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Animal Sacrifice, Archives, and Feasting at the Palace of Nestor

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# ANIMAL SACRIFICE, ARCHIVES, AND FEASTING AT THE PALACE OF NESTOR

## ABSTRACT

The contexts of burned faunal assemblages from Blegen's excavations at the Palace of Nestor are examined in this paper. Special attention is given to a deposit of bones found in a corner of room 7 of the Archives Complex. It is argued that these bones, from at least 10 cattle, probably represent the remains of a single episode of burned animal sacrifice and large-scale feasting that occurred shortly before the palace was destroyed. Feasts of this sort are likely to have played a diacritical role in Mycenaean society. The bones may have been brought to room 7 in order to verify to palace authorities that a sacrifice had been completed.

The institution of feasting in Mycenaean palatial society has been a focus of investigations by Aegean prehistorians for more than a decade.<sup>1</sup> Analysis of Linear B texts has demonstrated clearly that revenue received by the palatial administration could be directed toward “the provision of state-organized banquets, whether of a religious or of a secular character.”<sup>2</sup> Archaeologists as well as art historians have considered the nature of such events and where they are likely to have been held.<sup>3</sup> In many instances, as Killen has suggested, “state hospitality” no doubt helped “in holding together the fabric of the society.”<sup>4</sup> Differential access to food and drink, however, is also likely to have served to define and accentuate differences within that society, through what Dietler has described as the “diacritical” role of feasts.<sup>5</sup>

1. We would like to thank the two *Hesperia* reviewers, Brian Hayden and Jeremy B. Rutter, and John Bennet, Susan G. Cole, Michael Cosmopoulos, Robin Hägg, Yannis Hamilakis, Michael Nelson, Kerill O'Neill, Thomas G. Palaima, Ruth Palmer, Kevin Pluta, Ian Rutherford, and Cynthia W. Shelmerdine for offering comments on this article or for responding helpfully to requests for

information. We also thank Natalia Vogeikoff-Brogan for facilitating our access to records from the Palace of Nestor excavations that are archived at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens.

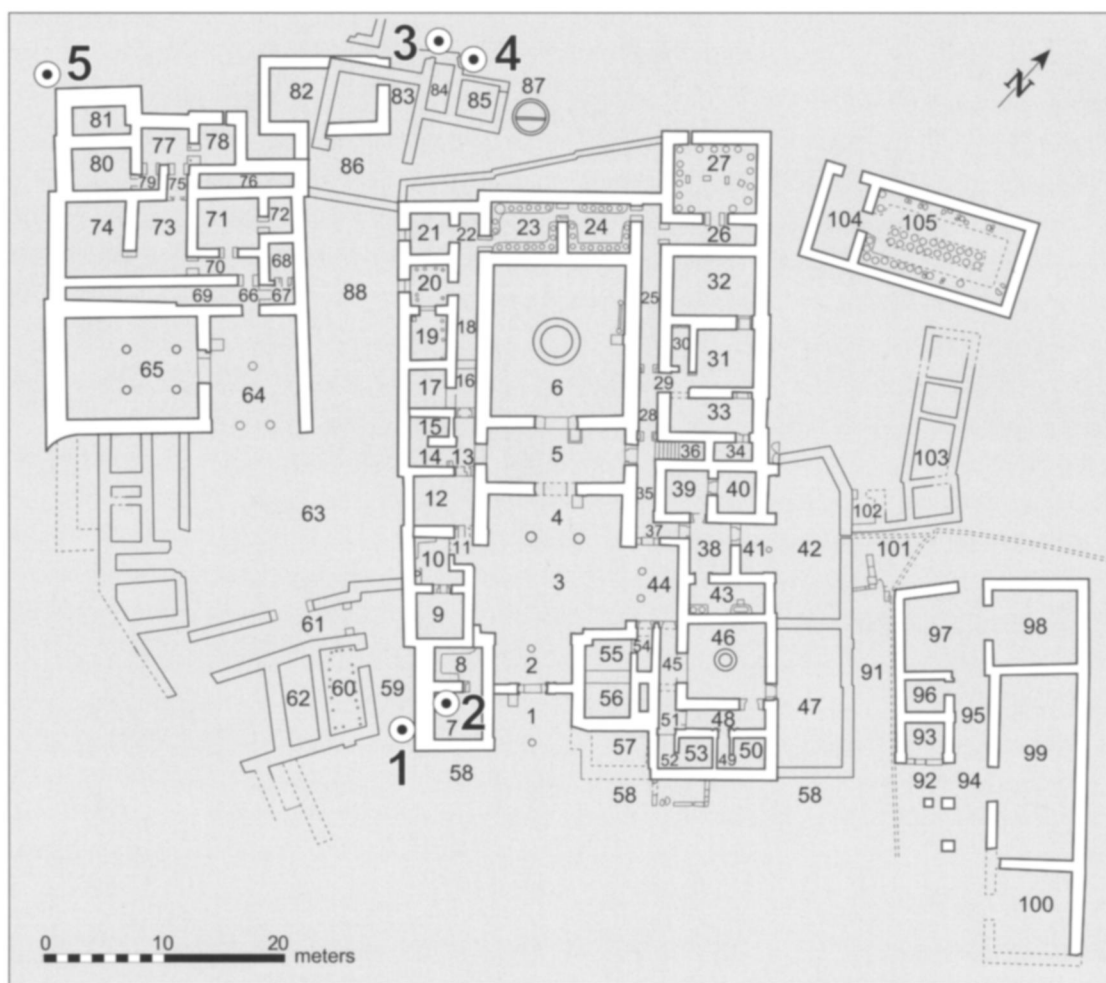
2. Killen 1994, p. 70. See also Piteros, Olivier, and Melena 1990, esp. pp. 171–184; Killen 1996, 1998a; Palaima 2000.

3. E.g., McCallum 1987; Shelmer-

dine 1998, pp. 84, 87–88; Shelmerdine, forthcoming; Davis and Bennet 1999, pp. 110–111; Whitelaw 2001, p. 58.

4. Killen 1994, p. 70.

5. Dietler (2001, p. 85) writes that a feast “involves the use of differentiated cuisine and styles of consumption as a diacritical symbolic device to naturalize and reify concepts of ranked differences in the status of social orders or classes.”



Dietler and Hayden have divided contributions to their recent edited collection, *Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power*, into two parts: papers that consider ethnographical and historical examples of feasting with a view to building frameworks within which archaeological data may be interpreted, and those “that attempt to grapple with the detection of feasting in the material record and to then make plausible inferences about the social life and culture of the people who were producing and participating in those feasts.”<sup>6</sup> The present paper falls into the latter category. In it we consider burned faunal remains from Carl Blegen’s excavations at the Palace of Nestor at Pylos, newly analyzed by Paul Halstead and Valasia Isaakidou, that promise to shed light on the practice of ritual animal sacrifice and feasting in the Peloponnese at the end of the 13th century B.C. (Fig. 1). In particular we concentrate here on the interpretation of finds from room 7, part of the Archives Complex of the palace. Examination of this room offers us an extraordinary opportunity to integrate information already gleaned from close analysis of the content and context of Linear B texts with the results of study of other artifacts and animal bones that were found in the same room. In so doing we considerably expand remarks and interpretations published elsewhere.<sup>7</sup>

6. Dietler and Hayden 2001, p. 6.

7. Isaakidou et al. 2002; see also Halstead 2003, p. 259. Although in this article we start from an analysis of context rather than of faunal remains, we reach several conclusions similar to those of Halstead and Isaakidou (forthcoming); neither colleague should, however, be implicated in any of our more extreme flights of fancy. We are very grateful to Halstead and Isaakidou for sharing their paper with us in advance of its publication and, more generally, for the enjoyable collaboration that we have had with them.

Figure 1 (*opposite*). Plan of the Palace of Nestor showing the locations of five groups of burned animal bones. A sixth group was probably from the same general area as groups 3–5.

R. J. Robertson, after J. C. Wright, based on *Palace of Nestor I*, foldout plan by J. Travlos

Dietler and Hayden observe that it may be possible to recognize the archaeological consequences of particular feasts.<sup>8</sup> We suggest that this is precisely the case at Pylos, where several deposits of faunal remains appear to be the remnants of burned animal sacrifices made on a single occasion and of the consequent distribution of meat to a large number of individuals. The last of these events (represented by finds in room 7) occurred shortly before the final destruction of the Palace of Nestor. We argue that feasts incorporating these practices, among their many other meanings and effects, played a diacritical role within Mycenaean society, and in this regard our paper complements a discussion of hierarchical Mycenaean feasting soon to be published by Lisa Bendall.<sup>9</sup>

## ANIMAL BONES FROM THE EXCAVATIONS

In 1997, several members of the Pylos Regional Archaeological Project (PRAP) began to reinventory and publish finds from Blegen's excavations at the Palace of Nestor, now stored in the nearby Archaeological Museum of Hora.<sup>10</sup> One goal of the project was to identify significant groups of archaeological finds left unpublished by Blegen's team. It soon became apparent that there existed a large quantity of well-preserved animal bones (weighing more than 275 kg), most from clearly defined contexts, that had been little studied.<sup>11</sup> The decision was made to embark on a systematic reexamination of all animal bones preserved from Blegen's excavations and of the contexts in which he and his team had discovered them. Toward this end a research team was formed, consisting of Isaakidou, Halstead, and ourselves. Isaakidou and Halstead have been responsible for the analysis of the faunal remains, while we have studied the stratigraphy of the relevant deposits.

In a preliminary inventory made by Halstead and Davis in 1998, Halstead observed that the state of preservation and range of species represented by animal bones from six excavation units from both inside and outside the palace complex were unusual: the bones appeared to have been

8. Dietler and Hayden 2001, pp. 8–9.

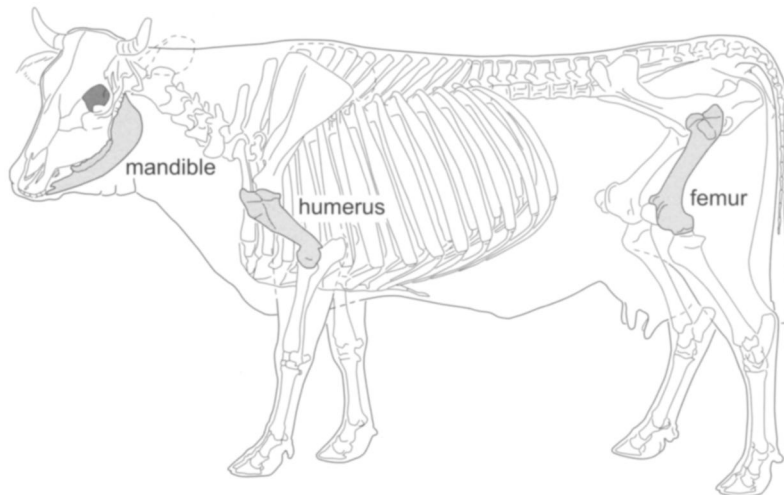
9. Bendall, forthcoming. Halstead and Isaakidou (forthcoming) similarly suggest on the basis of the faunal remains in room 7 and elsewhere at Pylos that feasting and animal sacrifice played a significant role in legitimating social distinctions there.

10. This enterprise, called the Hora Apotheke Reorganization Project, has been directed by Stocker, with advice from Davis, Bennet, and Shelmerdine. Research has been conducted under the auspices of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, in accordance with the terms of a permit granted by the Greek Ministry of Cul-

ture. We are grateful to the late William D. E. Coulson and to James D. Muhly, former directors of the School; to Maria Pilali, administrator of the School; and to the office of the Greek Archaeological Service at Olympia, particularly its director, Xeni Arapoyianni, and Yioryia Hatzis, curator of antiquities. The reorganization of the storerooms and our efforts toward republication of Blegen's finds have been supported by the Institute for Aegean Prehistory and the Louise Taft Semple Fund of the Department of Classics of the University of Cincinnati. We also thank all those who have assisted in reorganizing the second Blegen store-

room, especially Maria Antoniou, Emmett L. Bennett, Hariclia Brecoulaki, Suzanne Hofstra, Julie Hruby, Michael Lane, Sari Miller-Antonio, Lynne Schepartz, Robert Schon, Nick Thompson, and Erin Williams.

11. Some of these bones had been briefly described by Nobis (1993) who, however, did not have access to primary excavation records. Since it was clear to us that the bones that he had examined ranged in date from the end of the Early Bronze Age until the final destruction of the palace in Late Helladic (LH) IIIB, and that he had seen only part of the total collection, a fuller study seemed warranted.



**Figure 2. Bovine skeleton showing bones represented in the deposits of burned bones.** Courtesy V. Isaakidou and P. Halstead

entirely burned and to consist almost totally of parts of mandibles and leg joints of cattle (Fig. 2).<sup>12</sup> The six groups of burned bone were studied in greater detail in September 2000 by Halstead and Isaakidou, who concluded that each is the remnant of a highly structured deposit. The groups are contaminated by only a few fragments of unburned bone, which clearly differ from the burned material in terms of their anatomical and/or taxonomic character. The burned material thus seems to have been deposited with some care, rather than having been discarded with mixed refuse.

It is our contention that these deposits are the end product of ritual practice, the burned bones probably representing a sacrifice to the gods. According to Halstead and Isaakidou, all six groups “exhibited a more or less distinctive degree and type of burning, suggesting derivation from single burning episodes rather than the collection for disposal of bones burned independently.”<sup>13</sup> Many of the bones bear clear traces of knife marks consistent either with dismembering or filleting, suggesting that they had been stripped of meat before burning. Deep chop marks or fracture patterns characteristic of deliberate breakage of the bone, for example in marrow extraction, were not observed.

Further study confirmed that the burned bone consists almost exclusively of cattle (5–11 head per deposit) with parts of a single red deer in each of two groups.<sup>14</sup> The bones are highly selective in terms of anatomical

12. Halstead 2003, p. 259; Halstead and Isaakidou, forthcoming. The excavation labels preserved on groups 1–5 record the following information: 1) S2 1954. W Chasm. 10–12.7.54; 2) Room 7 bone: S3 Room of pithos heap of bones; S3 NW extension; 3) WK4. SW wall E. 17.5.62; 4) WK6. Fire on top of wall E. p. 161. 7.7.62. WK354; 5) EBW. 3.6.61. GPA. Σ. Τμήμα 2, 11. 1.10–1.30. sel. 26. The label on the sixth group is damaged and incomplete, but seems to read “PNW” (see below, n. 17).

13. Halstead and Isaakidou, forthcoming. See also Halstead 2003 and Isaakidou et al. 2002. Our description of the bones and their condition is entirely dependent on information provided to us by Halstead and Isaakidou. Recent discoveries in the Cult Center at Mycenae and at the Mycenaean shrine at Ayios Konstantinos on Methana have also been thought to derive from sacrifices; in addition to references to these finds in Isaakidou et al. 2002, see Hamilakis and Konsolaki 2004. See also Cosmopoulos 2003, pp. 16–18,

regarding evidence for Mycenaean burned animal sacrifice at Eleusis. Godart (1999) more generally discusses the sacrifice of animals, including cattle, in Linear B texts, while Palaima (1989) is concerned specifically with cattle at Pylos.

14. Deer are represented in groups 1 and 6 (Halstead and Isaakidou, forthcoming, table 1; see also above, n. 12, for the contexts). See Bennet’s recent suggestion (2001, p. 35) that the unique references to deer in two Cr tablets may represent “the elite’s contribution to

composition, and are composed almost entirely of humerus, femur, and mandible bones (Fig. 2). Many of the cattle seem to have been adult bulls or steers.<sup>15</sup>

In 2001, examination of the excavation contexts of the six deposits of burned bone led us to the conclusion that none could be positively dated earlier than LH IIIA and that all probably belong to contexts dating to LH IIIB.<sup>16</sup> Three, and probably four, of the six deposits of burned bones were found in the northwest part of the site, just outside the Main Building (Fig. 1, groups 3–5), and it seems likely that in each of these places bones from a sacrifice were purposely discarded.<sup>17</sup>

In Classical Greece the selective disposal of bones from a particular sacrifice appears to have been unusual. Németh has reviewed the epigraphical evidence for the treatment of sacrificial waste.<sup>18</sup> Provisions included 1) statutes determining areas of disposal for ashes from the sacrificial altar, dung from animals to be sacrificed, and excrement from the intestines of sacrificed animals; and 2) rules concerning the locations of tanneries that bought the hides of the sacrificed animals. The disposal of bones is not explicitly treated in these texts, however, and archaeological evidence suggests that, more often than not, they were simply swept from the altars and became part of the generalized refuse of a sanctuary.<sup>19</sup>

## CONTEXT OF BURNED BONE IN ROOM 7

In contrast to most of the deposits of burned bone mentioned above, one deposit clearly lay on a floor of the Palace of Nestor at the time of its final destruction (Fig. 1, group 2). The faunal remains from this deposit, already recognized by Blegen as the probable remains of sacrifice (see below), were found stored in a wooden box and labeled in a way that left no

feasts from their own special activities.” R. Palmer is currently preparing a manuscript on deer in the Cr tablets and in frescoes at Pylos. See also Hamilakis 2003 on the role of hunting in prehistoric Greece.

15. Halstead and Isaakidou, forthcoming. Tablets from Pylos that appear to record sacrificial animals also express a preference for males (see Killen 1994, p. 80). But see Un 6, where only females are recorded. We are grateful to C. Shelmerdine for reminding us of this text.

16. Extensive deposits of animal bones from earlier stages of the palace are preserved, but they are not similar in character to the six groups of burned bone discussed here.

17. Groups 3, 4, and 5 (see above, n. 12) were certainly excavated in these areas. In 2002, comparison of the remains from group 6 with isolated

fragments of burned cattle bones from PNW trenches 8/1 and 11, also located in the northwest part of the site, suggested to Halstead and Isaakidou that all derived from the same deposit. It thus appears probable that the bones in the sixth group were found outside the Main Building, in the same general area as groups 3–5. The contexts of these deposits, as well as the nature of the faunal remains from them, will be discussed in greater detail in a future publication coauthored with Isaakidou and Halstead.

In 1954, during excavation of the robbed-out southwest wall of room 7, another deposit of burned bones (group 1) was found. The full label on the container reads “S2 1954. W Chasm. 10–12.7.54 (S2 dug by E. Bennett) to early July: pot in ‘1939 Trenches, numbered sherds Room 7 (Archives) Chasm.” A join between a

bone in this deposit and one in group 2 was found in September 2002 by Halstead and Isaakidou (we thank them for this information). It is likely that the bones in group 1 had been removed from the floor of room 7 when the southwest wall was robbed in historical times and had been dumped into the trench left after the looting. At present it does not seem that the combination of groups 1 and 2 results in an increase in the minimum number of cattle represented in the deposit in room 7.

18. Németh 1994.

19. E.g., as at Kommos in Crete; see Shaw 2000. At Didyma, intact (but unburned) thigh bones were deposited in special places (Tuchelt 1992). In general, see Hägg 1998 for archaeological evidence for Classical Greek animal sacrifice.



**Figure 3. Spearhead and sword in room 7 at the time of excavation.**

Palace of Nestor Excavations Archive, University of Cincinnati, neg. 52-20: "Spear, Sword, and Tablet no. 10 [= Es 650], from East"

doubt that they had been found in the western corner of room 7.<sup>20</sup> At least 10 head of cattle are represented.<sup>21</sup>

The progress of excavation of room 7 can be reconstructed from the field notebooks. On June 12, 1952, Blegen discovered a deposit of animal bones in room 7 of the Archives Complex (originally known as the "Room of the Pithos," later as the "Annex" to the Archives Room of the palace). He described that day's excavation in trench S3 NW extension (equivalent to the southwest part of room 7) as follows:

West part of extension to south of it filled with fragments of gigantic pithos. A few tablets under pithos frag[ment]s. Close beside the above mentioned wall several miniature kylikes—1 or 2 intact. Also giant heap of bones apparently animal indicated on Theocharis plan.<sup>22</sup>

Blegen removed the deposit on June 18:

Start removing heap of bones on W. side of N. Ext. and also the miniature pots and to clear floor, if any, under them.<sup>23</sup>

A spearhead and a sword also lay near the northwest wall of room 7, not far to the northeast of the bones and miniature kylikes. The spearhead is complete; the sword, although shattered when found, is nearly complete and its bronze is well preserved. All of these objects are clearly visible on photographs taken at the time of excavation (Figs. 3, 4).<sup>24</sup> A plan by

20. See n. 12 above for the context indicated on the original excavation label. Group 1 probably belonged to the same deposit; see above, n. 17.

21. Halstead and Isaakidou (forthcoming) suggest that these bones are likely to have been placed in room 7 as a single act of deposition and that they

probably do not represent the gradual accumulation of bones from individually sacrificed animals subsequently burned as a group. They note that their estimate of the minimum number of individual cattle represented in the deposit is likely to be low, given the fragmentary state of the material.

22. CWB 1952, p. 39. The wall near which the miniature kylikes were found is that which divides room 7 from room 8.

23. CWB 1952, p. 57.

24. *Palace of Nestor I*, pp. 94–95, fig. 274, nos. 3 and 4; a drawing of the spearhead is published in Avila 1983, p. 45, no. 99. A fragment of a



**Figure 4. Room 7 with bones and pithos, from the north, 1952.** Palace of Nestor Excavations Archive, University of Cincinnati, slide 52-65: “Pylos Englianos Annex of Archives Room. Broken Pithos and Bones”

Demetrios Theocharis was not published by Blegen and Rawson, but it and other drawings (Figs. 5, 6) are contained in one of Theocharis’s architectural sketchbooks, now preserved in the archives of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens.

In a preliminary report, Blegen suggested that room 7 might be a shrine.<sup>25</sup> In the final publication, however, Blegen and Rawson were more reserved in their judgment:

On the floor in the south corner of the room on the day of the fire an enormous ribbed pithos evidently stood covered with its lid. A considerable heap of burned animal bones lay in the western corner and close beside them near the northwest wall were found 11 diminutive kylikes, probably votive offerings. What these apparent remains of sacrifices and dedicatory vessels had to do in the tax collector’s office raises an unsolved problem.<sup>26</sup>

blade, not from the sword, and possibly part of yet another blade were found in room 7, but their precise findspots cannot be determined. (CWB 1952, p. 28, records a fragment of bronze amid tablets S3-4-7 [Es 644-647], and CWB 1952, p. 38, mentions a “largish piece” of bronze near the bronze sword.) These artifacts are described and illustrated in *Palace of Nestor I*, p. 95, fig. 265, no. 3, and fig. 266, no. 1. A small fragment of silver was also found in the room. For the spearhead and sword, see Hofstra 2000, p. 100. Many small fragments of metal were found in the course of excavations of the palace (Hofstra 2000, pp. 84-86) and it is possible that the scraps of bronze and silver found in room 7 fell into

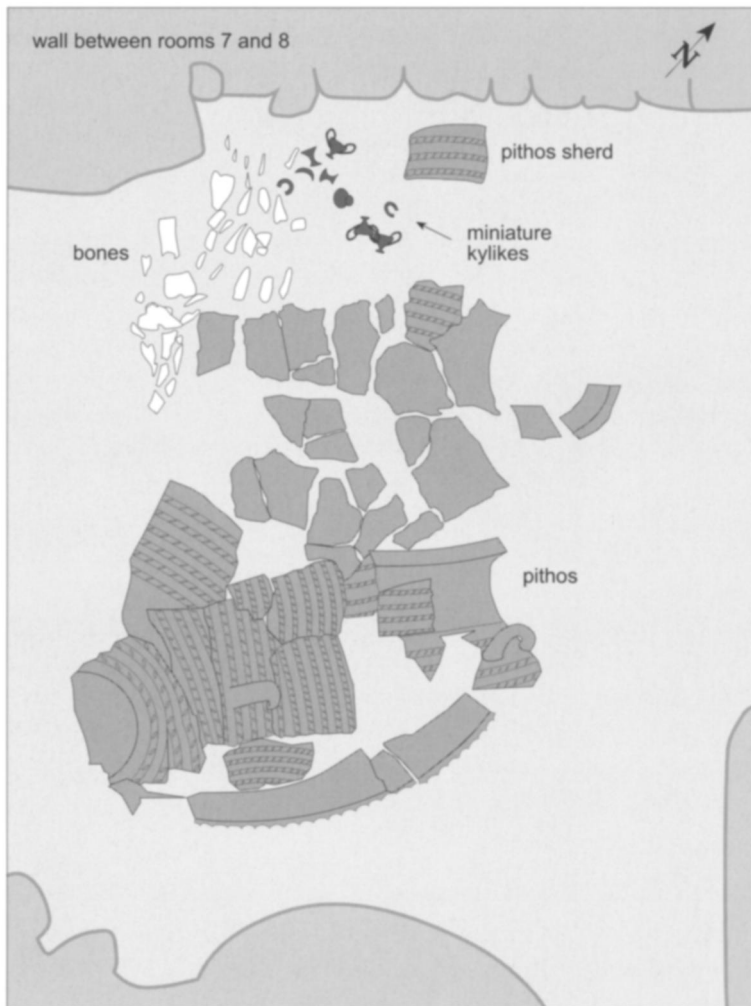
the room at the time of its destruction.

The black-and-white photographs taken on June 12, 1952, that show the pithos, spearhead, sword, and deposit of bones are numbered P52-18-20. The spearhead, sword, and Linear B tablets are also indicated on a plan drawn by Blegen (CWB 1952, p. 40).

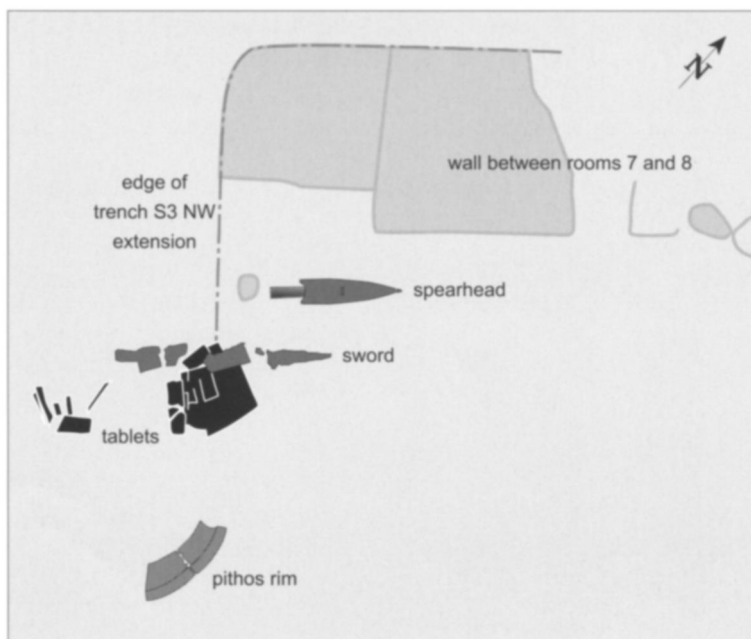
25. Blegen 1953, p. 63.

26. *Palace of Nestor I*, p. 92. The description of the stratigraphy of room 7 published by Blegen and Rawson (*Palace of Nestor I*, pp. 92-95) is entirely supported by the unpublished excavation records. A stratigraphical section by Theocharis (1952 Sketchbooks, American School of Classical Studies at Athens Archives) shows the elevation of the floor of room 7 and the way in which, at its southeastern

side, it ran over the top of an earlier wall of poros blocks; one of these blocks is incised with a double axe sign (*Palace of Nestor I*, pp. 44-45; cf. Nelson 2001, pp. 118-120). Blegen’s brief notes document the relative positions in room 7 of the pithos, heap of bones, kylikes, sword, and spearhead. Notebook pages describing the excavation of S3, North Extension and S3, Northwest Extension include CWB 1952, pp. 24, 28, 32, 36, 38-41, 43, 57, 103, and 105. W. A. McDonald appears to have clipped the edge of the deposit of bones in room 7 already in 1939 in his trench I (WAM 1939, pp. 113 and 117, where he describes “just south of room of archives a good many bones extending into east side of trench”).



**Figure 5. Pithos, miniature kylikes, and bones in room 7.** R. J. Robertson, after sketch, not to scale, by D. R. Theocharis. Theocharis 1952 Sketchbooks, American School of Classical Studies at Athens Archives

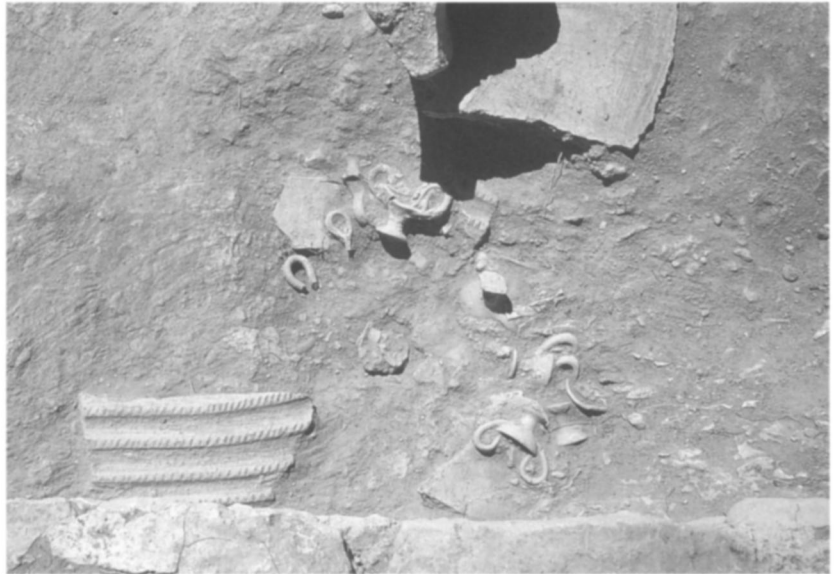


**Figure 6. Spearhead and sword in room 7.** R. J. Robertson, after sketch, not to scale, by D. R. Theocharis. Theocharis 1952 Sketchbooks, American School of Classical Studies at Athens Archives

**Figure 7. Four of the miniature kylikes from room 7 on display in the Hora Museum.** Hora Apotheke Reorganization Project Archive, University of Cincinnati



**Figure 8. Miniature kylikes in room 7 at the time of excavation, from the north; bones at right.** Palace of Nestor Excavations Archive, University of Cincinnati, slide 52-63: "Pylos Annex of Archives Room. Votive Cups"



Study of excavation records and unpublished artifacts permits us to add a few footnotes to Blegen and Rawson's publication. It seems that the only fixed piece of furniture in room 7 was the pithos, which fell with its mouth toward room 8.<sup>27</sup> Other than the pithos and its lid, no ceramic vessels were clearly being used in the room at the time it was destroyed. Some 20–22 miniature kylikes were, however, found in room 7. These include the 11 examples now on display in the Hora Museum (Fig. 7), which Blegen and Rawson specifically say were found near the heap of burned bones (Fig. 8),

27. Pluta (1996–1997, p. 240) has suggested that this pithos could have served as a source of water for forming and reforming tablets. See also Bennet's (2001, p. 27) arguments that at Pylos there may not have

existed documents in any medium other than clay, and that tablets may continually have been recycled (but on the potential difficulties of recycling, see Sjöquist and Åström 1991, pp. 23–24). Blegen and Rawson (*Palace of*

*Nestor I*, p. 92) thought, on the other hand, that the pithos had been full of oil that, when spilled, fueled the fire in which the Linear B tablets were baked.



**Figure 9.** A selection of miniature kylikes from room 7 in the storerooms of the Hora Museum. Hora Apotheke Reorganization Project Archive, University of Cincinnati

as well as those in a container of ceramics labeled “Room 7: Votive Kylikes,” now in the storerooms of the museum.<sup>28</sup> It is impossible to establish with precision the findspots within room 7 of this latter group (Fig. 9), which consists of at least nine, and probably 11, miniature kylikes of a style and fabric identical to the 11 examples on display.<sup>29</sup>

## ARTIFACTS AND TABLETS IN ROOM 7

It is obvious that all remains in room 7 must be considered in any reconstruction of activities in the room.<sup>30</sup> The key to understanding the presence of burned bones in this room is their spatial association with other artifacts, including Linear B tablets. Pluta has persuasively argued that room 7 was the “office” of the archivist: that he sat there to revise texts and to monitor the flow of tablets that would later be archived in room 8.<sup>31</sup> Tablets appear to have been stored temporarily along the northeast wall of room 7, and more than 200 tablets were in the room at the time of its destruction (Fig. 10).<sup>32</sup>

28. *Palace of Nestor I*, p. 93. In their final publication Blegen and Rawson did not explicitly describe the kylikes in the container, probably because they were fragmentary. In one place (*Palace of Nestor I*, p. 366), they reported that there were 12 miniature kylikes in the room, “eleven of them numbered,” while in another place (p. 93), they noted that there were 11 examples. Blegen and Rawson were not entirely consistent in how they reported statistics: in most cases they did not count sherds or fragmentary vessels (but see their description of the contents of room 24; *Palace of Nestor I*, p. 141).

Although they mention (p. 95) that the miniature kylix shape was represented among scattered sherds found in room 7, they do not record the number of sherds or minimum number of vessels.

29. Estimation of the number of vessels seems justified since the excavators do not seem to have discarded any pottery from the deposit that contained the miniature kylikes. In the container there are many fragments from shapes other than miniature kylikes, including larger kylikes of a standard size. There are also very small sherds present, indicating that all of the material was retained. Seven nonjoining handles

of miniature kylix type (i.e., with the handle pressed into place inside the rim) and four straight rim sherds are probably nonjoining fragments of the 9–11 miniature kylikes in the container. Blegen (CWB 1952, p. 29) notes a kylix in the east part of the room; Theodoris, in a 1952 sketchbook, illustrates at least one kylix, perhaps a miniature, in the southeast part of the room.

30. Pluta 1996–1997, p. 247.

31. Pluta 1996–1997, p. 245. A similar scene is depicted in Henry Hankey’s well-known drawing; see Chadwick 1976, p. 19, fig. 9.

32. Pluta 1996–1997, pp. 242, 247.



**Figure 10. Tablets on the floor of room 7 at the time of excavation.** Palace of Nestor Excavations Archive, University of Cincinnati, slide 52-31: "Pylos Annex from S. Tablets on Floor"

The original position of the tablets in room 7 can be located according to a fine-meshed grid.<sup>33</sup> Several texts appear to be concerned with the provisioning of sacrifices and associated feasts. Palaima has concluded that grid square 52 was "the area for label discards and temporary pre-processing of baskets of tablets brought to the Archives Complex."<sup>34</sup> In this square were found the tablets of the "armor inventory of the Sh series as well as tablets of the Es series that list offerings to Poseidon and key human figures in the Pylos kingdom."<sup>35</sup> Adjacent to these two groups of tablets were the heap of animal bones (concentrated in grid square 51) and the 11 miniature kylikes, spearhead, and sword (grid squares 42, 43, 52, and 53).

Palaima has also observed that grid square 83 at the southern end of room 7 contained a "small and special group of tablets (chiefly and significantly Un 718 and tablets of the Ta series)."<sup>36</sup> Of considerable importance is the fact that Un 718 is a "prospective text" that anticipates offerings that will be made to Poseidon by *e-ke-ra<sub>2</sub>-wo* (whom Palaima and others believe is the king of Pylos), the military commander, the *da-mo*, and a group called the *wo-ro-ki-jo-ne-jo*.<sup>37</sup> That offerings to Poseidon were in the process of being made when the palace was destroyed is implied by the future tense of the verb "to give." Palaima has concluded that certain texts were retained in this part of room 7 to await "confirmation that the contributions had indeed been made."<sup>38</sup>

33. The grid was originally established by Bennett and Olivier (1976, p. 25, fig. 2), and has recently been adjusted by Pluta (1996–1997, pp. 234–238).

34. Palaima 1995, p. 624, n. 9.

35. Palaima 1995, p. 628.

36. Palaima 1995, p. 624.

37. Killen, however, believes that *wo-ro-ki-jo-ne-jo* is an individual, not a group, and reads the form as a possessive adjective; see Killen 1998b, p. 21,

nn. 7–8. We thank J. Bennet for this reference. On current views concerning the identification of *e-ke-ra<sub>2</sub>-wo* as the king of Pylos, see Bennet 2001, p. 26, n. 11.

38. Palaima 1995, p. 629.

## SACRIFICE, FEASTING, AND ROOM 7

It seems possible that all of the artifacts in room 7, with the exception of the tablets and the pithos and its lid, are remnants of animal sacrifice and ritual dining. The sword could have been involved in the slaughter of sacrificial victims. Knives and swords figure prominently in Aegean Bronze Age iconography of sacrifice, and Killen recently observed that the “axes and swords (or knives) listed [in Ta 716] are attractively interpreted as weapons used to kill sacrificial animals.”<sup>39</sup> The spearhead is unexpected, however, since spears, although associated in Bronze Age iconography with hunting and warfare,<sup>40</sup> do not feature in depictions of sacrifice. Might its presence be related to the inclusion of deer remains among the burned bones at Pylos?<sup>41</sup> Support for the idea that the spearhead and sword were ritual instruments comes from the fact that both must have been antiques by the time of the destruction of the Palace of Nestor. Is this an example of religious conservatism? The spearhead is of a Middle Bronze Age type, whereas the sword is of Sandars’s type E and probably dates to the 14th century.<sup>42</sup> Hofstra discusses both the spearhead and sword, noting the “oddly archaic form” of the former.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, the coarse red micaceous fabric of the large pithos that stood in room 7 appears to be more characteristic of pottery from levels of the later Middle Bronze Age and early Late Bronze Age than that in use during the final stages of the palace.

Associations of the miniature kylikes with feasting rituals are also likely. Some fragments of wall paintings from the Throne Room (room 6) appear to represent activities associated with drinking. Two tables with two men seated opposite each other are depicted, each man plausibly restored as raising a kylix in a toasting ritual.<sup>44</sup> McCallum restores the Two Men at Table, a bull sacrificed on an altar (19C6), and the Lyre Player and Bird (43H6) in a single outdoor composition that decorated the northeast wall of the Throne Room.<sup>45</sup> Although the hands of the Two Men at Table are not preserved, an association between seated figures and drinking exists in Aegean iconography, e.g., in the Knossos Campstool Fresco, whether or not its fragments are arranged as in Evans’s reconstruction.<sup>46</sup> Reexamination of the fresco fragments from the Throne Room in 2002–2003 has shown, however, that fragment 19C6 can no longer be confidently reconstructed as a bull or as any other sacrificial victim.<sup>47</sup>

The precise use of the miniature kylikes in ritual remains unclear. Certainly the diners did not use them at the table as drinking vessels. They are much too small for that. The miniature kylikes could have held only a token amount of liquid (0.009–0.035 l),<sup>48</sup> and we should probably imagine that their content (if any) had symbolic significance.

The attested use of miniature kylikes in the palace is limited to what are arguably ritual contexts in the Throne Room: two were recovered on a plastered table of offerings near the western column of the room, and one lay against the northwest end of the northeast wall of the room.<sup>49</sup> Blegen and Rawson considered the miniature kylix (shape 26) to be local to the southwest Peloponnese.<sup>50</sup> Apart from examples from the palace and in chamber tombs at Volimidia, only a single rim fragment has been recognized in Messenia.<sup>51</sup> Several examples are known, however, from the northeast

39. Killen 1998a, p. 422. For the iconography of sacrifice, see Dietrich 1988, and commentary by N. Marinatos on p. 50 of the same volume; also Marinatos 1986, pp. 22–25.

40. See, e.g., Hofstra 2000, p. 99.

41. Group 1 contained deer bones and is probably from the same deposit as group 2 (see above, nn. 14, 17).

42. Avila 1983, p. 45; Sandars 1963, pp. 132–133.

43. Hofstra 2000, pp. 98–101.

44. See *Palace of Nestor II*, pp. 80–81, fr. 44aH6 and 44bH6.

45. For the Two Men at Table, see McCallum 1987, pp. 90–91, 199; for the bull, pp. 94–95. See also Wright, this volume, p. 163, fig. 13.

46. See Cameron 1964. More generally, see Wright, this volume, for discussion of seated drinking figures in Mycenaean and Minoan iconography.

47. We thank our colleagues H. Brecoulaki, Caroline Zeitoun, and Andreas Karydas for this information.

48. *Palace of Nestor I*, p. 366.

49. *Palace of Nestor I*, pp. 89, 91. Säflund (1980, p. 241) mistakenly cites Blegen and Rawson to the effect that only one miniature was found on the offering table.

50. *Palace of Nestor I*, p. 366.

51. In the settlement at Nichoria; see Shelmerdine 1992, p. 515.

Peloponnese, found in what appear to be ritual contexts.<sup>52</sup> Many complete miniature kylikes were found at the Palace of Nestor itself in the doorway between rooms 18 and 20, and in rooms 20 and 60; these parts of the palace served as repositories of large quantities of plain pottery that may well have been dispensed at feasts.<sup>53</sup> The presence of this shape in association with burned bone in room 7, on the offering table in the Throne Room, and in tombs at Volimidia suggests to us that the miniature kylix was regularly employed in ritual in Messenia and was not a plaything for children, a possibility raised by Blegen and Rawson.<sup>54</sup> Further support for a ritual function may be suggested by traces of burning on the miniature kylikes from the Throne Room, in use at the time of the final destruction of the palace; those from room 7 show similar traces.<sup>55</sup>

Analysis of the Pylos Ta series of tablets suggests that paired dining was a feature of feasting at the Palace of Nestor. Killen has argued that the Ta tablets represent “an audit of the palace’s equipment for banqueting, including the consumption of sacrificial animals . . . listed on the occasion of a major feast held to mark the appointment of a new office holder.”<sup>56</sup> Palaima agrees that the tablets record banqueting equipment and he has counted the total number of each item in all tablets of the series. Among other objects, 22 seats and 11 tables are recorded, and he imagines 22 individuals present at a feast, seated at these 11 tables in the manner of the representations in the frescoes of the Throne Room.<sup>57</sup> The number of seated banqueters could thus correspond to the number of miniature kylikes found in room 7. If this is not an extraordinary coincidence, two possible conclusions follow: 1) a single miniature kylix was deposited in room 7 on behalf of each of 22 banqueters; and 2) the number 22 could have held special significance at a Mycenaean banquet. Might such a select group of diners have comprised representatives from the principal subcenters of the kingdom of Pylos, perhaps with the addition of several high-ranking officials of the palace itself?<sup>58</sup>

The evidence of the material remains points, however, to the existence of a hierarchy of feasting at Pylos: a more intimate group of seated individuals and a much larger gathering of less privileged attendees.<sup>59</sup> The number of animals represented by the cattle bones in the deposit in room 7

52. French 1981, p. 45; Konsolaki-Yannopoulou 2000; Dabney, Halstead, and Thomas, this volume.

53. See Whitelaw 2001, pp. 52–62; we thank J. Hruby for additional information regarding contexts in rooms 18 and 19.

54. *Palace of Nestor I*, p. 366. On the ritual use of larger kylikes, see Säflund 1980.

55. In contrast, the miniature kylikes from rooms 18, 19, 20, and 60, as well as from the “Main Drain” (under corridor 59, just outside room 60), were not burned. We have not succeeded in locating two examples from court 58 in

the palace, reported by Blegen as having been found inside a “stone structure” but not mentioned in the final report. Blegen speculated (CWB 1952, p. 15) that there may have been a shrine in this place.

56. Killen 1998a, p. 421.

57. Palaima 2000, p. 237.

58. There appear to have been ca. 20 higher-order centers in the kingdom. Bennet (2001, p. 32) counts “sixteen or seventeen major centers within the polity other than Pylos itself and Leuktron, possibly the Further Province capital.” There is some evidence that the palace was involved in provi-

sioning feasts at these local centers (Bennet 2001, p. 33).

59. On the likely locations for a larger feast in the vicinity of the Palace of Nestor, see Shelmerdine 1998, pp. 84, 88; Davis and Bennet 1999, p. 110; Whitelaw 2001, p. 58. The composition of the wall paintings of the Throne Room suggests that the seated diners ate *al fresco*, rather than inside the palace, but any ritual involving the miniature kylikes may have occurred indoors, since in the Throne Room, as noted above, vessels of this type appear to have been in use at the time of the final destruction of the palace.

implies that 22 banqueters were not the only participants in the sacrifice and associated feasting. The slaughtered animals would have yielded a large quantity of meat, far in excess of the needs of 22 banqueters, and probably enough to supply the entire population of the town around the palace.<sup>60</sup> A Hellenistic inscription from Keos mandated that ca. 1.25 kg of meat be distributed to each male present at a sacrifice<sup>61</sup> and, if distributions at Pylos were on a similar scale, nearly a thousand families could have been provided with meat from the cattle in room 7.<sup>62</sup>

The number of cattle represented in the remains that lay on the floor in room 7 may have been great in comparison to the single bull given to Poseidon in Un 718 by *e-ke-ra<sub>2</sub>-wo*, but the existence of other groups of burned bones with the remains of five or more cattle and the Linear B evidence suggest that large-scale sacrifice of bovines was not without precedent at Pylos.<sup>63</sup> Pluta interprets the bones and kylikes in room 7 as “evidence for repeated activity of some sort.”<sup>64</sup> It seems unlikely, however, that the bones derive from multiple events of sacrifice at festivals held over several consecutive days, rituals of a type that *are* attested both in Linear B and Hittite texts.<sup>65</sup>

Finally, it needs to be asked why there were artifacts other than tablets in room 7. There is no evidence that burned sacrifices or other rituals were conducted in the room; we can offer no support for Blegen’s original hypothesis that room 7 was itself a shrine, nor was the room sufficiently large to have held 22 diners. The miniature kylikes appear to have been transported to room 7 after their ritual use. They do not appear to have been kept there as part of equipment for a banquet, since room 7 was not used

60. See also Isaakidou et al. 2002, p. 90, and Halstead and Isaakidou, forthcoming, for the amount of meat likely to have been derived from the sacrifice and the size of the population to which it may have been distributed. Ruschenbusch (1982, p. 180), drawing on Early Modern statistics published by Cipolla (1980, p. 126) and others, estimates an average weight of 200–220 kg per animal. Jameson, on the other hand, quotes an estimate of usable meat provided by adult animals in Dark Age Nichoria that is only half this amount (Jameson 1988, p. 95), and that is the figure employed by Killen (1994, p. 81, n. 53) for Mycenaean times. Even using the lower figure, the sacrifice of 10 cattle would have yielded on the order of 1,000 kg of meat and probably more, since Halstead and Isaakidou (forthcoming) have concluded that the individuals represented in the deposit in room 7 were at the upper end of the size range for cattle at Pylos.

61. *JG XII v 647*; see Ruschenbusch

1982, p. 180, for a discussion of this inscription.

62. Fieldwork sponsored by PRAP has suggested that the minimum size of the community around the Palace of Nestor in LH IIIB was on the order of 12.5 ha (Bennet 1999, p. 13; Davis et al. 1997, pp. 427–430). Carothers and McDonald’s (1979, pp. 435–436) regression formula based on examination of populations and areas of modern villages in Messenia yields a population of only 850 individuals, certainly too low an estimate in light of the considerable number of women known to have been resident at the palace (see Chadwick 1988, p. 76; we thank J. Bennet for drawing our attention to this point). Renfrew’s (1972, p. 251) estimated settlement density of 300 persons per hectare would yield a population on the order of 3,750 for the settlement at Ano Englianos, but this density figure must be too high. Whitelaw, using a lower density of 200 persons per hectare (and a settlement size

of 15 ha in LH IIIB), estimates the population at ca. 3,000 individuals (Whitelaw 2001, pp. 63–64); a smaller settlement size of 12.5 ha would yield an estimate of 2,500 individuals.

63. See PY Ua 25, where 10 head of cattle (8 males and 2 females) are recorded. Sacconi (2001, p. 469) distinguishes between such “grands banquets d’état” and the “repas typiquement religieux,” where daily rations of food in small quantities are distributed to a limited number of individuals participating in a ritual. Hamilakis and Konsolaki (2004, p. 147) note that the burned sacrifices in the Mycenaean shrine at Ayios Konstantinos on Methana may be an example of the latter type of celebration, a case of “empowerment for the few” who may have been provisioned by a palace.

64. Pluta 1996–1997, p. 247.

65. See above, n. 13. Concerning such sacrifices, see Killen 2001; Sacconi 2001; also Ruijgh 2004.

for the storage of ceramics: at least half of the kylikes were piled on the floor in no obvious order, all were burned, and many were broken.

One possible interpretation worth exploring is that the bones, miniature kylikes, and weapons, like the tablets found near them in grid square 52, had recently been brought to room 7. Did the administration of the palace perhaps require physical proof that the rituals in which these objects were involved had been completed? If these artifacts came to room 7 as part of a process of administrative supervision, it may be presumed that, had the palace not been destroyed, the spearhead and sword would have reentered the storerooms of the palace, the bones would have been buried in special deposits like those found to the north and northwest of the palace, and the miniature kylikes would have been otherwise discarded.

A parallel case of administrative supervision might be indicated by tablet Un 718 (the label for which was found in grid square 52) if we accept Palaima's argument that it was being retained in grid square 83 in anticipation of confirmation of contributions, since "major offerings to Poseidon were still in the process of being made at the time that the palace was destroyed."<sup>66</sup> Given the remarkable correspondence between the number of seats recorded in the Ta tablets and the number of miniature kylikes found in room 7, is it possible that both groups of objects were associated with a celebration of the same event, the appointment of the new *da-mo-ko-ro* mentioned in Ta 711?

66. Palaima 1995, p. 629.

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