

# The Ayios Vasileios North Cemetery in the Palatial Period

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**Abstract:** In ten years of fieldwork at the newly discovered site of Ayios Vasileios near Xirokambi, plenty of evidence has been collected to identify this site as the political center of Laconia during the Mycenaean Palatial period. We are, however, still at the very beginning of understanding the process and implications of its rise, operation, and fall. One precondition to do so is to get the archaeological record in chronological order. Secondly, it is our belief that any report on the significance of Ayios Vasileios requires a synopsis of all available evidence. In this paper we would therefore like to contribute to this synopsis by briefly presenting all currently available evidence from the Early Mycenaean cemetery in the north of the Ayios Vasileios Hill concerning the Palatial and early Post-palatial period. The margins of the North Cemetery yielded evidence of later use of the area in the form of architectural remains and ceramic deposits that may help to synchronize phases of construction and destruction at Ayios Vasileios. In our attempt to approach the political and cultural development in central Laconia between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> century BC, we also include in our discussion significant aspects of the ceramic sequence and settlement development at the Menelaion, the best researched site in the region.

**Keywords:** Ayios Vasileios, North Cemetery, pottery, chronology, Menelaion, political development, Mycenaean Laconia

## Introduction

The more we know about a site, the more confident we are in the reconstruction of its history. This is particularly important in the case of Ayios Vasileios, the recently discovered palatial center in Laconia, whose history seems to diverge from that of other palatial sites.<sup>3</sup> In this paper we use the evidence from the North Cemetery area at Ayios Vasileios<sup>4</sup> to contribute to the reconstruction of the site's history from the time the palace was operating until its destruction and the aftermath, i.e. in the Late Helladic III period. Although the main period of the cemetery is the LH I–II period, as attested by both the ceramic offerings and the radiocarbon analysis of the human remains,<sup>5</sup> the North Cemetery area does offer evidence for the later phases. To start with, the larger built tomb

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<sup>3</sup> Vasilogamvrou 2013; Vasilogamvrou 2014; Vasilogamvrou 2015a; Vasilogamvrou 2015b; Kardamaki 2017. At Ayios Vasileios numerous baked Linear B tablets were embedded in burnt and collapsed building material found in situ in the area of the West Stoa (Vasilogamvrou 2015b, 108). This layer and other extensive traces of fire destruction are dated on the basis of ceramic finds around the middle of LH IIIB (Kardamaki 2017, 114), perhaps a couple of decades earlier than the final destructions of the palaces in the Argolid and at Pylos.

<sup>4</sup> The North Cemetery at Ayios Vasileios is situated at the northernmost point of the hill where the Mycenaean palace was built. See Voutsaki et al. 2021. The excavation of the North Cemetery is part of the Ayios Vasileios Excavation Project, carried out under the auspices of the Archaeological Society in Athens and the general direction of Adamantia Vasilogamvrou. Sofia Voutsaki, University of Groningen, has been responsible for the excavations since 2011, with the assistance of an international team of specialists. The excavation has been financed by the Groningen Institute of Archaeology, while the scientific analyses have been covered by a generous grant from the Ammodo Foundation, The Netherlands. The study of the pottery has been carried out thanks to a post-doctoral fellowship from the Institute for Aegean Prehistory (INSTAP), while the Mediterranean Archaeological Trust (MAT) has contributed to the study of both the pottery and the human remains.

<sup>5</sup> Erdil et al. forthcoming.

(Grave 21), which contained approximately 27 burials, may have remained in use until LH IIIA1. In addition, in the later phases the cemetery was used, albeit only occasionally, for the burial of infants. Finally, the abundance of deposits with pottery dated within LH IIIA and LH IIIC Early at the margins of the cemetery indicates certain activities in this area though the graves were never overbuilt or disturbed.

While the nature of these activities is still a matter of further investigation, we may provide here a picture of higher chronological resolution and evaluate the intensity of use of the North Cemetery area during the Palatial period phase by phase. The emphasis in this paper is thus on the types and groups of pottery relevant for a chronological sequence. Regarding the still limited available evidence from Ayios Vasileios, from both the palace and the North Cemetery area, it is advisable to refer back to the sequence presented by Hector Catling for the Menelaion. After all, the Menelaion offers the largest corpus of published Late Bronze Age pottery in central Laconia. Moreover, Catling has observed that the ceramic sequence at the Menelaion seems much closer to the Argolid than, for example, to the palace on Epano Englianos at Pylos,<sup>6</sup> a comment which is of considerable importance considering the fact that the Argolid is the leading reference for the typology of Late Helladic pottery.

Our investigation elucidates some general problems of ceramic studies in central Laconia but also provides an opportunity to synchronize occupational events at Ayios Vasileios with those at the Menelaion – an exercise which may help us understand shifts in the political landscape in Laconia and developments in the Mycenaean Palatial and early Post-palatial period in general.

### Conditions for the Study of the Late Helladic Pottery

When attempting to reconstruct the sequence of a new Late Helladic site outside the Argolid, one immediately encounters the problem that some of the chronologically most significant vessel types for certain phases are notoriously rare and difficult to detect among worn and encrusted sherd material such as that from the North Cemetery at Ayios Vasileios. Diagnostic items of this kind include all vessel types decorated with a single motif without horizontal banding such as Ephyraean-style vessels (LH IIB), Zygouries kylikes (LH IIIB1) and rosette deep bowls (LH IIIB2); none of these types have yet been identified at the North Cemetery but they are also extremely rare among the better preserved material in the nearby palace area. In our attempt to reconstruct the relative chronological sequence at Ayios Vasileios we have to rely at the moment largely on the study of plain, linear and monochrome decorated types of pottery. There are, however, pottery-related hints that might provide an expedient.<sup>7</sup> A detailed rim typology developed for the Ayios Vasileios project<sup>8</sup> occasionally referred to in this paper may help in understanding the local ceramic development and provide useful supplemental chronological information. In addition, radiocarbon dates have now been obtained from the human skeletons which can be compared to the relative dates obtained from ceramic finds.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Catling 2009, vol. 1, 366.

<sup>7</sup> As can be derived from occasional notes, Catling observed for the Menelaion a morphological development of rim shapes of open vessels similar to that at Ayios Vasileios. Concerning the material from the South Erosion Deposit on the North Hill (NS), which is predominately of LH II date, Catling notes that ‘nearly all the everted rims are both very long and very slim’ (Catling 2009, vol. 1, 402; Catling 2009, vol. 2, 203, fig. 207.NS 59–NS 67), while his distinction between monochrome goblets from LH II and from LH IIIA1 is based on his observation that the typical goblet of the later phase ‘has a rather fatter, still everted, rim which in some cases verges on wedge-shaped’ (Catling 2009, vol. 1, 354). Among the most obvious changes between LH IIIA and LH IIIB, Catling mentions the ‘disappearance of the lip, whether distinguished by eversion, or some kind of modelling’ (Catling 2009, vol. 1, 404). For Ayios Vasileios see Kardamaki 2017, 81.

<sup>8</sup> Kardamaki 2017, 80–83; Kardamaki – Hachtmann forthcoming.

<sup>9</sup> The human and animal bones are still being studied by Ioanna Moutafi and Youri van den Hurk.

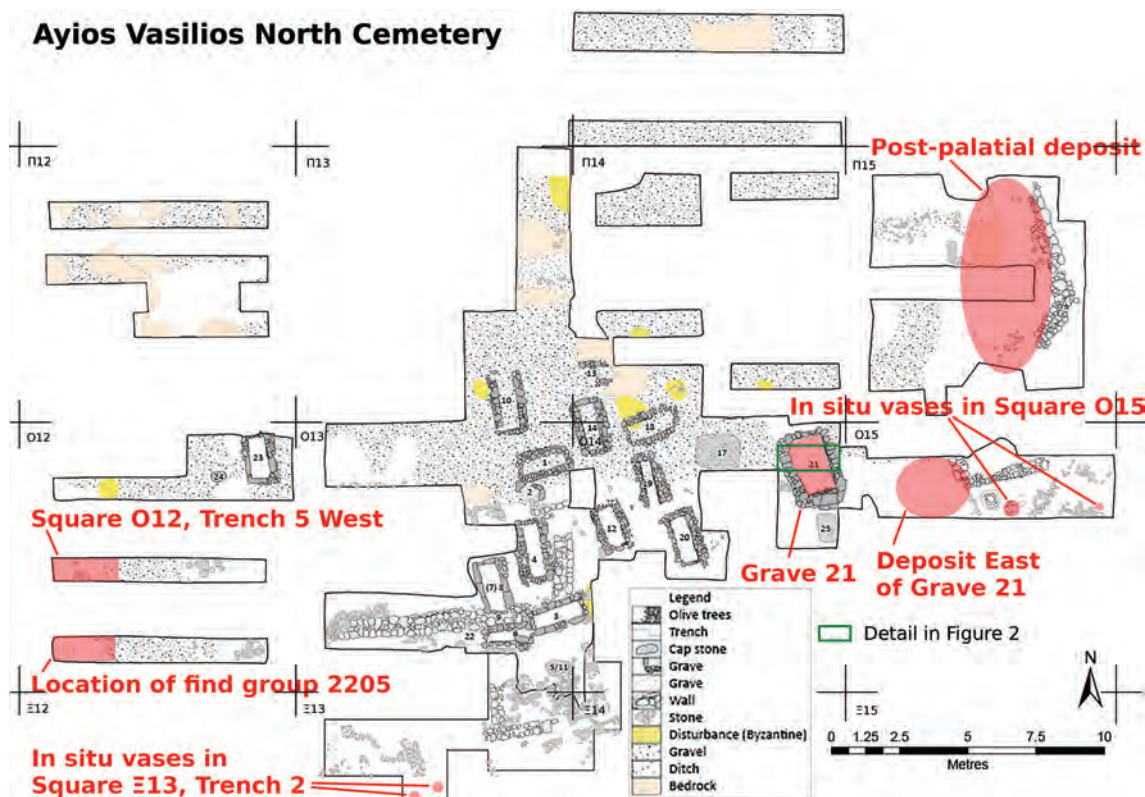


Fig. 1 Plan of Ayios Vasileios North Cemetery with locations of deposits (drawing I. Koulogeorgiou, digitization G. Nobles with additions by V. Hachtmann).

In the following sections, chronologically significant ceramic features and the contexts in which they were found are discussed briefly phase by phase, regarding the question of what they can tell us about the history of the North Cemetery area.

### LH IIIA1 to LH IIIA2 Early

The ceramic evidence from the graves in the North Cemetery at Ayios Vasileios suggests that the main phase of use for burials ended in LH IIB or LH IIIA1.<sup>10</sup> The latest burial activities took place in the largest built tomb Grave 21 with over 27 buried individuals (Fig. 1). Before the first skeletons appeared, large stones were found overlain by a fill of soil in the uppermost layers of the grave. On top of the layer of soil, concentrations of larger vessel fragments, small stones and bones – possibly both animal and human – were documented in the position in which they were found (Fig. 2). Among the 17 fragments from this ‘Surface under Layer 3’, one upper part of a goblet with tall everted rim, monochrome interior and plain exterior except for a thin rim band is the most significant (Fig. 3).<sup>11</sup> Based a) on the presence and the typo-chronology of this fragment

<sup>10</sup> Voutsaki et al. 2021.

<sup>11</sup> This vessel type occurs in LH IIIA2 at Tsoungiza and Patrick Thomas (2011, 196, fig. 10.76–79) noted that the thin exterior rim band may be a characteristic feature of this phase; however, the rims on the Tsoungiza goblets are all of a shorter type than the piece from Grave 21. We would like to follow Kardamaki (2017, 93), who has suggested on the basis of stratified evidence in the palace area of Ayios Vasileios that this vessel type with thin exterior rim band begins already in LH IIIA1 and that this feature perhaps does not yet appear in LH IIB. Consequently, in respect of the tall everted rim, the goblet from the uppermost fill of Grave 21 should be dated in LH IIIA1. Similar vessels from the Menelaion are discussed among the LH IIB pottery (Catling 2009, vol. 1, 345–346, and e.g. Catling 2009, vol. 2, 104, fig. 108.ST 53, ST 55).

Ayios Vasileios North Cemetery  
Square O14β, Trench 1, Layer 3

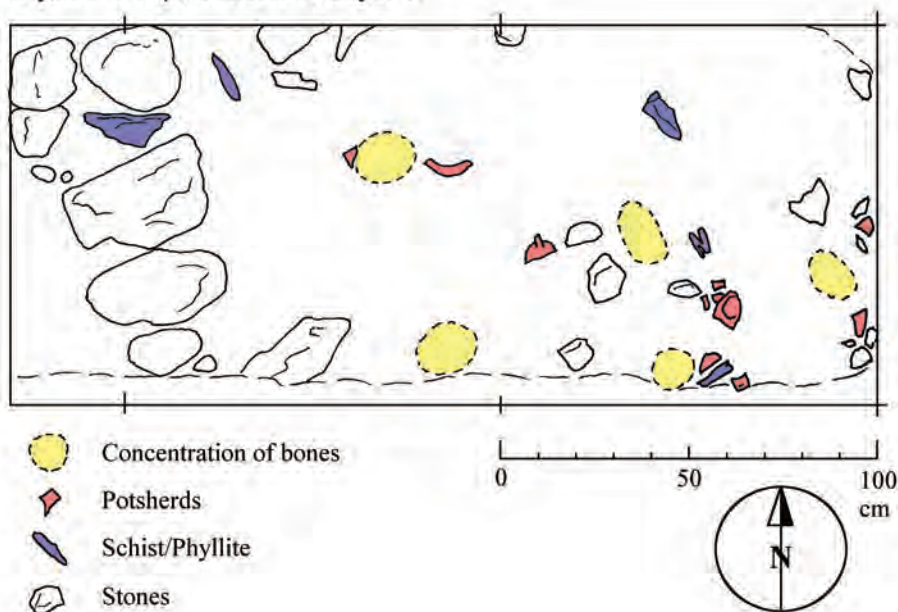


Fig. 2 Discovery of Grave 21: Square O14β, Trench 1, Surface under Layer 3  
(drawing A. Balitsari, digitization V. Hachtmann).



Fig. 3 'Vessel 1' on top of Grave 21 (Square O14β, Trench 1, Surface under Layer 3).  
Scale 1:3 (drawing V. Hachtmann).

and b) on the total absence of later ceramic features, we may date the uppermost fill of Grave 21 above the stones to the LH IIIA1 subphase.<sup>12</sup> This date signals the end of the main use of the North Cemetery, although the area remained respected and was occasionally used for infant burials.

The North Cemetery area yielded plenty of evidence from the period after its main use as a burial ground. A large deposit with fragmented pottery was found east of Grave 21 (Fig. 1). The 'Deposit East of Grave 21' contained pottery from LH II to IIIA1; however, the youngest component may have crossed over into the next phase. There are possible monochrome kylikes and possible stemmed bowls, both types which are introduced in LH IIIA2 Early (Fig. 4.1–3).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> By using digital recording and reconstruction methods, de Raaff et al. 2022, convincingly suggested that the stones found within Grave 21 originated from a cairn above wooden beams and tumbled into the grave when the beams collapsed. This may have happened just before or during the LH IIIA1 period, when the cavity formed after the collapse of the roof was filled with soil containing pottery and bones taken from the closer vicinity.

<sup>13</sup> Shelmerdine 1992, 495–497; Vitale 2011, 334; Kardamaki 2017, 78–79, 114. See also a recently presented LH IIIA1 closed context at Kontopigado/Athens without monochrome kylikes and stemmed bowls (Kaza-Papageorgiou – Kardamaki 2018). But see Thomas 2011, 198–201 n. 50.

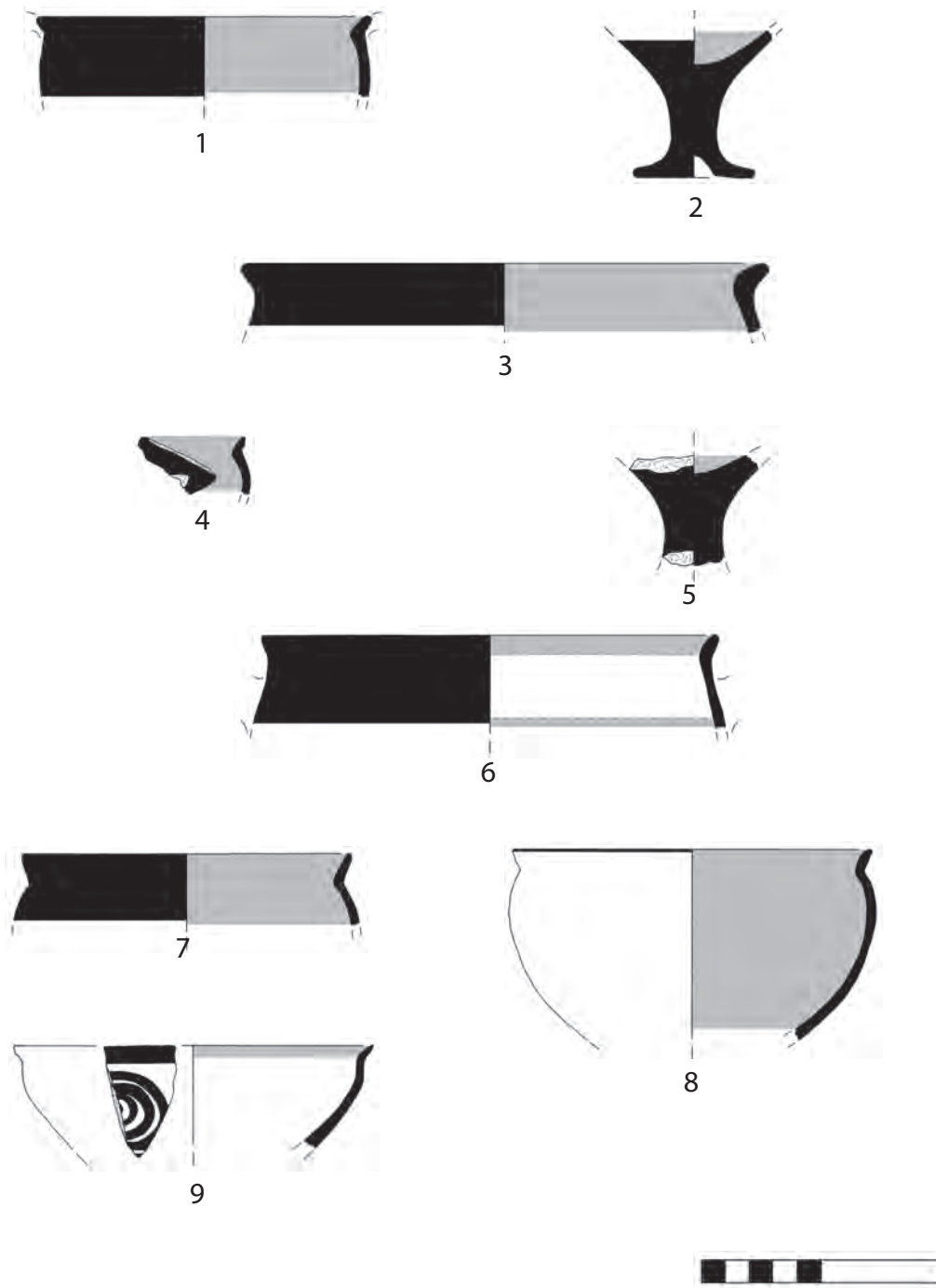


Fig. 4 Examples of pottery from pure deposits. 1–3. ‘Deposit East of Grave 21’ (LH IIIA1–IIIA2 Early); 4–6. Square O12, Trench 5 West, Layer 3 (LH IIIA2 Early); 7–9. Square O12, Trench 5 West, Layer 4 (LH IIIA1). Scale 1:3 (drawings V. Hachtmann).

Moreover, some lips of open shapes are short and everted, typical for LH IIIA2; however, there is no pattern-painted pottery from this phase. Due to the absence of pattern-decorated kylikes FS 256 and 257 there is no reason to believe that this deposit reaches beyond an initial stage of the LH IIIA2 subphase.<sup>14</sup> Two deposits in the palace area of similar ambivalence between LH IIIA1

<sup>14</sup> Shelmerdine 1992, 495–497; Vitale 2011, 334.



and LH IIIA2 Early were studied by Eleftheria Kardamaki.<sup>15</sup> One of them comes from the construction fill under the floor of the West Stoa and would actually date the large terrace upon which the monumental stoas and the court of the palace were built. Considering that some of the pottery in the construction fill of the Mansion at the Menelaion might date to LH IIIA2,<sup>16</sup> although the bulk of the material is of LH IIIA1 date, the construction of Mansion 2 and of important monumental features at Ayios Vasileios such as the court and the West Stoa may be more or less contemporary.

While the ‘Deposit East of Grave 21’ appears to be a mix of pottery from LH II to IIIA2 Early, a clearer sequence of LH IIIA1 and LH IIIA2 Early, termed ‘Sequence in Square O12, Trench 5 West’, was found west of the cemetery in two layers superimposed upon each other (Fig. 1).<sup>17</sup> Although the division of these two layers was artificial, and evidence is once more limited by the small amount of sherd material, the upper layer (Layer 3) contained shapes missing in the lower layer (Layer 4), in particular fragments of monochrome kylikes and of one stemmed bowl (Fig. 4.4–6). Layer 4 instead contained exclusively goblets with tall to medium-tall everted rims and one fragment of a pattern-decorated LH IIIA1 kylix with shallow bowl (Fig. 4.7–9).

In summary, intensive and large-scale building activities took place on the top of the hill around the transition from LH IIIA1 to LH IIIA2 as part of the construction, or perhaps the expansion or monumentalization of the palatial main complex. This is attested on the basis of pottery deposits below and above the large Court and the material inside terrace fills.<sup>18</sup> The ‘Deposit East of Grave 21’ may indicate that certain rearrangements of space also took place around the same time in the cemetery area. By then, the construction of tombs and the deposition of burials within them had certainly stopped. With the exception of occasional infant burials, the cemetery may have functioned as a memorial from then on.

## LH IIIA2

In two areas in the North Cemetery area, vases were found in situ in non-funerary contexts: further east of the ‘Deposit East of Grave 21’ in Square O15 and south of the cemetery in Square E13 (Fig. 1). Segments of walls were encountered in both areas; however, the in situ vases and possible floors could not be related to these walls with certainty. East of the cemetery, in Square O15, a large part of a cooking tripod was found that was reassembled from more than 30 sherds (Fig. 5.1). One of the two units that contributed most sherds to this vessel<sup>19</sup> also contained, amongst other things, one fragment of a monochrome stemmed bowl with short everted rim (Fig. 5.2). Only 3m to the east, another in situ vase was found: a small jug of fine plain Mycenaean fabric, the rim of which was missing (Fig. 5.3). Although the stratigraphic relationship between these two vessels is unclear due to disturbances in this area during the Byzantine period, it seems possible that both belong to one single horizon that overlay the ‘Deposit East of Grave 21’ and that can be dated to the full LH IIIA2 subphase. In any case, it is worth noting that there were no indicators in this area for the LH IIIB and IIIC Early phases. The tripod cooking pot indicates domestic activities in direct proximity to the cemetery and the use of this area may imply an expansion of the settlement in this phase.

<sup>15</sup> Kardamaki 2017, 110, tab. 6, ‘highest pebble surface (‘Floor’ 3)’ and ‘(construction) fill below West Stoa’.

<sup>16</sup> Kardamaki 2017, 77 n. 18, 113–114.

<sup>17</sup> Kardamaki et al. in press.

<sup>18</sup> Kardamaki 2017, 111.

<sup>19</sup> Find Groups 2334 and 2358. After mending, Unit 2334 contained 141 fragments of utilitarian pottery and Unit 2358 contained 11 fragments. Unit 2334 was contaminated with eight fragments of Byzantine tile. With its flat base and the s-shaped rim profile, this cooking tripod has a good parallel in Room 6, Trench I18a in the palace area dated to LH IIIA2 Late based on its context (Kardamaki 2017, fig. 11.180. See also Kardamaki 2017, 104–105, 110, tab. 6).

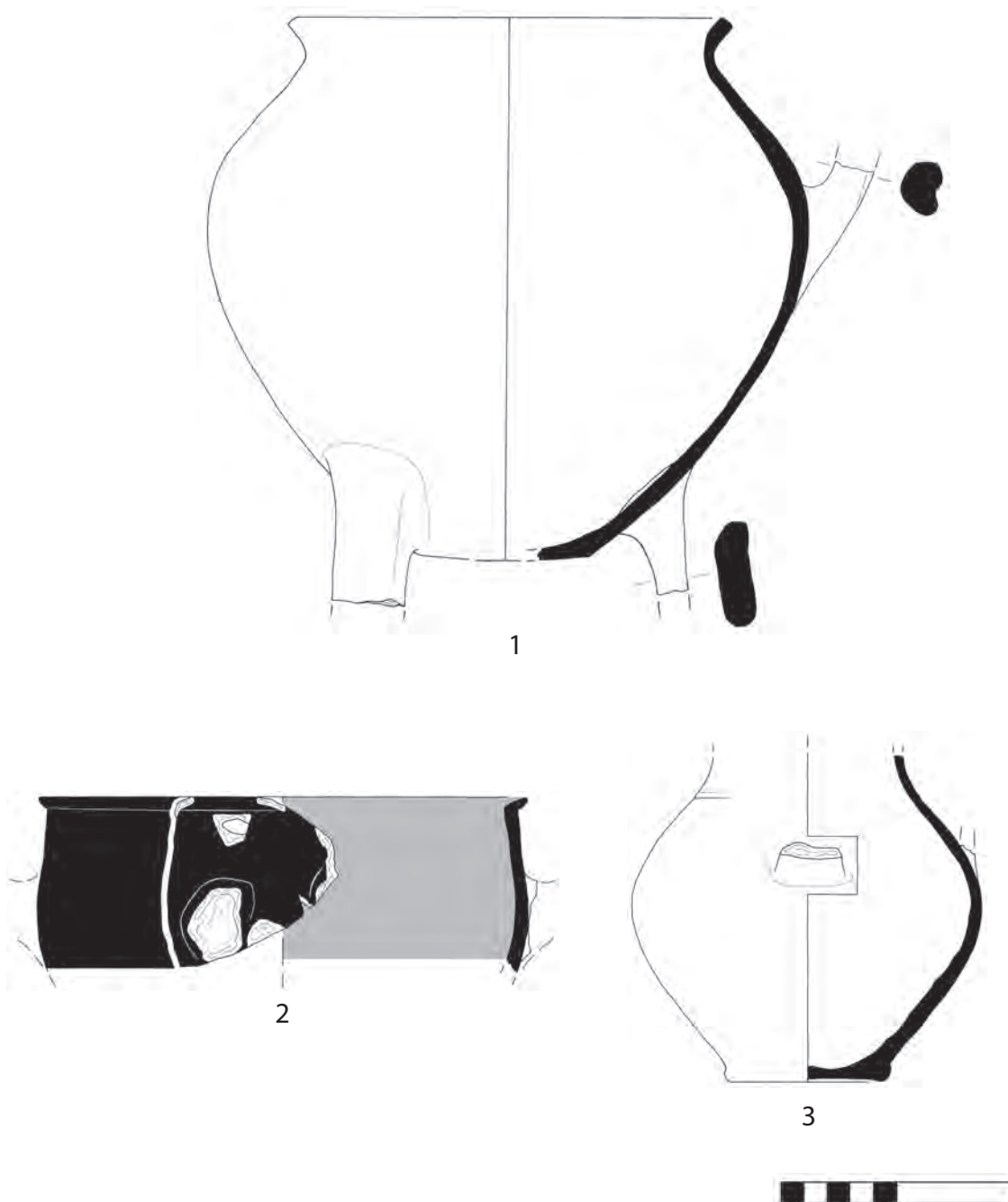


Fig. 5 In situ vases in Square O15. Scale 1:3 (drawings V. Hachtmann).

In Square  $\Xi$ 13, south of the cemetery (Fig. 1), many pebbles, which possibly represent the remains of a pebble floor, were encountered only c. 15cm below the modern surface. Among other sherds and animal bones, this layer yielded one large fragment of a monochrome basin (Fig. 6.1) and many sherds that were reassembled as one almost complete carinated kylix with the handle missing (Fig. 6.2). The rim of this kylix is rather flaring and quite dissimilar to every other carinated kylix rim from the ‘Deposit East of Grave 21’ or from the ‘Sequence in Square O12, Trench 5 West’ mentioned above. It resembles a later type found in quantity in the so-called ‘Fresco Dump’ in Square  $\Delta$ 6, west of the large Court dating to LH IIIA2 Late.<sup>20</sup> According to our current state

<sup>20</sup> Kardamaki 2017, fig. 13.200–201, 203.

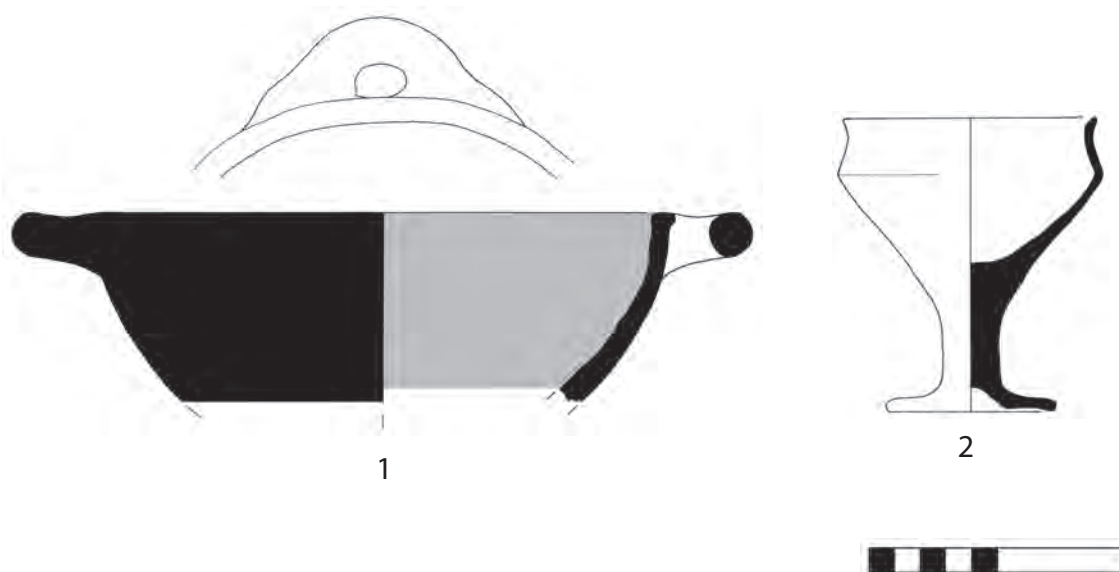


Fig. 6 In situ vases in Square E13, Trench 2. Scale 1:3 (drawings V. Hachtmann).

of knowledge, the ‘Fresco Dump’ can be connected with a possible refurbishment or rebuilding activity prior to the main destruction of the palace.<sup>21</sup> Whether the in situ vases in the North Cemetery area represent one single horizon and, if they do, whether they were contemporary with the ‘Fresco Dump’ or the later disastrous conflagration of the palace, cannot yet be decided.

### LH IIIB

A less well-attested period for Ayios Vasileios is LH IIIB, although evidence is pointing towards the destruction of the palace somewhere in the middle of this period.<sup>22</sup> In the palace area painted pottery of LH IIIB1 style is rare.<sup>23</sup> However, in the area of the court and in the West Stoa there is subtle evidence for this phase embedded in a red layer that seems to derive from the collapsed upper floor after the fire.<sup>24</sup> In the North Cemetery area this phase is even more elusive. Fragments of pattern-decorated kylikes are uncertain and deep bowls of canonical<sup>25</sup> Type A (without monochrome interior) are rare. One fragment of a Group A deep bowl with traces of a flower decoration found in a LH IIIC Early context is among the very few pattern-decorated pieces from the North Cemetery area that can be safely dated to LH IIIB (Fig. 7). Only one single find group in the west of the cemetery without any relation to walls or floors, Find Group 2205<sup>26</sup> (Fig. 1), delivered a couple of fragments from plain kylikes and shallow angular bowls with characteristics of this phase. The rims of these vases are lipless, rounded or slightly flaring (Fig. 8.1–9). Parallels in safe LH IIIB1 contexts can be found e.g. at Mycenae and at Tsoungiza.<sup>27</sup> A date in LH IIIA2

<sup>21</sup> Kardamaki 2017, 114.

<sup>22</sup> See Vasilogamvrou et al., this volume.

<sup>23</sup> Kardamaki 2017, 114.

<sup>24</sup> Kardamaki 2017, 111. See also Vasilogamvrou et al., this volume.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Canonical’ is here referring to interior rim bands; the emphasis is on the contrast with vessels with a monochrome interior.

<sup>26</sup> Find Group 2205 contained 147 fragments of utilitarian pottery after mending. These include also Early Mycenaean and some EH II sherds. Three historical sherds and one fragment of a Byzantine roof tile can be interpreted as intrusive into Find Group 2205.

<sup>27</sup> Mycenae: for the rounded kylikes see Mountjoy 1976, 101, fig. 13.165. For plain open shapes in general see Wardle 1969, 284–292, figs. 9–12. Tsoungiza: Thomas 2005, 514, fig. 27.12–18; 515, fig. 28.1–18.





Fig. 7 Fragment of a Group A deep bowl (Post-palatial deposit). Scale 1:3 (drawing V. Hachtmann).

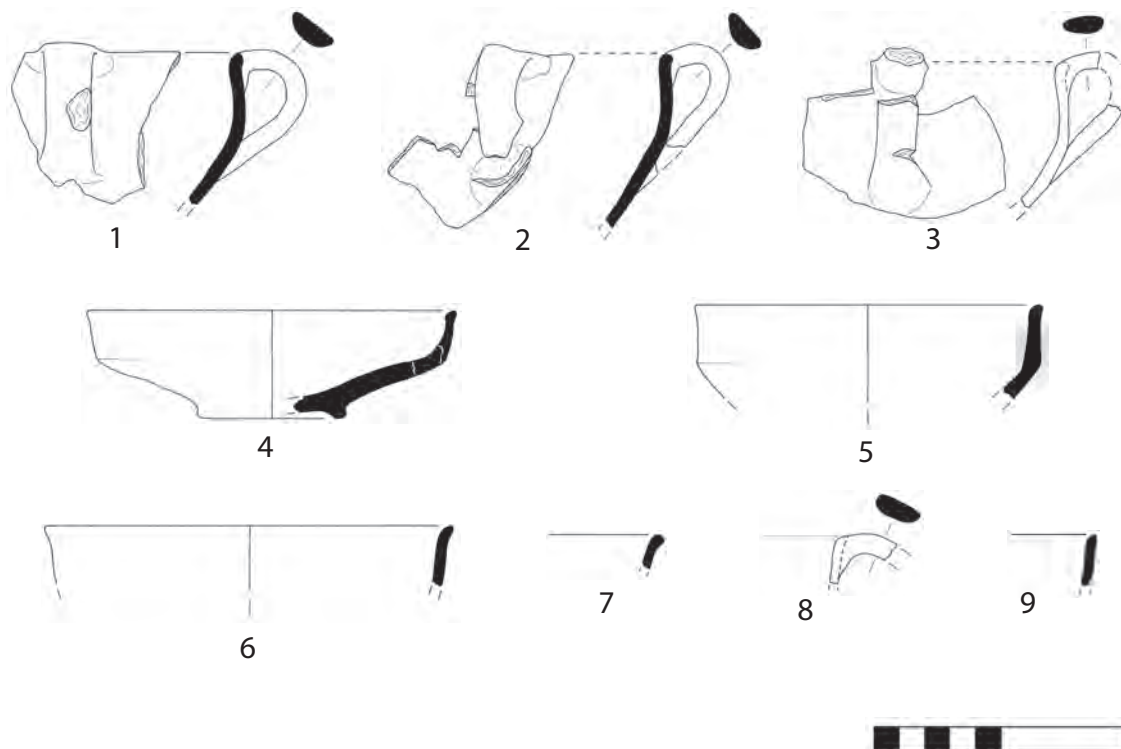


Fig. 8 Fragments from Find Group 2205. Scale 1:3 (drawings V. Hachtmann).

Late, however, cannot be entirely ruled out for this group of fragments.<sup>28</sup> In any case, it is important to note that fragments of deep bowls were totally absent in Find Group 2205, although this shape was extraordinarily well represented in a Post-palatial deposit 35m further east (see below). This may suggest that the plain kylikes in Find Group 2205 predate the phase when deep bowls came into use at Ayios Vasileios. The plain kylikes in Find Group 2205 may be placed between LH IIIA2 Late and the earlier part of LH IIIB. It may even be suggested that they date just before or around the time of the palace destruction. The relatively large size of the fragments may imply that they were broken not too far away from the place they were found.<sup>29</sup> Pottery signaling the LH IIIB2 phase, in particular the Group B deep bowl and the rosette deep bowl,<sup>30</sup> has not yet been found among the material from the North Cemetery.

<sup>28</sup> Shelmerdine 1992, fig. 9-47.P3721–P3723 (Nichoria, LH IIIA2 Middle–Late).

<sup>29</sup> The group of fragments in Find Group 2205 may also be related to one of the infant burials dated according to radiocarbon date in LH IIIB.

<sup>30</sup> Mountjoy 1999, 36.

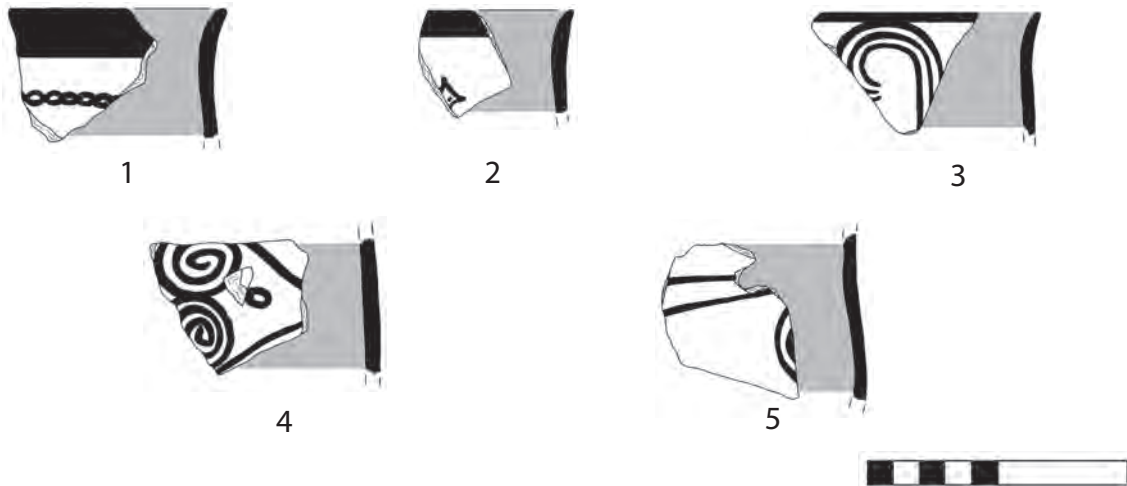


Fig. 9 Fragments of Group A deep bowls with monochrome interior from the 'Post-palatial deposit'.  
Scale 1:3 (drawings V. Hachtmann).

### LH IIIC Early

The next pottery phase identified at the North Cemetery has been attributed to the LH IIIC Early phase and probably dates in its early part (LH IIIC Early 1)<sup>31</sup> since characteristic types of advanced LH IIIC Early have not yet been identified at this stage.<sup>32</sup> LH IIIC Early is characterized at Ayios Vasileios by deep bowls with a thin to medium-wide exterior rim band, monochrome interior, and a wide range of motifs, of which the antithetic spiral is the most frequent (Fig. 9.1–5). In the palace area material dated to LH IIIB2/IIIC Early is so far only known from secondary deposits.<sup>33</sup> In the cemetery area one large dump of fragmented LH IIIC Early pottery, the so-called 'Post-palatial Deposit' (Fig. 1), was found northeast of the graves in Square II15 in connection with a wall. Whether this wall was built during LH IIIC Early or earlier, while the palace was still intact, is not yet clear and a definite answer has to await further stratigraphic analyses. Either way, the 'Post-palatial Deposit' clearly indicates certain activity in the cemetery area during the LH IIIC Early phase.

### The Menelaion Sequence

At this point we may recall the situation at the well-researched Menelaion. LH IIIA2 at the Menelaion was described by Catling as a 'period of uncertainty'.<sup>34</sup> This phase is mainly represented in wash levels and in only one of them, the 'Prophitis Elias South Wash Level' (PES), does LH IIIA2 seem to be the dominant component.<sup>35</sup> The reason for the assumed scarcity of LH IIIA2 deposits

<sup>31</sup> French 2011; Kardamaki 2015, 88–93.

<sup>32</sup> For example, painted conical kylikes FS 274. For LH IIIC Early 1 contexts in the Argolid see French 2011 and Kardamaki 2015. We cannot exclude that the material we call here LH IIIC Early also includes pottery attributable to Mountjoy's transitional LH IIIB2/IIIC Early phase (Mountjoy 1995; Mountjoy 1997; Mountjoy 1999). The study is still in process and a definite answer regarding this phase must be delayed until the final analysis. We need to point out that the fragmentary state and poor preservation of the material at the Ayios Vasileios North Cemetery hampers the identification of a phase which has been defined largely on the basis of complete vases. At the Menelaion the transitional LH IIIB2/IIIC Early phase has been positively identified by Mountjoy through well-preserved vessels.

<sup>33</sup> Kardamaki 2017, 114.

<sup>34</sup> Catling 2009, vol. 1, 461.

<sup>35</sup> Catling 2009, vol. 1, 359.

may partly be due to the rarity of pattern-decorated pottery from this phase in mixed sherd material.<sup>36</sup>

Although few architectural remains can be assigned with certainty to the LH IIIB phase, extensive wash levels were found with corresponding pottery indicating an occupation throughout this phase at almost all excavated locations of the site.<sup>37</sup> An early phase within LH IIIB is clearly signaled by decorated kylikes FS 258A (Zygouries kylix) and FS 258B. The best evidence for these types of kylikes was found concentrated in the 'Aetos Stone Mound' although the number of sherds belonging to these types is small.<sup>38</sup> Evidence for the most common open shape during LH IIIB, the deep bowl FS 284 of canonical Type A, is widespread over the site.<sup>39</sup> By contrast, the Group B deep bowl with exterior rim band around 3cm wide, characteristic for the LH IIIB2 subphase in the Argolid, is virtually absent at the Menelaion. Two well-preserved rosette deep bowls from the Aetos Stone Mound may also postdate the LH IIIB2 subphase.<sup>40</sup> The most common type of deep bowl at the Menelaion is the Group A deep bowl with monochrome interior so common in the 'Post-palatial Deposit' in the Ayios Vasileios North Cemetery mentioned above. At the Menelaion, this type of deep bowl was especially frequent in the 'Prophitis Elias, Erosion Gully' (PE) and in the 'Aetos Stone Mound' (A), two large deposits with mixed material assigned by Catling to LH IIIB and LH IIIC Early.<sup>41</sup> By contrast, in the wash levels around the slopes of the Mansion (WN, WE, WS and PD) that have been connected with the occupation of Mansions 2 and 3, the Group A deep bowl with monochrome interior is conspicuously rare, while the canonical one is relatively well attested there.<sup>42</sup> This could be interpreted as showing that the Mansion had fallen out of use before the Group A deep bowl with monochrome interior became popular. While in the Argolid the Group A deep bowl with monochrome interior is traditionally regarded as an element of LH IIIC,<sup>43</sup> Catling assumes that this type was commonplace already in LH IIIB

<sup>36</sup> While pattern-decorated pottery was rare in the wash levels north and east of the Mansion, 41% of the decorated pottery was monochrome painted (Catling 2009, vol. 1, 78), a significant part of which may actually come from the LH IIIA2 occupation (Catling 2009, vol. 1, 80). In fact, LH IIIA2 pattern-decorated pottery was found in the Mansion area during the old excavations by Richard Dawkins (Dawkins 1910, 8–9, pl. 1).

<sup>37</sup> Catling 2009, vol. 1, 461. On the Menelaion Hill rebuilding/repair activities referred to as 'Mansion 3' are believed to date to LH IIIB. North Hill and Aetos Hill were occupied as well.

<sup>38</sup> Catling 2009, vol. 2, 281, fig. 285.A 2, A 4, A 7–A 8, A 10–A 11.

<sup>39</sup> Catling 2009, vol. 1, 388–389; Catling 2009, vol. 2, 174, fig. 178.WS 25; 181, fig. 185.PD 46; 211, fig. 215.NC 48; 217, fig. 221.NW 23; 226, fig. 230.PE 61; 262, fig. 266.AA 12–AA 13; 272, fig. 276.AO 22, AO 24; 286, fig. 290.A 65–A 69, A 78.

<sup>40</sup> Catling 2009, vol. 1, 391; Catling 2009, vol. 2, 290, fig. 294.A 148–A 149. For rosette deep bowls in the transitional LH IIIB2/IIIC Early and LH IIIC Early periods see Mountjoy 1997, 116.

<sup>41</sup> Catling 2009, vol. 1, 453; Catling 2009, vol. 2, 226–231, figs. 230–235; 282–286, figs. 286–290.

<sup>42</sup> Catling 2009, vol. 1, 77–81; Catling 2009, vol. 2, 155–193, figs. 159–197. In the Menelaion Hill wash levels the monochrome interior (compare Catling 2009, vol. 1, 388 [table]) may be largely confined to stemmed bowls (Catling 2009, vol. 2, 163, fig. 167.WN 69–WN 70; 169, fig. 173.WE 42, WE 49; 174, fig. 178.WS 30; 182, fig. 186.PD 64–PD 65) and one type of stemmed or deep bowl with a fat wavy line FM 53 (Catling 2009, vol. 2, 163, fig. 167.WN 71; 169, fig. 173.WE 41, WE 48; 174, fig. 178.WS 33; 181, fig. 185.PD 48). The latter types are well represented in the Aetos Stone Mound (Catling 2009, vol. 2, 290, fig. 294.A 144–A 146; 294, fig. 298.A 207–A 215). Stemmed and deep bowls with a fat wavy line and monochrome interior are among the vessel types used to define the transitional LH IIIB2/IIIC Early phase (Mountjoy 1997, 116), however the fat wavy line was a very popular pattern on stemmed bowls already during LH IIIA2 and LH IIIB1 (Rutter 2003, 198; Thomas 2005, 499, 501; Thomas 2011, 205) when it was already combined with a monochrome interior (Mountjoy 1999, 275–276, fig. 92.142, 144; Thomas 2005, 503, fig. 22.15, 18). If the combination of wavy band and painted monochrome interior existed some time before the beginning of the 'transitional' phase, it seems possible that the corresponding rim sherds from the Mansion wash belong to stemmed bowls from this older period. In the Mansion area only two pieces may actually be deep bowls A with monochrome interior (Catling 2009, vol. 2, 182, fig. 186.PD 49, PD 55. PD 52 may also be a stemmed bowl). The deep bowl A with monochrome interior decorated with paneled patterns and antithetic spirals encountered in large quantities in the Prophitis Elias, Erosion Gully and the Aetos Stone Mound seems to be missing in the Mansion area, like most of the shapes that necessarily call for a date within the transitional LH IIIB2/IIIC Early phase or LH IIIC Early.

<sup>43</sup> Catling 2009, vol. 1, 387.

at the Menelaion.<sup>44</sup> Recently the Group A deep bowl with monochrome interior has also been securely attested in the Argolid already for LH IIIB, but the canonical type without monochrome interior was still predominant in LH IIIB2 destruction layers.<sup>45</sup> The motifs on deep bowls with and without monochrome interiors are similar: paneled compositions and continuous patterns occur, but on the latter the antithetic spiral motif is particularly frequent.

At this point, a note on the Menelaion sequence concerns the transitional LH IIIB2/IIIC Early phase of Penelope Mountjoy. According to Mountjoy, the Menelaion was among the sites that yielded evidence for this phase.<sup>46</sup> In the Argolid this transitional phase was used to describe the period immediately after the destruction of the palaces at Mycenae and Tiryns when ceramic features of LH IIIB2 and LH IIIC Early were in use together with certain features unique to this transitional phase as defined by Mountjoy.<sup>47</sup> The definition of this phase, however, was received with skepticism. Jeremy Rutter synchronized it with his LH IIIC Phase 1 defined for Korakou,<sup>48</sup> and Salvatore Vitale attributed the features and contexts of the transitional phase to either LH IIIB2 Late or LH IIIC Phase 1.<sup>49</sup>

There is, however, also secure evidence at the Menelaion suggesting that the site was occupied beyond LH IIIC Early 1. This evidence includes e.g. one type of decorated conical kylix with inward-curving upper body FS 274 and carinated cups FS 240.<sup>50</sup> In fact, some of the material from the ‘Prophitis Elias, Erosion Gully’ and the ‘Aetos Stone Mound’, including plenty of Group A deep bowls with monochrome interior, may also date to the more advanced LH IIIC Early. In any case, a stratigraphic sequence that would allow us to distinguish between LH IIIB Late, LH IIIC Early 1 and more advanced LH IIIC Early has not yet been identified at the Menelaion, and the same is true for the Ayios Vasileios North Cemetery.

### Summary of Pottery Evidence from Ayios Vasileios and the Menelaion

Stylistically, the LH III sequences at Ayios Vasileios and the Menelaion are closely comparable. The rims of open shapes follow the same development observed elsewhere in southern Greece from tall and medium-tall everted in LH IIIA1 to short everted, short flaring and rounded in LH IIIA2. In this period goblets and kylikes occur together. Monochrome pottery is extremely common compared to patterned ware. Pattern-decorated kylikes FS 256, characteristic of LH IIIA2, are difficult to identify among the fragmented material from the North Cemetery at Ayios Vasileios. They are attested in the palace area and also at the Menelaion, but in the former they are rare.<sup>51</sup>

Concerning the LH IIIB period, evidence is getting thin at the Ayios Vasileios North Cemetery. Mycenaean decorated pottery of this phase is virtually absent there. Only one small group of fragments from plain vases may be attributed to LH IIIA2 Late or the earlier part of LH IIIB and nothing was found that necessarily dates to LH IIIB2 as defined in the Argolid. In the palace area, the canonical Group A deep bowl is extremely rare in the area of the court and the West

<sup>44</sup> Catling 2009, vol. 1, 459. Catling 2009, vol. 1, 367, refers to Nichoria, where deep bowls with a monochrome interior have been assigned to LH IIIB2, although, according to Mountjoy 1997, 124, this material may also belong in the transitional LH IIIB2/IIIC Early phase. For Nichoria see Shelmerdine 1992, 531, fig. 9-61.

<sup>45</sup> See, e.g., Demakopoulou 2003, 82, fig. 5.1–2; Kardamaki 2015, 84, tab. 1; Wirghová, this volume.

<sup>46</sup> Mountjoy 1997, 123; Mountjoy 1999, 36–38.

<sup>47</sup> Mountjoy 1997, 111–112, 116–117. See also Mountjoy 1995, 196, and Mountjoy 1999, 36–38. See, however, Kardamaki 2015, 86; Wirghová, this volume.

<sup>48</sup> Rutter 2003.

<sup>49</sup> Vitale 2006.

<sup>50</sup> Catling 2009, vol. 2, 234, fig. 238.PE 246–247 (carinated cup FS 240); 272, fig. 276.AO 14; 295, fig. 299.A 229 (conical kylix with inwards-curving rim).

<sup>51</sup> Ayios Vasileios palace area: Kardamaki 2017, 114, 123, fig. 12.192–195. Menelaion: Catling 2009, vol. 1, 361–363, and e.g. Catling 2009, vol. 2, 169, fig. 173.WE 28–WE 33.

Stoa, and only two examples of the Group B deep bowl have been found there so far.<sup>52</sup> Catling wrote about the ‘Pottery Dump’ (PD) at the northwestern corner of the Mansion that ‘the predominant character of the pottery contents is of LH IIIB2 type’.<sup>53</sup> There are, indeed, a couple of Group A deep bowls in the Mansion wash deposits supporting occupation during LH IIIB; however, the identification of the LH IIIB2 phase, again in comparison to what we know circulated in the Argolid at that time, is not really convincing for the entire Menelaion ridge. In fact, Mansion 2 (or rather Mansion 3) may have fallen out of use before the end of the LH IIIB phase. Although too little is known to discuss the reasons for the abandonment of the Mansion, the discovery of patches of burning in connection with a floor deposit that was dated by Catling to LH IIIB may suggest a destruction by fire.<sup>54</sup> In the southernmost sector of the Menelaion ridge, in particular on the Prophitis Elias ridge and on the Aetos Hill, occupation continued, however, well into LH IIIC Early. This phase is also well attested again at Ayios Vasileios in the form of the Group A deep bowl with monochrome interior that is often decorated with antithetic spirals, like those from the Menelaion.

### Conclusions

After having examined significant ceramic deposits from the Ayios Vasileios North Cemetery and compared them both with deposits from the palace area and the nearly continuous ceramic sequence at the Menelaion, we may approach a synchronization of construction and destruction phases at the two sites. Around the LH IIIA1–IIIA2 Early transition, major building activities took place at Ayios Vasileios. A large terrace was built to support new monumental extensions of the palace.<sup>55</sup> At the Menelaion, some ceramic evidence in the construction fill of Mansion 2 suggests that it was built around the same time.<sup>56</sup> The two settlements were probably in operation during the LH IIIA2 phase, although evidence is still limited. A few in situ vases in the North Cemetery may be remnants from this period. Otherwise, broken pottery and other debris may have been cleaned up and dumped in appropriate places.

If we compare the situations at the Menelaion and Ayios Vasileios for the following LH IIIB period, as far as they are known to us, we note that the ceramic sequence at the Menelaion is less incomplete than at Ayios Vasileios thanks to the abundance of the canonical Group A deep bowl. Both sites, however, have in common the absence of the most characteristic types of deep bowls for LH IIIB2 in the Argolid: the Group B deep bowl and the rosette deep bowl. Is this due to a settlement hiatus in central Laconia or to a different stylistic development of the pottery diverging from the Argolid? This examination has shown that the question of ‘occupational gap or regional diversity of ceramic style’<sup>57</sup> cannot be answered from the perspective of the Ayios Vasileios North Cemetery alone. In the palace area, subtle evidence of an earlier phase in LH IIIB exists that would place the destructive fire somewhere in the middle of this phase.<sup>58</sup> But where is the second half of LH IIIB? One ceramic-related solution to shorten the gap in LH IIIB, or make it disappear, is to believe, with Catling, that the Group A deep bowl with monochrome interior, found in large quantities at both sites, the Menelaion and Ayios Vasileios, was already regularly in use in Laconia in LH IIIB. Consequently, since this vessel type seems to appear only after the destruction of the palace at Ayios Vasileios and the abandonment, or perhaps destruction, of the Mansion at the

<sup>52</sup> See Vasilogamvrou et al., this volume, also for another possible deep bowl B fragment from the destruction deposit of the West Stoa.

<sup>53</sup> Catling 2009, vol. 1, 132.

<sup>54</sup> Catling 2009, vol. 1, 18–19, 451; Catling 2009, vol. 2, 138, fig. 142.X 3–X 4, X 7.

<sup>55</sup> Kardamaki 2017, 111.

<sup>56</sup> Kardamaki 2017, 77 n. 18, 113–114.

<sup>57</sup> This was the title of the paper presented at a workshop in memory of Christopher Mee (Kardamaki et al. in press).

<sup>58</sup> See Vasilogamvrou et al., this volume.



Menelaion, both events could be placed somewhere in the middle of the LH IIIB phase. Moreover, it seems possible that these events may have taken place within a very short span of time, or even were exactly contemporary. At the beginning of LH IIIB, the use of traditional shapes such as the decorated kylix may have continued, while in the Argolid, the deep bowl FS 284 was already the most common shape on the dinner table.<sup>59</sup> The fact that the canonical Group A deep bowl is somewhat better represented at the Menelaion than at Ayios Vasileios may reflect the current state of research and may change with continuing excavation. In this respect, we may consider the perhaps surprising but nevertheless plausible suggestion that the construction and destruction of both the palace of Ayios Vasileios and of Mansion 2/3 at the Menelaion were more or less synchronous,<sup>60</sup> though the limited evidence from both sites recommends some caution. This assumption would, however, support the view that Ayios Vasileios and the Menelaion belonged to the same political entity.

In any case, there is clear evidence at Ayios Vasileios of a major destruction from which the palace may have never fully recovered, and there are hints that this destruction, according to the latest results, took place at the end of LH IIIB1.<sup>61</sup> This destruction may not have caused a complete hiatus but nevertheless a significant reduction in occupation for approximately 50 years that might explain the scarceness of deposits from this phase. During this time the cemetery area may have largely fallen into disuse, while other parts of the hill may still have been inhabited. Thereafter, the edges of the cemetery area were used again in LH IIIC Early – albeit only for a short time.

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<sup>59</sup> For similar observations at Nichoria in relation with a transitional LH IIIA2/IIIB1 phase see Shelmerdine 1992, 503–504.

<sup>60</sup> Compare Kardamaki 2017, 112.

<sup>61</sup> Kardamaki 2017, 111; see also Vasilogamvrou et al., this volume.

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