

Round Table on Bronze Age Aegean Warfare  
University of Athens, 12-13 December 2009



ABSTRACTS

(in alphabetical order of the speakers)

1. *Lucia Alberti* (Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, ICEVO - CNR)  
**To be or not to be? Problems of identity of Knossian warriors**

Since the end of LM IB, the cultural, political and economic set-up of the Aegean seems to have changed substantially, modifying the previously existing equilibrium in the region.

A series of new elements appear in Crete, where one of the most important changes is evident in burial customs: new necropoleis similar to the mainland ones suddenly appear in the Knossos area, in which warrior assemblages were particularly noticeable. Two different interpretations were applied to these new necropoleis considered as either Minoan or Mycenaean.

The current paper will focus on the investigation of the chronological and typological character of the assemblages and will discuss the two prevailing although contradicting interpretations in a wider Aegean historical framework.

2. *Tomáš Alušík* (Czech Centre for Mediterranean Archaeology)  
**Fortifications of Early Minoan/Prepalatial Crete revisited**

In this paper the occurrence of defensive architecture in Prepalatial sites of Crete will be revisited. The defensive architecture of Prepalatial and especially of Early Minoan period is almost unknown. At present there is only one safely dated example of Early Minoan fortifications. The author will focus mainly on longer-settled (bigger) settlements of Early Minoan/Prepalatial period in Messara (Apesokari Vigla, Koumasa Korakies, Trypiti, Porti etc.) associated with the tholos tombs, but some other sites in other regions of the island will be also dealt with (Myrtos Phournou Korifi, Livari Kastrokephalaki etc.). During this research local topographical and chronological context as well as settlement pattern and relations to other sites in close vicinity will be studied. The main aim is to try to grasp and clear up the following two key points: 1) chronological problems and 2) the analysis of actual occurrence or non-occurrence of fortifications/defensive architecture in sites under investigations; the reasons for non/construction of fortifications and the possible way of defence in these sites during Early Minoan/Prepalatial period.

3. *Sabine Beckmann (University of Crete)*

**War or Peace? Middle Bronze Age cyclopean/megalithic structures in the area of Agios Nikolaos, Crete**

When Evans first followed his “Mycenaean Military Road” in 1895, he saw several “Cyclopean” buildings of “primitive construction” he called “castle”, “fort” or “stronghold” and believed to be part of a Bronze-Age defense-system. When years later he excavated and published Knossos he established his vision of a peaceful Minoan culture that has mostly prevailed over the archaeological approach towards understanding Minoan culture in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Recently scholars have begun to question this peaceful image again, especially while returning to a closer study of structures in the far East of Crete similar to those described by Evans.

In my PhD study of the mountain-region Evans passed in 1895 my main aim is cataloging and mapping Minoan structures in its vicinity. When leaving the known track it becomes obvious that Minoan “megalithic” or “cyclopean” buildings had been erected all over the mountain-side, not just close to the road. Many of them are situated next to small agricultural plots (sometimes still in use until today), often surrounded by typical enclosure walls. Over 300 Minoan ruins seem to be arranged in a peculiar dispersed settlement-pattern, isolated but on average not more than 300 m apart from each other, interconnected with a network of paths/roads that also includes local caves and wells. Nearly 60 of the house ruins still reach up to over 1,5 meters and were built with large stones. Pre-industrial Cretan mixed farming was installed on the background of Bronze Age landscaping of the same area, often using the same structures, suggesting that the Minoan installations were used as farmsteads, including typical walling for animal husbandry.

4. *Mercourios Georgiadis (Open University of Cyprus)*

**Warfare in the Mycenaean South-Eastern Aegean: facts and fiction**

Warfare has been a significant factor in the narrative of the Mycenaean presence in the South-eastern Aegean. The Mycenaean influence in this area has been proposed to be imposed in the form of invasion, as in most of the Aegean islands. Furthermore, in the LH IIIC a second wave of invasion from the Greek mainland has been hypothesised for explaining a period of acme in the South-eastern Aegean. The main evidence invoked is the finds from the large number of burials recovered throughout this region. Thus, a new assessment on the tomb offerings will be made in order to understand their spatial and temporal context and the extent to which they are related to warfare or not. An additional source of information is the Hittite records, which mention the Mycenaean military activities in the western Anatolia for more than two centuries. These could be associated with the burial finds as well as the fortifications so as to comprehend the role of warfare in the South-eastern Aegean during the Mycenaean times.

5. *Theodoros G. Giannopoulos (University of Heidelberg)*

**The dialectic between warfare and social status in the Achaean warrior burials of the 12<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century B.C.**

Since the 1930s a constantly increasing number of warrior burials of LH IIIC date comes to light in the north-western Peloponnese, in the region enclosed by the borders of the modern Greek prefecture of Achaia. The 17 so far excavated buried warriors represent nothing less than the greatest concentration of contemporary (i.e. LH IIIC) warrior burials hitherto known in the Aegean and are accompanied by an equal number of Naue II swords, the largest number of these weapons found in a single region of the eastern Mediterranean. The aim of this paper is to outline systematically some of the main characteristics of these warrior burials in order to evaluate their social significance for the Achaean society of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century B.C. After a brief introductory consideration of some general aspects regarding the socio-historical evaluation of warrior burials, the paper attempts to approach some principal features of the Achaean warrior graves by setting a series of relevant questions: Where do these warrior burials occur (i.e. spatial distribution)? When do they occur (i.e. chronological distribution)? Do they really belong to the ruling class of this region (i.e. analysis of the grave goods in comparison with the normal contemporary burials in Achaia)? Were the buried warriors natives or immigrants in Achaia? Were the attribute of warrior and their high social position hereditary? How can we eventually assess the nature of the interaction between warfare and social status in this interesting case study of the Greek prehistory?

6. *Kyriakos Grigoropoulos (University of Athens)*

#### **A warrior is dead, a hero is born: Burials with weapons in MH late-LH I Greece**

The deposition of weapons in burials became a widespread practice in Late Bronze Age Aegean, giving a warlike tone to the civilisations of the time. This paper will examine the origins of “warrior burials” back at the transition from MH to LH periods. Mycenae Grave Circles A and B still stand as the hallmark in that process, however, the appearance of weapons in burial contexts was a much more widespread phenomenon, surpassing Mycenae. This paper will stress the differences between Grave Circles Mycenae and other contemporary places where burials with weapons took place and try to detect different trajectories followed by social groupings in their effort to negotiate social identities and supra-local codes of behaviour.

7. *Katherine M. Harrell (University of Sheffield)*

#### **In Flanders Fields: Social Space and Violence in Mycenaean Greece**

Weaponry and citadels are two of the most iconic elements of Mycenaean Greece, but analysis of these rarely extends beyond a discussion of their symbolic representation of martial and political power. Yet there is more to this co-occurrence of deposition of armaments, the construction of the built environment and the political formation processes taking place in the palatial period than is generally acknowledged. This is because the built environment cannot be considered as a blank canvas upon which the Mycenaeans enacted their social agenda. Rather the landscape is bound with historical memory and is in part a symbolic resource of social power. As part of Mycenaean cultural resources, therefore, the built environment both imparts and reaffirms the use of particular forms of political violence.

This paper seeks to understand how violence, practice and power converge within specific cultural arenas to form politically meaningful institutions. By

contextualising martial power we can begin to understand how landscapes become contested, how violence is drawn upon as a resource, and how social hierarchies are renegotiated.

8. *Barry Molloy (University College Dublin)*

### **Were the Minoans behind the Mycenae Shaft Graves?**

Warfare is one of the most divisive issues in the study of Aegean prehistory. The popular tradition of “Peace-loving Minoans” of Crete is cast in stark contrast to the “Warlike Mycenaeans” of the Mainland. This hyperbolic dichotomy is rarely overtly argued in archaeological literature, as such a reduction of complex social and political frameworks is contrary to the scope and indeed language of contemporary academia. Nonetheless there is a prevailing, if subliminal, acceptance of these models in the frameworks developed since the time of Arthur Evans which relegates the study of Minoan warfare to relative oblivion and accentuates its importance in understanding Mycenaean social network dynamics. By tracing the origins of the martial traditions which are evident in the rich finds from the Shaft Graves at Mycenae it will be demonstrated that Mainland models of warfare are directly derived from, and intrinsically related, to systems developed in the Protopalatial period of Crete. The cultural renaissance of MH III/ LH I may in turn have a closer relationship to Minoan international interests and policies than is currently argued, and will be explored further in this paper.

9. *Argyro Nafplioti*

(Wiener Laboratory, American School of Classical Studies at Athens)

### **Warfare in the Bronze Age Aegean: an osteoarchaeological perspective**

The human skeleton is a unique record of information for the life of the respective individual and as such it can help directly investigate specific aspects of it. However, what one can learn about the life and death of the individual from the skeleton can be nothing more than what was ‘written’ on it. The rest remains elusive to the osteoarchaeologist.

This paper will briefly review, along the above lines, the potential of osteoarchaeology for research in warfare in prehistoric populations, by discussing the nature of skeletal evidence for the latter. It will further address issues of identifiability of warfare in the osteoarchaeological record, emphasizing the Bronze Age Aegean context in particular, and present selected examples from it.

Finally, the results of the study of the human skeletal collection from Grave Circle A at Mycenae will be used to address the question of warfare in the Bronze Age Aegean, in relation to the specific osteoarchaeological issues reviewed earlier in this paper.

10. *Stephen O’Brien (University of Liverpool)*

### **The Naval Capacities of the Mycenaean Palaces**

The importance of maritime communications in an environment such as the Aegean has long been recognised. However, despite the substantial body of literature which

has amassed regarding warfare in the LBA of the region, comparatively little has been published regarding military uses of the sea. This is particularly unsatisfactory given the importance of research questions regarding the spread of Mycenaean culture into the wider Aegean world and interactions between the palatial states and the state and non-state groups of the eastern Mediterranean. Utilising recent work conducted into the iconography of vessels in the LBA eastern Mediterranean, the Linear B texts of the Mycenaean centres, and comparisons with the contemporaneous naval practices of other eastern Mediterranean cultures, this paper seeks to assess the extent of Mycenaean naval power, and address the consequences of this for our understanding of the military aspects of the Mycenaean world.

*11. Angelos Papadopoulos (Department of Antiquities, Cyprus)*

### **Mis-interpreting the Evidence? A Contribution to the Hermeneutics of the Iconography of Warfare**

The study of images has been considered by many as an important field that allows a deeper understanding of the symbolisms, *ethos* and character of individuals, ruling groups, aristocratic parties and even of communities and polities in prehistoric times due to the lack of textual sources. In the case of Aegean Bronze Age warfare, it often happens that images of violence are used as interpretative tools that almost automatically categorize artifacts, individuals and archaeological sites as of military character, highlight the warrior *ethos* of the local elites and they are considered as evidence of war-orientated societies.

This paper aims to challenge some of these approaches by presenting some methodological problems based on case studies drawn from the rich iconography of warfare of the Bronze Age Aegean. In addition, some of the issues that may lead to problematic interpretations will be underlined and finally a different approach to the iconographical analysis will be suggested based on recent research on this field that has been conducted over the past decade.

*12. Vangelis Samaras (University of Athens)*

### **Observations on the defensive architecture of the Cyclades in the Bronze Age**

This paper attempts a new approach to the study of defensive architecture in the Cyclades during the Bronze Age. So far archaeological research has focused mainly on the resemblances of Cycladic fortifications to the fortifications on mainland Greece, Minor Asia, Cyprus and Near East. These resemblances have been explained in many ways, such as the result of contacts and influences, or cultural affinities, even of invasions by refugees or conquerors, etc. This paper attempts a reexamination of these interpretations and discusses the issue of a possible local architectural tradition in the Bronze Age Cyclades, which is likely to raise further issues concerning the form and the presence of the warfare in the Bronze Age Cyclades.

*13. Robert Schon (University of Arizona)*

### **Mycenaean Militarism: A Diachronic Approach**

Typically, Mycenaean militarism has been studied as a static phenomenon, with little differentiation between the early and late Mycenaean periods. This paper takes a diachronic approach and examines the changing role of warfare and the warrior through the Mycenaean period (LH I-LH III) in Greece. What it means to be a warrior, the level of military organization, and the nature of military deployments are inextricably linked to the political structure and ideology of any given society. With that in mind, I compare the nature of militarism during the LH I period, the era of the shaft-graves, with that of the LH III period, the era of the palaces using archaeological, textual, artistic, and ethnographic evidence. I argue that the formation of nascent states in Mycenaean Greece resulted in major changes in military organization as reflected in military hierarchies, the specialization of fighting techniques, and the function of military deployment.

14. Susan Kirkpatrick Smith<sup>1</sup> and Maria A. Liston<sup>2</sup>

(<sup>1</sup>Kennesaw State University, <sup>2</sup>University of Waterloo)

#### **Bones and Blades: skeletal and bronze evidence for warfare in Late Bronze Age Athens, Greece**

Militarism in Bronze Age Greece has long been a topic of interest. The nature and organization of military activity has been analyzed from a variety of sources, including architectural remains, pottery decoration, weaponry from grave assemblages, and Linear B writings. However, human skeletal remains have rarely been included in these discussions. Smith's (2009) analysis, *Skeletal Evidence for Militarism in Mycenaean Athens*, demonstrated that such evidence of interpersonal violence rarely is present on skeletons buried with the bronze weapons, although these traditionally have been associated with a warrior aristocracy. Interpersonal violence and battle injuries are amply documented on historic period skeletons from Greece and other countries. Using this evidence, we suggest features that can facilitate the identification of skeletal trauma possibly related to warfare. Such traumatic injuries can aid in the identification of ordinary soldiers in the absence of high-status military grave goods. Conversely, skeletons buried with weaponry rarely exhibit evidence of battle scars and may represent status roles of individuals not actively engaged in combat activities. We include evidence from two recently excavated Late Bronze Age chamber tombs from the Agora of Athens. Both of the chamber tombs contained bronze weapons and multiple burials (Camp 2003). These tombs provide an opportunity to explore further the relationship between military activity as exemplified by grave goods and skeletal trauma.

15. Thomas Tselios (University of Peloponnese)

#### **Prepalatial Minoan daggers: Manufacturing technology and use**

This paper deals with two subjects: the manufacturing techniques of metal daggers from Prepalatial period in Crete and the possible uses of these daggers based on their technical properties. In particular, I examined the manufacturing procedures that revealed through laboratory analyses of fifty two daggers (twenty one triangular and thirty one long daggers) from several sites of central and eastern Crete. From all the examined object very small samples (about 2 cubic millimeters each sample) were taken and submitted to laboratory examinations. Metallographic and chemical analyses that took place produced information about the structure and composition of

the objects, revealing first the manufacturing history of each dagger and then the possibilities that these daggers had as concern to use.

*16. Christian Vonhoff (University of Erlangen-Nuremberg)*

**Depictions of Sea Fights in the Bronze Age Aegean and their pictorial heritage in Early Greek Art**

My paper will be dealing with the iconographic phenomenon of naval warfare in Bronze Age Aegean art and the possible transition of this kind of distinctive imagery into pictorial representations of the Greek Iron Age.

The first part of my presentation gives an overview of the preserved material, which ranges from the Middle Helladic until the Late Helladic period and includes such famous works of art as the LH I miniature wall paintings from the Westhouse in Akrotiri, Thera, or the fragmentary LH III C shipbattle scenes depicted on a number of sherds from the Mycenaean settlement on the Pyrgos Livanaton in Locris.

The second part of my paper addresses the question, whether the Late Bronze Age representations of naval warfare took influence in the development of sea fight imagery in Iron Age art and, if so, which elements, motifs or even topics found their way into the repertoire of Geometric and Archaic Greek artists.