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Die letzte Elite der mykenischen Welt

Achaia in mykenischer Zeit und das Phänomen der
Kriegerbestattungen im 12.-11. Jahrhundert v.Chr.

von

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ENGLISH SUMMARY

Aim of the present study is to examine the historical development of Achaea in the Mycenaean period. Achaea encompasses the cultural landscape of the north-western part of the Peloponnese, and its place-name has preserved up to the present day the designation of a much larger and much more important part of Late Bronze Age Greece. The identification of a strikingly similar pattern between the course of Achaea's history in the Mycenaean period and the development of the region in the historical period of Greek antiquity was one of the most important results of this study. Just as Achaea of the 1st millennium B.C. remained on the margins of the great culture-historical achievements of the Geometric, Archaic and Classical period, the same region belonged to the periphery of the Mycenaean world in the Early Mycenaean times as well as in the Mycenaean palatial age. And like historical Achaea that only emerged in the Hellenistic period through the establishment of the 2nd Achaean League, which was eventually meant to lead the last fighting of the Greeks against the Romans, the Late Bronze Age north-western Peloponnese unfolded its most significant cultural dynamics in the lattermost phase of the Mycenaean era, in the post-palatial LH IIIC period.

However, the archaeological activity of the last decades has brought to light important new evidence of prehistoric occupation in Achaea, not only from LH IIIC but also from earlier phases of the Mycenaean and the Bronze Age in general. Recent discoveries, such as the large chamber tomb cemetery of Voudeni, the Early Helladic and Mycenaean burial complex in Kalamaki, the settlement findings in Patras, Aigion and Chalandritsa, the tumulus and chamber tomb cemeteries in Portes and, of course, the great concentration of LH IIIC warrior burials in the western part of the region have made Achaea one of the focuses of archaeological attention. Despite the many new discoveries, a comprehensive background and critical assessment of the current state of research is lacking, while many uncertainties are still associated with some sites. This is why the first part of this book is devoted to the detailed and systematic overview of the natural environment, the ancient sources and the research history of Achaea, followed by a comprehensive list of the hitherto examined Mycenaean sites, as well as by a source evaluating consideration of the present state of research. This overview aims to provide the increasing number of scholars interested in Achaea's prehistoric, and particularly Mycenaean, archaeology with a reliable background and a solid framework for further research.

The first part of the book begins with a description of Achaea's advantageous geographical setting, a feature that makes this region the western gate of Greece. Another typical feature of north-western Peloponnese is the variety of its landscape. Apart from the geographical division of the region in three main land parts (western Achaea, central mountainous district, and eastern Achaea), the relationship between the natural and the political boundaries in the course of history is also discussed. The consideration of both the geographical factors and the archaeological evidence leads to the conclusion that the dividing line – both politically and culturally – between western and eastern Achaea was more clear-cut in the Mycenaean period than in later times. In fact, western Achaea rather formed a more tangible cultural unity with northern Elis.

Such a state of affairs is also indicated by some of the ancient written records referring to Achaea, four of which are of special importance. The oldest account of Achaean settlements is to be found in the Homeric epics: in the Catalogue of Ships in the Iliad, the region later known as "Achaea" is associated with other place-names (e.g. Aigialos). Another important source is Herodotus: He is the first ancient author to give an outline of the prehistory of the region and also the first to use the place-name "Achaea" as a clear designation of the north-western landscape of the Peloponnese. Polybius is, then, to be mentioned, as the discussion of the history of the 2nd Achaean League gave him the opportunity for a more detailed account of the prehistory of Achaea. And finally, the most significant ancient source for early Achaea is Pausanias: in his

Achaika the Greek traveler hands down a great number of information and the most important local mythological traditions. Among these rather unspectacular tales, which suggest that Achaea's position was on the margins of the great mythological cycles, the tradition about Tisamenus deserves special attention. The ancient records all agree that the formerly Ionic settlement in Achaea came to an end dispossessed by the invading Achaeans, who were previously expelled from Argolid and Laconia by the Dorians. These Achaeans followed their leader Tisamenus, Orestes' son and Agamemnon's grandson, to their new homeland. According to the literally tradition, this is how the north-western region of the Peloponnese came to be called "Achaea".

The first section of the purely archaeological part of the present study deals with the research history on Mycenaean Achaea. The argument put forward here is that much of the progress hitherto made in the Mycenaean research of the region is not due to systematic projects or extensive excavations as much as it is to the activity of specific researchers. Most significant among these are N. Kyparisses, who conducted the first excavation of a Mycenaean site in Achaea (Katarraktis-Karela) in 1919 and subsequently discovered a great number of chamber tomb cemeteries, Th. Papadopoulos, who in 1979 published the hitherto most comprehensive work on Mycenaean Achaea and since then has been excavating some major sites (Kallithea, Clauss), as well as L. Kolonas, who in the last decades has been in charge of excavations and other projects in some of the most important and promising sites of the whole region (Teichos Dymaion, Voudeni, Portes).

The activity of these persons and especially the "survey of cemeteries" conducted by Kyparisses before the Second World War have coined the profile of Mycenaean Achaea as a landscape of cemeteries with only a few localized and hardly investigated settlements. Nevertheless, the peculiarity of the current state of research is not only restricted to the great number of the known cemeteries in contrast to the settlements (52 cemeteries compared to only 7 settlements); What is also remarkable is the much greater concentration of sites on western Achaea, especially in the areas of Patras and Pharai, in comparison with the sporadic findings in central and eastern parts of the region. As it is shown in the chapter about the relationship between modern population development and the progress of archaeological research, the unbalanced demographic transformation that took place in Achaea during the second half of the 20th century is responsible for that discrepancy. The rescue excavations, which are the main tool of field research in Greece, inevitably followed the population movements concentrated on areas experiencing the greatest population increase. On the other hand, regions with no intensive building activity have clearly lower chances to be excavated. As a result of this critical assessment, it has been possible to explain why the Mycenaean map of Achaea shows the present pattern. Furthermore, it became feasible to predict reliably that the regions with the most significant population increase (e.g. the Patras area) will also be the ones to produce most findings in the near future, whereas the regions gradually being depopulated (central and eastern Achaea) will continue to appear empty of sites in our maps. Consequently, without examining critically the available evidence, the evaluation of archaeological data may end up unconsciously projecting modern demographic anomalies back to the distant past.

Despite the problems and peculiarities of the current state of research, a relatively clear picture of Achaea's historical development in the Mycenaean period begins to emerge. During the Early Mycenaean times Achaea formed a part of the Mycenaean periphery retaining a provincial character compared to the major centers of the Peloponnese. However, the north-western landscape of the peninsula was not entirely isolated from the developments occurring in its main regions, as the small tholos tombs of Katarraktis-Rodia, Kallithea-Laganidia and Petroto evidently indicate. Along with the "Hoard of Pharai", consisting of a number of valuable grave offerings with good parallels in the Mycenaean main centers, these tholos tombs show that Achaea participated in the forming process of the small-scale political structures characterizing the Early Mycenaean period.

It seems that political complexity in Achaea maintained the same standards during the Mycenaean Palatial era as well. Although there are findings from this period, like the chamber tomb 4 of Voudeni, the monumental dimensions of which denote the existence of local rulers

with considerable power, no evidence is hitherto unearthed that could be related to a bureaucratic palatial administration. Local leaders, like the chief buried in the tomb 4 of Voudeni possibly represent small independent *qa-si-re-we* outside the core territories of the Mycenaean palaces of the Peloponnese.

The lack of a palatial administration and a bureaucratically organized trade activity did not necessarily hinder the development of relations between Achaea and the outside world, especially the West. The existence of contacts with the peninsula of the Apennines already during the Mycenaean Palatial age is, for instance, clearly demonstrated by the context of the chamber tomb I of Monodendri, which is published in the second part of the book. Among the grave goods some objects were found, which bear significant witness to the exchanges between Italy and the Aegean. Moreover, thanks to the bronze finger-ring with spiral discs dating to LH IIIA2, the view that these pieces of jewelry were introduced to Greece from central Europe finds now a persuasive confirmation. The latern-shaped beads found in the same context show that the presence of this ring type in the tomb of Monodendri can indeed be traced back to trade contacts with Italy. The occurrence of this Mycenaean bead type in north Italian sites as well as the presence of rings with spiral discs in south Italian contexts seem in fact to illustrate the chain of transmission that brought this specific kind of rings from central Europe to Greece.

However, the dynamics of the contacts with the West, for which Achaea was always predestined due to its geographical setting, was able to fully unfold only after the collapse of the Mycenaean palace states. In the following LH IIIC phase Achaea begins for the first time in the Mycenaean period to play a special role. While in most Mycenaean core regions the number of sites decrease dramatically, the over 40 sites dating to this phase in Achaea attest the dynamic continuity of the Mycenaean culture in this district of the Peloponnese. In most cases the settlements or cemeteries under discussion were already in use in the preceding periods, indicating the continuity of the pre-existing structures. The scenario based on the mythological tradition, according to which Achaea was overflowed by refugees coming from the destroyed palatial states, offers a hardly convincing explanation for Achaea's late prosperity in LH IIIC.

The Achaean political and settlement structures predating LH IIIC did not only simply continue to exist. They were apparently also in the position to take advantage of the vacuum that was created by the destruction of the Mycenaean palaces and partly to fill it. The collapse of the monopolistic and strictly organized palatial network of external relations and trade activities offered the latitude for an independent development. The formation process of a local pottery style can already be observed in Achaea in LH IIIC Early, whereas in LH IIIC Middle and Late the local pottery production was meant to experience its peak. Typical Achaean decorative concepts, like the evenly-spaced banding of closed vessels, or local ceramic shapes, like the four-handled jar, were massively produced, exported, or imitated in other regions. As the pottery from the site of Leontion shows, which is published in the second part of the present book, the characteristic Achaean shapes and decorative trends of the sub-phases LH IIIC Middle and Late can be found as local, fully developed products even in the mountainous regions of central Achaea. And, as the discussion of one of the most important findings of the present study, i.e. the bird vase from chamber tomb 2 at Spaliareika, has demonstrated, the vitality of the Achaean pottery production had not fade out even in an advanced stage of LH IIIC Late.

Diverging from the hitherto prevailing view, there are now good reasons to argue that the spreading direction of the bird vases dating to the phases LH IIIC Late-Submycenaean-Early Protogeometric was not from East (Cyprus) to the West but the other way round. The place of origin of the bird vases under consideration can apparently be located in Achaea, where in LH IIIC Late a formally and stylistically very developed and homogeneous group of these vessels occurs, representing at the same time the largest and earliest such assemblage in the Aegean. During a stage of LH IIIC in which in Achaea the densely banded decorative style declines in favour of an increasing monochrome trend, while in Attica as well as in Euboea the Submycenaean and Early Protogeometric phases have begun, the idea of the bird vase starts to spread eastwards. Shortly afterwards bird vases appear in Attica, in Euboea, on the Aegean islands, and eventually

on Crete and Cyprus, whereas their transmission was accompanied by their further formal development as well.

The beginning of the eastwards spread of the bird vases apparently coincides with the last phase of another noteworthy phenomenon, which is in fact the most important expression of the Achaean upswing in LH IIIC and at the same time the most significant development in the Late Bronze Age history of this region. This phenomenon is the formation of a sword-bearing elite, which is at present merely known through the burials of its members. For the period considered, these grave findings represent the greatest concentration of warrior burials in the Aegean. Despite a lot of uncertainties associated with several of these warrior tombs due to finding conditions or insufficient documentation or the state of publication, it is still possible to approach the main features of this ruling class, which can be considered as the last elite of the Mycenaean world. The publication of three such warrior burials in the second part of this study, two of the chamber tomb 2 of Spaliareika and one of the warrior tomb of Krini-Agios Konstantinos, is the starting point for the detailed examination of the phenomenon discussed in the third part of the book.

The 13 warrior burials known so far are geographically concentrated on western Achaea and date to the phases LH IIIC Middle and Late. Hence, they are contemporaneous with the prosperity, which is attestable in Achaea in other aspects of the material culture as well. The warrior burials are distinguished from the other interments of their time through their grave offerings and sometimes through the architecture of the tombs. The most important part of their burial equipment is the sword of Naue II type. The popularity of these swords was not only due to their technical superiority as cut-and-thrust weapons. It also resulted from their symbolic capital as foreign cultural insignia with a wide but selective diffusion in crucial points along important maritime trade routes. Sometimes the sword can be the only weapon of the equipment in the tomb to betray the existence of a warrior burial. Apart from the Naue II swords there are also other pieces of equipment accompanying the burials, like spearheads, spear butt-spikes, boar's-tusk helmets, greaves or shields. These weapons are normally found together with tools for the personal hygiene, like razors, combs and tweezers, which recall the heroic ideal of military prowess and physical beauty known from the Homeric epics. The knives often found among the grave goods of these warrior rulers may be an indication of their cult responsibilities as well. Finally, bronze vessels and crown-like head-gears, which occasionally appear among the grave offering of the LH IIIC Achaean local chiefs, undoubtedly express a special treatment of the dead.

One of the most important research results concerning this warrior elite is the fact that their members belonged to local, Achaean families. Their burials are unearthened in graves, which were already in use in the preceding phases. Interestingly, there is no evidence that some of the LH IIIA or LH IIIB ancestors of the later warriors possessed a high social status as well. Consequently, the LH IIIC warrior elite consisted of persons, who had not inherited their high rank but achieved it through their own leadership qualities. Their rising in the social pyramid apparently occurred gradually as the result of their adaptation to the new historical circumstances and challenges. The best example of such a gradual social evolution is possibly encountered in chamber tomb 2 of Spaliareika, which is the central part of the material published in this study. Due to its long period of use within LH IIIC, the unusual, striking arrangement of the grave offerings in clearly separated groupings, and the existence of several outstanding interments this tomb seems to “summarize” the social history of this Achaean micro-region during LH IIIC. On the one side of the tomb, where two cremations dating to the sub-phases LH IIIC Early and Middle were uncovered, an attempt is discernible to demonstrate the privileged knowledge of foreign, innovative rites and cultural elements as a legitimation strategy during a still formative phase of social development. On the other side of the chamber, where two warrior burials of LH IIIC Middle-IIIC Late date were unearthened, the former aspiration has now apparently become a fulfilled and consolidated reality.

As it seems, the members of this warrior elite lived in a troubled time, when the high social position could only be justified and retained through the display of military qualities and leadership

competence. The warrior chiefs under discussion were possibly based on relatively rich dwelling and economic units (*Oikoi*). They probably ruled over communities, which were apparently organized in kinship groups (*gene, phratries, phylae*) and used their own chamber tomb cemeteries. Furthermore, the Achaean rulers in LH IIIC can be associated with the title *qa-si-re-u* (*basileus*). This hypothesis is at first based on the possibility that this title existed as designation of the local leaders already prior to the emergence of the Mycenaean palaces and finds further support by the Linear B evidence describing the role of the *qa-si-re-we* of the Mycenaean Palatial period as leaders of the kinship units that composed the communities of the provinces.

As far as the origins of the LH IIIC warrior elite in Achaea are concerned, the first factor to be mentioned is the one that possibly played the least significant role: this is the supposed flooding of the region with refugees from the ruined palatial centres. In the course of the present study, this view has been rejected as an explanation for Achaea's post-palatial prosperity and the phenomenon of warrior burials on the basis of several archaeological and especially chronological pieces of evidence. On the contrary, the historical developments under consideration have been perceived as the outcome of two other factors. The first of these is the combination of Achaea's advantageous geographical setting with the circumstances that emerged out of the collapse of the palatial system. The artefact of this interplay was the decisive role that Achaea played during LH IIIC as mediator and front line in the contacts between the West, i.e. the Adriatic cultures, and the Aegean. The special relationship between Achaea and the peninsula of the Apennines in this period is illustrated by the presence of the "Urnfield bronzes" in Achaea, the Achaean style pottery found in Italy, or the exchange of objects with symbolic significance. These contacts were possibly unfolded on the level of personal relationships, occasions of mutual hospitality and gift exchange. They contributed to the Achaean wealth and favoured the formation of an elite, which used as instrument for social evolution not only military and leadership qualities but also privileged friendships and trade networks.

The second factor which along with the first led to the emergence of this great concentration of small rulers in the north-western corner of the Peloponnese during LH IIIC is possibly the intentional reminiscence of the palatial past for propagandistic purposes. The world of Achaea in LH IIIC Middle and Late was topographically and chronologically dislodged from this past and the perhaps unpleasant connotations linked with it in the former palatial regions. It is because of this reason that Achaea offered the fertile ground for legitimating rulership aspirations through the endeavor to create a connection with the palaces and the palatial dynasties. The possible attempt of Achaea's LH IIIC minor kings to claim their political or even genealogical derivation from the palatial dynasties might have generated the emergence of related and "founding" (according to J. Assmann's definition) myths, like the one of Tisamenus.

The association of the place-name "Achaea" with the north-western landscape of the Peloponnese can finally also be apprehended as a result of the two above-mentioned factors which led to the late prosperity of Achaea in the Mycenaean period and, of course, to the phenomenon of warrior burials. Just like the Romans c. 1000 years later and their "inductively" created province-name "Achaea", the Adriatic cultures of the Late Bronze Age might have "deductively" perceived the north-western Peloponnese, their main counterpart in the post-palatial period, as *pars pro toto* for the greater part of Mycenaean Greece, the former *Achai[w]ia=Achaea*. And under the viewpoint of the Achaean ruling class, such a perception of its own region was certainly an extremely welcomed legacy. Combined with a deliberate reference to the Age of the Heroes, it could stimulate the idea of associating the developments in the LH IIIC north-western Peloponnese with the prestigious palatial past. This reminiscence probably contributed to the emergence of the idealized retrospective view of the Mycenaean Palatial era that eventually came to find its manifestation in the Homeric epics.

Nevertheless, the dawn of this nostalgic reminiscence in the course of LH IIIC period was a historical contribution made not only by Achaea but also by other regions of the setting Mycenaean world. Consequently, if there is something that exclusively belongs to the north-western Peloponnese, this is the special relationship to the West, which twice during antiquity, both at the

end of the 2nd and at the end of the 1st millennium B.C., offered the decisive framework for its cultural flowering. Even at the beginning of the 21st century A.D., after almost half a century of political and cultural stagnation, this ancient cosmopolitan look to the West, which is attestable in later phases of the Achaean history as well, still remains topical for the major mainland region of western Greece.

* I would like to thank Ioanna Moutafi for reviewing my English text.