end of Phase 3 (see below), deep bowls are rare or absent in deposits of this phase,²⁵ indicating a date early in LH IIIB1.

A burning destruction affected most or all of the site at the end of Phase 3, which can be dated in ceramic terms to the transition from LH IIIB1 to LH IIIB2. The assemblages that date the destruction of the Cyclopean Terrace Building are typical; along with ashlar blocks, burnt mud-brick and building material, and charcoal, the destruction layer contains mostly characteristic LH IIIB1 pottery, including lipless kylix rims,²⁶ and Group A and banded deep bowls (Fig. 6.P3707; Fig. 7.P3735).²⁷ As at other sites in Messenia, LH IIIB2 pottery at Iklaina lacks the two features that define this phase in the Argolid: rosette and Group B deep bowls.²⁸ But the Phase 3 destruction material does include five vessels of LH IIIB2 types: two monochrome deep bowls (Fig. 6.P3700, P4233), two deep bowls with coated interiors (Figs. 6.P4200; 7.P4018), and a krater with coated interior (Fig. 6.P3706). Both of the deep bowls may be Type A/B: the rim P4018 has a handle ringed with paint but no preserved decoration exterior banding, and the base P4200, still in

²⁰ Cosmopoulos 2018, 6–15, 20–28.

²¹ Cosmopoulos 2018, 104–106.

²² Cosmopoulos 2018, 13–14, 26, pls. 22–23.

²³ Cosmopoulos 2018, 27.

²⁴ Cosmopoulos 2018, 27.

²⁵ Cosmopoulos 2018, 27, 33, 36 (deep bowls absent in Building T), 44 (possible rims in Room CT), 69 (fragments in the pit in Space ST.1 of the South Terrace Building).

²⁶ Cosmopoulos 2018, 12, fig. 5, including lipless kylix rims P3836, P4030 and deep bowl rim P3853.

²⁷ Cosmopoulos 2018, pl. 21.

²⁸ Mountjoy 1999, 36.

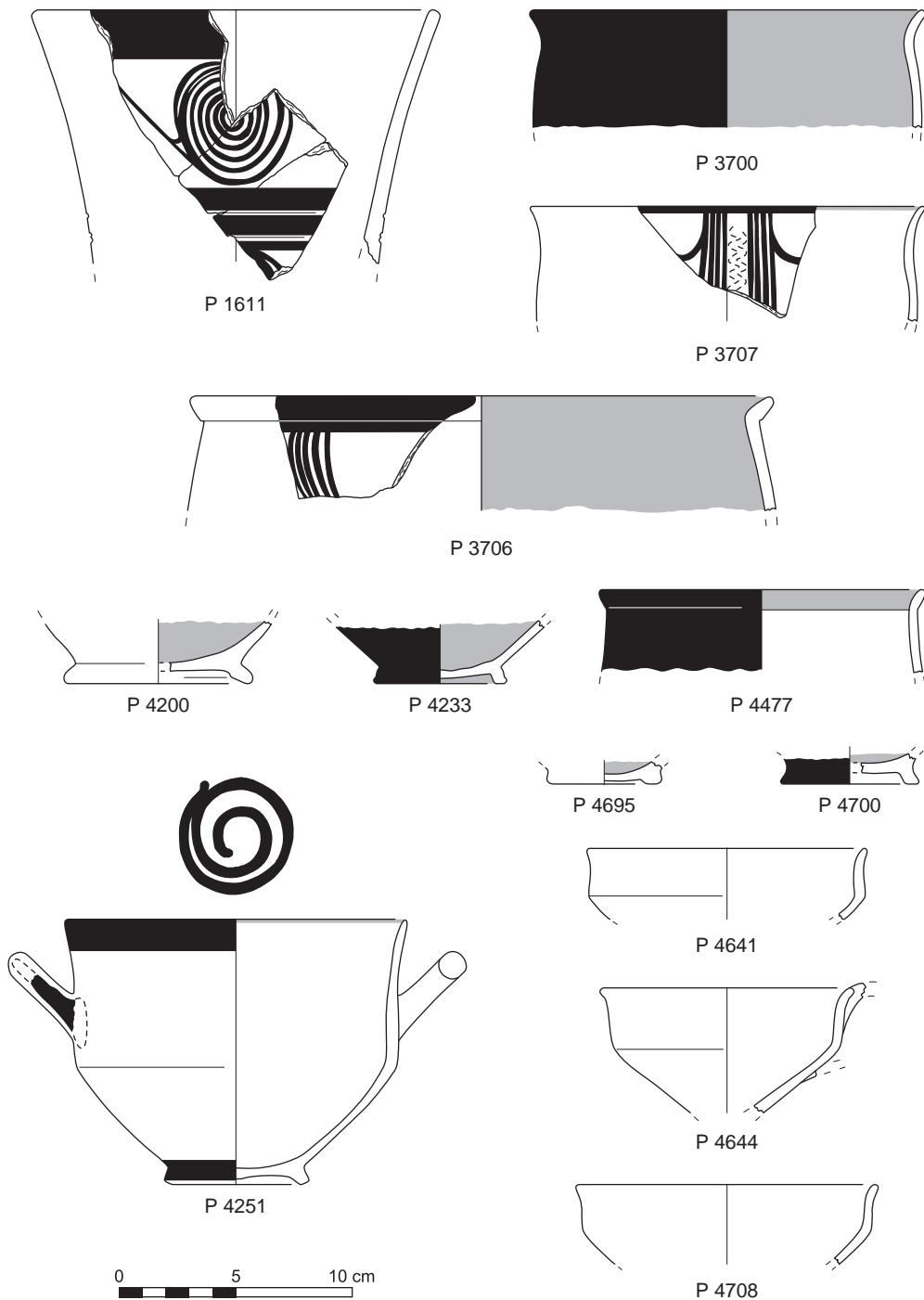


Fig. 6 Pottery of Phase 3. Scale 1:3 (drawings Y. Nakas).

conservation, may prove to have a narrow band on the exterior. The presence of these five vessels means that Phase 3 not only spans latest LH IIIA2 and LH IIIB1 but extends into LH IIIB2. It thus corresponds in Argolid terms to both LH IIIB Early and mid-LH IIIB (Mycenae) / LH IIIB Middle (Tiryns).²⁹

²⁹ Mountjoy 1999, 32; Vitale 2006, 178–184.



Fig. 7 Pottery of Phase 3 (photos G. Vdokakis).

Further evidence of this destruction in the South Sector comes from the South Terrace Building, Buildings Z1 and Z2, Building X, the Gateway, and the East Road to the south of the latter two structures. Like the destruction material from the Platform area, the pottery includes characteristic LH IIIB1 material, including Group A and unpainted deep bowls, plus just four deep bowls typical of LH IIIB2. Three of these are from the destruction layer of Building X (Fig. 6): P4251, with a medium band on the exterior and a spiral on the interior base; P4695 with coated interior; and the monochrome example P4700.³⁰ From the rubble associated with the Horos just south of Building X comes Fig. 6.P4477, with a deep exterior rim band that also should be later in LH IIIB.³¹

Phase 4 (LH IIIB Middle – IIC Early)

This is a short phase following the destruction that ended Phase 3. In the north, Megaron Γ now had small storage rooms attached to its south side, and its main room was divided by two cross-walls. Some of this remodeling had apparently begun in Phase 3, but the precise chronology

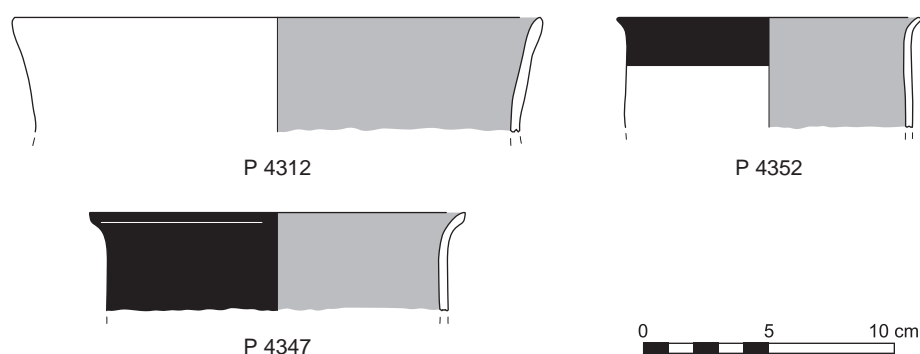


Fig. 8 Pottery of Phase 4. Scale 1:3 (drawings Y. Nakas).

is still to be worked out. Unit E continued in use; an industrial function is indicated by the addition of plaster floors to the west of it.³² This phase is also present in the East Sector, which is still under study. Much less evidence for this phase comes from the South Sector. The buildings of Phase 3 were not rebuilt, but Walls CT-048 and CT-060 show that new buildings were added at the east end of the East Road and above the destroyed Gateway.

Both monochrome (P4347) and medium band (P4352) deep bowls, types first seen in the destruction of Phase 3, continue in Phase 4 (Fig. 8).³³ The rim P4312 with coated interior (Fig. 8) could be from either a mug or a deep bowl.³⁴ Unpainted kylix and shallow angular bowl rims are very thin and mostly lipless, and a few are in brown or gray-brown fabrics. The drab colors and thin walls are uncharacteristic of LH IIIA–B1, and more often attested in late LH IIIB–IIC. Also indicative of a late date is the absence of decorated kylikes. Late IIIB–IIC features are



Fig. 9 Pottery of Phase 4. (photo G. Vdokakis).

³⁰ Cosmopoulos 2018, 87.

³¹ Cosmopoulos 2018, 88.

³² Cosmopoulos 2019, 364–365.

³³ Cosmopoulos 2018, 88; the exterior rim band on P4352 is not indicated in Fig. 44.

³⁴ Cosmopoulos 2018, 87.

also seen in Phase 4 pottery from other sectors, for example a jar shoulder with tassel decoration FM 72 (Fig. 9.P5049) from the Room of the Pithoi in the East Sector.

Development, Destruction and Abandonment

Iklaina developed without interruption from Phase 1 to Phase 2. Nor was there a major destruction at the end of Phase 2, as we originally thought. Our initial idea was that the Cyclopean Terrace Building and Building T were built in Phase 2, and destroyed at the end of that phase.³⁵ We also observed signs of destruction in the North Sector, and indeed Unit A in that sector did suffer a destruction at this time. However, stratigraphic and ceramic evidence have confirmed that the Cyclopean Terrace Building belongs entirely to Phase 3, and that the second phase of Building T is contemporary with it.

The end of Phase 3, however, was marked by a general site-wide burning destruction, dated ceramically to the middle of LH IIIB. At this time, the Cyclopean Terrace Building was destroyed, along with the other buildings in the South Sector, and several in the North Sector as well. After this destruction there was only a little activity in the South Sector, in the vicinity of Building X and the Gateway. More significant activity continued in the North Sector, some of it industrial, and in the apparently residential East Sector. At the end of Phase 4 the site seems to have been abandoned, with no sign of further destruction.

A remaining question is how the history of Iklaina outlined here maps onto the history of the region, and particularly the history of the kingdom of Pylos. There is clear evidence that an administration complex enough to keep written records was operating at the Englianos palace by early in LH IIIA.³⁶ These early tablets were burned in a destruction now known to date to LH IIIA2 Early.³⁷ The Iklaina tablet is roughly contemporary with this early phase of administration, and could support the view that Iklaina was already part of the Pylian state at this time, in Phase 2. To date no further tablets have been found at Iklaina, however, and in any case, it seems unlikely to me that there was a second regional power complex enough to require written records, especially at this early stage of palatial administration. However, this is the view currently held by Cosmopoulos, the director of the Iklaina project, who believes the site came under palatial control only after the destruction at the end of Phase 3.³⁸ Its new status, as the second-order center *a-pu₂-we*,³⁹ would account for the industrial activity that went on in the North Sector during Phase 4.

If this view is correct, it must follow that the Pylian system of second-order centers, and the taxation system based on it, developed surprisingly late in the history of the state, in contrast to the longer history generally proposed.⁴⁰ We all hope that future work at Iklaina will provide more clarity on this important issue.

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³⁵ E.g. Cosmopoulos 2012; Cosmopoulos 2015a, 250–251, 257; Shelmerdine 2015, 243, 246–247.

³⁶ Shelmerdine in press.

³⁷ Vitale et al., this volume.

³⁸ Cosmopoulos 2019.

³⁹ Hope Simpson 2014, 57.

⁴⁰ Hope Simpson 2014, 53–54; Shelmerdine in press.

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