

Weapons in the Shaft Graves of Mycenae. Remarks on the Chronology¹

Piotr Taracha

Chronological interconnections between the shaft graves of Circle B at Mycenae have been much discussed since Professor Mylonas' publication,² and recently even more vigorously, for excavations in the whole Aegean have provided new information about the transition from Middle Helladic to Late Helladic.³ All the attempts to identify chronologically distinct groups of the graves were based on different diagnostic criteria: stratigraphy, grave forms, position of skeletons - contracted or the upright one -, a wealth of furnishings, and first of all, ceramic typology.⁴ As they were adequately summarized by Giampaolo Graziadio,⁵ there is no need here to enter into details. We should outline, however, results of the previous discussion, since it has bearing on our subject.

There is general agreement that earlier Circle B was still in use when, already in the LH I period, first graves of Circle A were built. Evidence for the MH period is therefore restricted to Circle B burials of Early Phase and Late Phase I according to Graziadio; albeit, pottery groups of Late Phase I, that is, the very end of Middle Helladic, as defined by Graziadio, seem sometimes to be hardly distinguishable from those of Late Phase II, corresponding to the LH I period. Graziadio himself admits that "the mere presence of LM I A specimens or contemporary vases is not, in itself, decisive in ascribing a pottery group to one of the two phases",⁶ because they were both contemporary with LM I A.

Thus, on the evidence of pottery we are able to dis-

cern, in spite of all doubts, three phases in the history of Circle B. Late Phase II was the longest phase and lasted at least two generations, only the burial sequence of this phase cannot be identified on the pottery analysis. In any case, however, a relative chronology of the LH I burials in both the Circles of Mycenae should be discussed, as a comment on the chronologies published by Kilian-Dirlmeier and Graziadio.⁷ In what follows I wish to look for new criteria to enable that task. I suppose that, among others, assemblages of weapons that were found in the graves may be such a criterion.

Thus, we shall limit ourselves here to the burials with weapons, excluding Grave IV, since on the basis of the existing documentation I see no possibility to distinguish specific sets among numerous weapons from this grave.⁸ As is well-known, weapons were found in both single-burial graves (in that case, associations are clear) and reused ones. Within the latter, earlier skeletons were often displaced and as a result, offerings are difficult to attribute to specific burials. On the other hand, earlier weapons, unlike vases, seem to have been only exceptionally removed from the graves. In fact they have seldom been found in the fill, and rather in smaller graves where place for new interments was scarce - for example, a sword from Grave Δ (Δ-277).⁹ Moreover, if small objects got to the fill, it was apparently not intentional. The boar's tusk plates from Graves N and V, or the arrowheads from Grave IV, for example, occurred both in the fill and inside the grave.¹⁰ In other cases, fur-

1. For a broader discussion, see Taracha 1993.

2. Mylonas 1973.

3. For the list of sites, see Graziadio 1988, 352 n. 35.

4. Mylonas 1973, 270-275, 354-360; Dickinson 1977, 42-46, 51; Alden 1981, 81-104; Dietz 1980, 80-81, 141-144; Dietz 1984, 38-39; Dietz 1987, 113-119; Kilian-Dirlmeier 1986, 160-176; Kilian-Dirlmeier 1988, 161-171; Graziadio 1988, 361-363.

5. Graziadio 1988, 344, 345 Table 1.

6. Graziadio 1988, 361.

7. See n. 4.

8. Karo 1930-1933, 71-121 (Nos. 229-622).

9. All further references in parentheses are to the catalogues in Karo 1930-1933 and Mylonas 1973.

10. Mylonas 1973, 158, 163, 176 (N-488, 489). For the finds in the fill of Graves V and IV, see Schliemann's Mycenaean Diary of Nov. 11th, 18th, and 28th, 1876: Calder III and Traill (eds.) 1986, 190, 197, 203.

nishings of earlier burials were moved aside when needed. Most often, however, they still lay near displaced bodies. Amongst three earlier burials in large Grave Γ, only interment No. 3, following Mylonas' numbering, had been moved to the northwest corner, whereas two other skeletons (Nos. 2 and 4, the latter with associated weapons) remained where they had been originally placed, beside the new interment No. 1.

The Early Phase burials follow the mainland MH traditions, also in weapons. The one-edged knife from Grave Θ, the tongue-shaped dagger¹¹ from Grave Η (H-290), and the sword from Grave Ζ (Z-289), all apparently associated with single burials, are not exceptional. Quite large number of similar burials is known from other MH sites.¹²

It is also the case of some interments belonging, in terms of pottery, to Late Phase I - the tongue-shaped dagger from Grave Β (B-261), and the sword (I-291) and tongue-shaped blade (I-292) assigned to the later burial in Grave Ι; although their other goods - an armband (B-354, 355), an electrum shoulder belt (B-356), so-called garters (Schliemann's *Gamaschenhalter*) (I-378, 379), and a silver Vapheio cup (I-327) - already "herald the rise of the Mycenaean civilization". In fact, the assemblage of weapons found with the earlier interment in Grave Ν, also ascribed to this phase,

shows new developments. The offerings were heaped together with remains of the skeleton along the west wall: a bronze jug (N-310), a golden Vapheio cup (N-389), a diadem (N-391, 392), a pyxis of alabaster (N-458), certainly Cretan import, pieces of a silver vessel (N-329), and the weapons - one socketed spearhead (N-308), Karo's type A sword (N-302), a dagger (N-304), another tongue-shaped blade (N-305, or 306), a one-edged knife (N-307), and boar's tusk plates (N-489) which must have belonged to the same helmet as the plates from the fill of the grave (N-488). Increasing impact of Crete is clearly confirmed by the imported alabaster vessel and the socketed spearhead, rather unfamiliar in the MH mainland.¹³

All these furnishings were moved aside, but we shall follow Kilian-Dirlmeier's assumption that their inventory appears to be complete, since it can be compared to the list of goods, including weapons, from single-burial Grave ΙΙ, dating to the very beginning of the LH I period.¹⁴ This grave also contained a golden Vapheio cup (Karo 220), a diadem (Karo 219), imported Cretan vases (Karo 221, 223), a bronze vessel (only one handle surviving, attached to Karo 215), and the similar weapons: the socketed spearhead (Karo 215), the type A sword (Karo, 214), the short dagger (Karo 217), and the tongue-shaped blade (Karo 224c). The only difference is the set of four one-edged knives

11. The flat, tongue-shaped blades with convex sides are sometimes called razors; cf. Evans 1906, 507; Evans 1928, 629-630; Hood 1956, 96-97; Tripathi 1988, 154. Yet, they have long been recognized as daggers / knives by others, Blegen 1937, 322 ff., Class b. This latter interpretation seems to be confirmed by the specimen from Aegina, with the shoulders adorned with golden bull heads; Walter 1981, 184 fig. 8 right; Walter 1984, 106 fig. 1d.
12. For the MH burials with the single, one-edged knife, see, for example, Voidokoilia, Tumulus A, pithos burials 5 and 7 (Korres 1978, 354-357; Korres 1979, 144-147, pl. 112γ) Samikon-Kleidhi, cist graves (H. Papakonstantinou apud Korres 1987, 737); Drachmani (Tripathi 1988, 262 No. 236; with further references); Lerna, T. JB-4 (Tripathi 1988, 261 No. 232); Asine, MH T. 107 (Tripathi 1988, 262 No. 240); Sesklo, T. 50 (Tripathi 1988, 261 No. 230); Zerelia, T. F (Tripathi 1988, 263 No. 246); Giannotion, cist grave (Tripathi 1988, 262 No. 235). Burials with the tongue-shaped dagger knife: Eleusis, T. 6 (with boar's tusk plates; Mylonas 1932, 55, 144, 146-148; figs. 119, 121; Tripathi 1988, 258 No. 202); Eleusis, T. Z 6 (Tripathi 1988, 265 No. 273); Corinth, T. 5 (Tripathi 1988, 258 No. 203); Sesklo, T. 17 (Tripathi 1988, 258 No. 200); Sesklo, T. 25 (together with a one-edged knife and a wavy metal sheet; Tripathi 1988, 258, No. 199; 261 No. 231; 276 No. 505); Ayios Stephanos, T. a28

(with bronze tweezers; Tripathi 1988, 351 No. 1186; 355 No. 1221); Koukounara-Gouvalari, Grave Circle, T. 1 (Tripathi 1988, 351 No. 1188); Kephalyvryson Volimidion, T. 1 (together with a one-edged knife and 41 stone arrowheads; Tripathi 1988, 258 No. 204; 263 No. 242. Another one-edged knife from this grave (Tripathi 1988, 263 No. 243) belonged to an earlier displaced burial. Moreover, Varvaregos 1981, 88, published a boar's tusk plate from this grave.). The type A sword and two knives were found with the child-burial in T. Σ5 at Argos, Kaza (Protonotariou-Deilaki 1980, 115-119; fig. Σ6; pl. Σ10. 6-7). On the basis of pottery it should be considered contemporary with Grave Ι of Circle Β at Mycenae. Similar assemblages of weapons, consisting of a sword and the one-edged knife, occur at Epano Englianos, tholos Vagenas, Pit Ι (Tripathi 1988, 325 No. 905; 336 No. 1067) and at Vajzë, Tumulus Ι (Hammond's A), ustrinum (Hammond 1967, 229, 237 f.; fig. 20G, 21A).

13. The only two socketed spearheads which are said to date back to the MH III period, came from Malthi, room C-14 (Tripathi 1988, 261 No. 227) and from Mycenae, Acropolis, trial pit (Tripathi 1988, 261 No. 226). Yet, the stratification of Malthi is suspect, and the Mycenaean specimen was found only in a trial pit.
14. Kilian-Dirlmeier 1986, 161, 166.

(Karo 216a, 216b, 218, 227) from Grave II, varying in length, but we have to remember that the objects in Grave N were displaced. There is no room for doubt that both the graves had been built almost at the same time.

It was reasonably argued that Graves II and VI were contemporaneously used and belong to the earliest ones in Circle A; yet, Grave VI contained two interments, both with weapons, and the above statement certainly refers exclusively to the first of them. Stamatakis gave no information about how the finds were originally arranged within the grave, we only know that they lay on both sides of the younger skeleton. Nevertheless, some goods may be assigned to the earlier burial on the basis of their similarity to the finds from Grave II. First of all, I mean here the golden Vapheio cup (Karo 912) and the short dagger with an ivory hilt (Karo 927). It is likely, however, that other bronzes, for example, a socketed spearhead (most likely Karo 910, or 933) and a type A sword (one of four specimens published by Karo: 909a, 909b, 925, or 926) might belong to the earlier burial, too. The later interment in Grave VI shows a relationship to the latest burials in other graves and will be described below.

Three burials with weapons in Grave Γ (Nos. 1, 3 and 4) should play the key role in identifying similar groups of weapons in other graves and in inferring on their relative chronology. Two of them (Nos. 1 and 4) survived in situ. Burials' succession in Grave Γ has been discussed by several scholars, but Mylonas' first proposal appears the best.¹⁵ The deceased No. 3 was buried first, occupying much place in the western part of the grave. Therefore, a young man (No. 4) who came next, must have been placed close by the east wall. Then the last body (No. 1) was buried again in the western part of the grave after remains of interment No. 3 had been moved to the northwest corner. All these burials certainly date to LH I.

Furnishings associated with these burials deserve our special attention. In the northwest corner (interment No. 3) were found two swords of types A and B (Γ-262; the type A sword not listed by Mylonas¹⁶)

and a dirk (Γ-266); besides, a bronze cup (Γ-316), multi-coloured beads of an armband, the electrum mask (Γ-362), and objects of gold - a shoulder belt (Γ-361), a garter (Γ-360), a Vapheio cup (Γ-358). Although displaced, these furnishings are comparable to those of the north skeleton in Grave V (Schliemann's Mummy) which was found untouched. On the body lay the golden mask (Karo 623), the necklace of golden eagle-beads (Karo 689), the breast plate (Karo 626), and the shoulder belt (Karo 633) with a suspended dirk; on the right were found, among others, two swords of types A (Karo 745) and B (Karo 634, 635, 763) and a golden garter (Karo 637). Some other objects found in the northern part of the grave and ascribed by Kilian-Dirlmeier to this burial - numerous vessels of gold, silver, bronze, alabaster, etc.¹⁷ - may have belonged to earlier, displaced interments. Yet, one of them, the golden Vapheio cup (Karo 627), very similar to the vessels from Graves II and VI (Karo 220 and 912), may shed more light on the dating of the burial in question.

Weapons of the deceased near the east wall of Grave Γ (skeleton No. 4) lay, as usually in undisturbed burials, on his right-hand side. This set consists of a socketed spearhead (Γ-276), two type A swords (Γ-263, 264), a dirk (Γ-268), another tongue-shaped blade (Γ-270; assigned in the publication to burial No. 1, but to be seen on photos near burial No. 4),¹⁸ and four knives, of which only two (Γ-271, 272) were listed in Mylonas' publication; two others, however, we can see on photos and on Papadimitriou's plan of the grave.¹⁹ Mylonas considered also a short sword with central midrib (Γ-269) as belonging to this burial, but it is more likely to have been found near skeleton No. 1 (see below).

Grave λ contained two interments, yet all the gifts from the inside of the grave - perhaps, except vases - seem to have been associated with the earlier, disturbed burial. Among those are weapons, a socketed spearhead (λ-299), two type A swords (only one listed in Mylonas' (λ-295), but both visible on photos),²⁰ a dirk (λ-296), a tongue-shaped blade (λ-297), two knives (λ-298, 300), and 29 flint arrowheads (λ-450).

15. Mylonas 1973, 48 f.; Alden 1981, 97 f.; Kilian-Dirlmeier 1986, 166; Graziadio 1988, 347 f.

16. Yet it was mentioned in S. Marinatos' earlier reports; cf. Mylonas 1973, 47, 53.

17. Kilian-Dirlmeier 1986, 175 f.

18. Mylonas 1973, pls. 33, 39a.

19. Papadimitriou 1952, 445 fig. 13; Mylonas 1973, 44, fig. 5.

20. Mylonas 1973, pl. 112. Note also Mylonas' statement (130 n. 4): «Ενίοτε είναι δυνατή επίθεσις δύο ξίφων, παραξίφιδος ή μαχαίρας επί ξίφους, αλλ' εκεί έχομεν περισσότερα του ενός ξίφη, ενώ εις τον λ ευρέθησαν συσσωρευμένα έν ξίφος, μία παραξίφιδος, μία μάχαιρα, μία αιχμη ακοντίου, μία κοπίς».

Thus, the relationship to burial No. 4 in Grave Γ becomes well grounded.

On the analogy of associated weapons it is possible to distinguish quite a large group of the latest interments. To begin with, let us describe burial No. 1 in Grave Γ. The bronzes were placed on the right of the skeleton - one type A sword (Γ-265), another short sword with a central midrib (Γ-269), and a dirk (Γ-267). Moreover, the published photo of the grave²¹ shows a clear imprint of a short one-edged knife on the earth near the skull. Another undisturbed burial, the later one in Grave Ν, yielded a type A sword (Ν-301), a dirk (Ν-303) and a tongue-shaped blade (Ν-305, or 306).

Similar assemblages of weapons occur in other graves, too, although either in displaced or imperfectly described contexts. Three people, two men and a woman, were buried in Grave Δ. We may follow Graziadio (who points out the interconnections among the pottery groups from the fill of Graves Ν and Δ²²) in dating the earliest interment, moved later to the northeast corner (No. 3 according to Mylonas). Offerings belonging to the second burial (No. 1) were also either heaped along the east and west walls - the dirk with a flanged and pinched-up shoulder (Δ-278, 446), the tongue-shaped blade (Δ-279), and three knives (Δ-280, 281, 282) -, or they were mixed into the fill of the grave at the time of the last woman's burial (No. 2) - the type A sword (Δ-277) and a silver cup. Nevertheless, the set of weapons as a whole displays close affinity to the bronzes of the later burial in Grave Ν.

Still more difficult is to infer on the associations of the finds in the south part of Grave V, near Schliemann's "Agamemnon". We shall quote here from Schliemann himself: "I found besides with the body at the S. end 15 two edged bronze swords; 10 of which lay at his feet. 8 of them are of very large size; about one half of all the swords are in a good state of preservation; also the upper part of a bronze sword with a handle ornamented with golden nails; 1 small sword

and 2 long bronze knives...".²³ The last phrase wants particular attention, since in his report for "Ephemeris", dated from Mycenae, 30 November 1876, Schliemann said that "the golden hilt of a sword" was found on the skeleton itself.²⁴ Thus, in spite of the imperfect documentation, it is not unlikely, even though still hypothetical, that the original set of weapons belonging to "Agamemnon" may have consisted of "a bronze sword with a handle ornamented with golden nails; 1 small sword (i.e., a dirk) and 2 long bronze knives", as Schliemann distinguished these finds from the bronzes heaped at the feet of the skeleton. If so, this set would correspond with the late burials in Graves Ν and Δ, mentioned above. This coincides, too, with Dickinson's suggestion that the south burial in Grave V appears a little later than the north one.²⁵

Finally, two late burials in Graves Α and VI can be added to the above mentioned. In both cases, associations are not clear, since the precise information about the find circumstances is lacking. Nevertheless we are able to distinguish the related sets of weapons.

Grave Α contained two burials which were considered late on the basis of associated pottery. It seems a woman was the first.²⁶ Thus, numerous weapons belonged to the later interment of a man, including one socketed spearhead (Α-258), three type Α swords (Α-250, 251, 252), the type Β dirk (Α-253), the tongue-shaped blade (Α-257), three knives (Α-254, 255, 256), and boar's tusk plates of a helmet (Α-508). All the bronzes apparently constitute the homogeneous assemblage, which can be proved on the evidence of three type Α swords coming from the undisturbed pithos burial in Tholos Vagenas, Pit 3 (NE) at Epano Englianos.²⁷ These latter are decorated on blades in the similar way as the swords and the dirk from Grave Α.

The following weapons can be assigned to the second burial in Grave VI: three spearheads - perhaps, one of type C (Karo 910, or 933) and two of type D (Karo 902, 903) according to Höckmann-,²⁸ three type

21. Mylonas 1973, pl. 34.

22. Graziadio 1988, 359.

23. *Times*, 3 January 1877, 10; cf. Calder III and Traill (eds) 1986, 256.

24. *Εφημερίς*, 19 November (1 December) 1876, 1; cf. Calder III and Traill (eds) 1986, 233.

25. Dickinson 1977, 49.

26. Bronze pins with crystal heads, like that from Grave Α (Α-259), were clearly associated with female burials in other

graves (Υ-320; Ο-312, 313, 314; and Grave III, Karo 1930-1933, 102, 103). See also Kilian-Dirlmeier 1986, 166.

27. Blegen *et al.* 1973, 163 f. (CM. 2182, 2183, 2184 + 2187). On the analogy of decoration of the blades, CM. 2183 is comparable with Α-251 and Α-253, and CM. 2184 + 2187 with Α-250 and Α-252.

28. Höckmann 1980, 13 ff. The spearheads from Grave VI are listed under *Gruppe C* (4-5) and *D* (2-3).

A swords (of four in Karo's: 909a, 909b, 925, 926), the short sword with a central midrib (Karo 928), very similar to the specimen from Grave Γ (Γ -269), two or three daggers (Karo 905, 906), of which one has a pinched-up shoulder (Karo 904), like the specimen from Grave Δ (Δ -278), and, maybe, another tongue-shaped blade (Karo 931). As the bronzes display the substantial likeness to the specimens from Graves Γ and Δ , we cannot doubt the late dating of the last interment in Grave VI. On the other hand, however, the assemblage of weapons as a whole is very unlike those belonging to the other late burials except Grave A. In fact, analogous assemblages occur but outside Mycenae, in the contemporary burials at Epano Englianos²⁹ and, for example, in the later tholoi at Vapheio³⁰ and Dendra.³¹

To sum up, on the basis of the above presented survey we are able to distinguish two phases of the LH I burials in the shaft graves of Mycenae, both corresponding to Graziadio's Late Phase II. In each phase, sets of weapons among burial gifts significant-

ly changed, what makes the classification of specific interments possible. The assemblages of Phase A show introduction of new elements. Three distinct types can be recognized. The first consists of the socketed spearhead, the type A sword, the short dagger, the tongue-shaped blade, and the knives (II, VI early). It already occurs in the earlier burial in Grave N, ascribed by Graziadio to Late Phase I. The sets of the second type are larger, including the socketed spearhead, two type A swords, the dirk, the tongue-shaped blade, the knives (Γ 4, λ early). Finally, the third type, appearing in the richest burials - with golden masks, breast plates, etc. (Γ 3, V North), contains two (types A and B) swords and the dirk, but no spearhead. In that case, the symbolic meaning of the swords is very likely. The complex sets of weapons further developed in Phase B (A late, VI late) while the sets consisting only of swords are like those of Phase A (Γ 1), or they are reduced to the sword and the dirk (N late, Δ 1, V South?). A summary of the suggested relative chronology is given in Table I.

Early Phase	Z	H					
Late Phase I		B	I(1)				
			N(e)				
Late Phase IIA			II	VI(e)			
					Γ (3)		V(N)
					Γ (4)	λ (e)	Δ (3)*
Late Phase IIB			N(1)	VI(1)	Γ (1)	A(1)	Δ (1) V(S)
* Alternative dating to Late Phase I							

Table I. Relative chronology of Circle A and B burials with weapons.
e = earlier burial(s); 1 = later buterial(s).

29. Epano Englianos, Tholos Vagenas, Pit 3 (SE); Blegen *et al.* 1973, 159-161.

30. Vapheio, tholos, from the cist; Tsountas 1889, 145 ff.

31. Dendra, tholos, Pit I, King's grave; Persson 1931, 16 f., 31 ff.

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