## SOME THOUGHTS REGARDING THE SOCIAL VALENCES OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE. THE MYCENAEAN SOCIETY AND ITS MOST IMPRESSIVE FUNERAL MONUMENTS

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**Abstract**. *The present article is structures in three parts. In the beginning we tried to map out a theoretical background regarding the modalities in which human interrelations were presented, with the aim of making more clear the modality and measure in which the archaeological material can be useful for the reconstitution of the past social aspects. The same objective is pursued in the second part of the study where we insisted upon the objective factors which can influence the "deciphering" of the information which the funerary contexts can offer us. Following this, we presented, from the perspective proposed by this article, the results of the research of the shaft graves from Mycenae and of the tholoi from the area of Mycenaean civilization.*

**Rezumat**. *Prezentul articol este structurat în trei părți. Se doreşte, la început, schițarea unui cadru teoretic privind modalitățile de reprezentare a relațiilor interumane, cu scopul de a facilita înțelegerea modalității şi măsurii în care materialul arheologic poate fi util reconstituirii aspectelor sociale din trecut. Acelaşi obiectiv este urmărit şi în a doua secvență, unde se insistă asupra factorilor subiectivi care pot influența "descifrarea" informațiilor pe care contextele funerare le-ar putea transmite. În continuare, sunt prezentate, din perspectiva propusă în acest articol, rezultatele cercetării mormintelor cu puț de la Micene şi a mormintelor cu falsă cupolă din aria civilizației miceniene.*

### 1. Social Differences and the Archaeological Record

The present essay[1] cannot be something else but a short travel through some of the yesterday and today social theories. The ideas that

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form the social theory in archaeology are so many and so eclectic that one could hardly provide a wide and deep study of everything that refers to social phenomena. The difficulty of choice comes from the complexity of what social phenomenon represents. The human interactions are so many and so diverse that the social theory has to explain a huge amount of specific phenomena. This makes a single social theory insufficient for the archaeologists' need to interpret the material record. There are many scholars, therefore many minds that produce numerous theories that vary in level of generality, degree of abstraction, empirical content. The present situation is required to be brought at a common point. Schiffer's (2000, 6) metaphor of "building bridges" emphasizes the need of a unitary approach of all the social phenomena. He proposes more strategies that can be used to achieve this aim. There is the possibility of constructing "metatheories" that subsume two or more related theories, or "to formulate themselves theories, models and laws that apply to specific behavioral and social processes that crosscut the societal levels".

We shall see now if the "social limits" approach (a syntagme often used in the theoretical archaeology vocabulary) is one of those that help the social theories being bridged. From the beginning the terms *border/limit* and *bridge* seem to be antagonist and incompatible. Since the *limit* is defined as something that "bounds, restrains or confines" or as" a point beyond which is impossible to go" (Webster's 1993, 1312), it seems to me unnatural to limit a society that implies infinite, multiple directed connections between people. What part of the whole should be broken off? How consistent should it be? Doesn't my fragmentation harm the analysis of the whole social structure, then? One might observe that there are domains influencing the social life that are physically bounded, like, for instance, the sex or the space. This category of notions is not longer considered isolated as one side factors influencing the human communities, they are now perceived as parts of the social interrelations and this position diminishes their limitative physical nature. In this context

the sex is seen as *gender*[2] and the space as *landscape*[3] as the recent theoretical archaeology emphasizes (GILCHRIST 1999, 1; INGOLD 1993, 152). It is the man that changes the law of nature by his power to communicate, imagine and recreate the world in accordance with his ideology, tradition and experience.

My attention stopped over another attempt of drawing a picture suitable to all kinds of societies so that being closer to the aim of "bridging" (WELSCH, TERRELL 1998, 52-53). In this approach the people are seen as players. Their actions (social actions) represent the game of living. The rules of the game are the law or the common agreed expectations about how people should behave. Their play takes place on a social field that is, in fact, an interweaving of social, economic, and political relations. This scheme fits somehow with my personal view on how the representation of the social system should be sketched. Still there are some problems that are not explained by means of the playing field that is a bounded space: the authors state that people are not only involved with their neighbours, but with "expansive regional and global systems" (WELSCH, TERRELL 1998, 52). What does it mean? That players leave their field and go to play on another one?

I have conceived another multidimensional scheme that fits better to the complexity of a society. My people acts like mobile atoms, that permanently move from one place to another interacting and producing social phenomena[4] that represents the smaller pieces of the whole social

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[2] The sex has a biological dimension while the gender represents the cultural facet of it. Its qualities can be "conflicting, mutable and cumulative, contingent upon personal and historical circumstances" (GILCHRIST 1999, 1). Here I want to exemplify the mutable feature that gender implies. In the Vrancea region (Romania) certain girls are named as boys. They are addressed to using a word that combine the word *boy* with the feminine termination. The first impression is that those girls are supposed to have a behaviour similar to that of boys', but the real explanation is that the first born male in a family had some particular rights. (Nobody could say any more what rights the boy might has had since today the Romanian legislation provides equal rights to all children that a family has). If the family had no boys, then the boy's role was taken by the first born female that was called *băiată* (information provided by Professor Dan Gh. Teodor).

[3] According to Tim Ingold (1993, 152) the landscape is constituted "as an enduring record of, and testimony of the lives and work of past generations who have dwelt within it".

[4] Examples of social phenomena: a simple conversation between husband and wife, the action of ensuring the food for a period of time, the design

unit. All social phenomena are included then in bigger structures that I would like to call them social spheres. They have a more general character and comprise all the social phenomena that are related. The social spheres are populated by people that have contacts, therefore these spheres correspond to the kinds of communication that a man can establish. So far I identified two groups of communications: thematic and emotional[5]. These spheres cut across[6] each other so that they cannot be represented as independent units. They have a crossing area that allows the people to choose another sphere, to return, even to stay in the contact zone of two or many spheres. The size of the sphere is variable, their content is also variable, even new spheres could appear in time. Their variation depends on how the people   perceive their world and how they choose to change it. So the cluster of social spheres is surrounded by an omnipresent big sphere which is the ideology. Between the ideology and people there is a permanent exchange of influence. The people produce change of ideology and the new ideology changes the people. The ideology objectified in social contexts makes people behave as functional requirements of the social system demand. But the people do not simply follow the requirements as they were machines. They have the power to judge, to contest and to modify little by little the aspects that do not correspond to their will. In that moment the social contexts change, therefore the ideology too.[7] Of course, the man's volitional act is immediately intended and with unconscious impact upon society.[8]

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of a pot, the mourning gesture when somebody dies, etc.

[5] Examples of social spheres: a) thematic: economical, political, juridical, religious, ritual b) emotional: family, group of friends, whole community.

[6] Imagine the interaction between economical sphere and those correlated with emotional criterion (family and community here): in Luo community from Kenya (DIETLER, HERBICH 1998, 248-260) the pots are made exclusively by women who learn the craft after marriage from their mothers–in-law or other older woman in the husband's father's homestead. This economical matter implies a special relationship establish at the family level between younger and older women. The manufacturing of pots is an economical issue because these pots are further sold into the many markets within Luo territory near Lake Victoria. Into these markets another kind of interaction is established between those who sell and those who buy, namely the members of the communities.

[7] Within the Luo community, the potters are responsible for a permanent change of style that occurs at any stage of the technological chain (DIETLER, HERBICH 1998, 253).

[8] These thoughts are related with the 'agency" issue that some scholars today concern with (BARRETT 2001, 141-164).

The society, at its highest level of complexity knows three principal stages that seem to be generally accepted: a) bands represented by mobile hunter-gatherers, b) tribes and chiefdoms as intermediate societies and c) complex societies organized as states (SCHIFFER 2000, 4).

Each of these levels is represented by a typical social spheres cluster that can be found multiplied and personalized in each community, which corresponds to the respective level. If two societies / communities have contacts, then their clusters interrelate. The reverse situation (two communities situated in different parts of the world) implies two independent clusters. Here and only here, at the outer part of the social spheres I agree to see borders.

Inside the social spheres the social acts taking place have as result the polarization of some social entities. This polarization is never complete and is always in change. There are always certain degrees that characterize the social process. This is why I am not willing to see these social processes as bordering factors. I would rather accept a scale of differentiation.

The above approach is intended to respond to the need of bridging social theory in archaeology. I chose to bridge the processual view that treated societies as whole entities, as systems made up of subsystems, which socially determined the behavioral norms, with the opposite trend of seeing society from down towards its upper part, from particular towards general, that characterize the meaningful and humanistic approach of post-processualists. Generally, history knows cultural movements that appear as a reaction to the previous trend and so happened with the processualists and the post-processualists. They propose opposite research directions with different objects of study as starting points (society/people, respectively, individuals), but, in fact, the two trends are complementary.

As I said at the beginning, my system is multidimensional. The social component is cut across by another three components: the temporal one, the situational one and the material one. Till recently these units were seen as supporting and *describing* the social system. Space was just a physical place, a medium with a lot of objects forming the nature in which people were seen as biological entities belonging to it. Time was perceived like chronology, a scale with numbers where the events of the history were nicely attached (INGOLD 1993, 152-174). In this context, the material record was regarded as connected to certain behavioral categories, which appeared as functional responses to the systemic organized society (BARRETT 2001,146)

The interpretation that was proposed by the post-processualists comes from a change of perspective. They close the eyes of the modern critics that sit at their desks and watch the show of the history and they open the eyes of the prehistoric man. Now we are invited to see and fill the history the way he saw and felt it. For this there were proposed terms like *landscape* and *temporality* that represent the subjective facets of the space and time. "As the familiar domain of our dwelling it [the landscape] is with us, not against us, but it is no less real for that. And through living in it, the landscape becomes a part of us, just as we are a part of it" (INGOLD 1993, 154). We are "not spectators, but participants in the very performance of our tasks. […] The passage of time is none other than our own journey through the task scape in the business of dwelling"(INGOLD 1993, 159).

I owe the explanation about how the third dimension (the material one) crosses the social web. This is the key problem/ question of the whole archaeology: what do objects tell us about the social formations that produce them? A more realistic reformulation: Can they?

Starting with the 60's it has been argued that the ethnicity cannot be correlated with the distribution of material culture (DIETLER, HERBICH 1998, 233; STARK 1998, 9; WELSCH, TERRELL 1998, 50). For prehistory "ethnicity" is a contested and problematic modern concept that eludes translation into archaeological terms. Also it cannot be designated societies and cultures on the bases of material patterning.

Still, how can social groups and social processes be identified in the material record? The relation between the archaeological record and the social entities is a contextualized one (HODDER 1987). The past reality that has marked the artifact has multiple dimensions. It includes not only the material, but also the ideal and the imaginary (CRIADO 1995, 195). If we see past reality this way, then a simple artifact could tell us more.

But how could we "read" the archaeological record?

A notable trend in interpretative archaeology that implied intense and complex discussions, presents the material culture as a form of communication, a kind of "writing". For Shanks and Tilley "(1987, 102) the artifacts are a set of resources, "a symbolic order in practice, something drawn on in political relations, activated and manipulated in ideological systems ". The logic of their assertion could be correct, but the difficulty appears when a proper"translation" is required to be done.

Among other scholars Felipe Criado (1995, 201) thinks that such a reading is impossible to be realized since many components of the text are absent.The absent signs are related with his "will to visibility" concept that

states the selectivity of the archaeological record. This means that not all activities, all social processes, all people of the past can be traced in the archaeological record. The "will to visibility reflects a specific cultural rationality and is related to social representations and ideological discourses". Therefore the social rationality determines social actions whose results expressed in material terms, demonstrate different degrees of visibility (CRIADO1995, 197).

Then how could be the social reality identified only through the patterning of the archaeological record? Dietter and Herbich (1998, 233-234) consider that this attempt must rely on two methodological steps: (1) identifying "the conceptual tools by which archaeologists define patterns and (2) in what ways, and to what extent,  the patterns they define may be related to social and cultural identity".

The usual "tool" for defining patterns in archaeological record was the style of the artifact. The style was regarded as a static feature, as describing the artifact, sometimes as simply a decoration. Considering the artifact as only an object does not help us to understand the social conditions that are inferred. We have to appreciate the processes by which style is created, namely the technological steps. The technique represents the link between things and society. The social rationality and the physico-technical environment determine certain choices within the operational steps. The technical system is based upon the concept of the *chaîne opératoire*, which regards the final product as a result of consecutive operational steps (DIETLER, HERBICH 1998, 237-238). These steps are socially determined. The man who makes the artifact can realize every step in the traditional way he was taught or may choose to modify the technical link of the operational chain. His choices determined by "dispositions" to act form the so called *habitus* concept of Bourdieu's and are influenced by the past material conditions (DIETLER, HERBICH 1998, 246 ).

Eventually, if scholars cannot reach the meaning of the archaeological record because of the missing parts, they could compensate it through an "excess of subjectivity" based on intuition (CRIADO 1995, 202). A great importance in interpreting archaeological data is attributed to the imaginative approach based on assumption. Both terms, assumption and imagination, are sustained by a theoretical framework that motivates the importance of using such means in scientific research. The assumptions are simple instruments for research. There is not need to be believed. What is important is to see their implications and the results they conduct to (PHELAN, REYNOLDS 1996, 89). Concerning the imagination, it

is seen risky since it is without a scientific ground, but it is necessary because it represents the engine which produces the questions whose answers form the interpretation (HODDER 2000, 67).But one should be careful to the answers. The questions are permitted to be fantastic but the answers, namely the interpretation, should reflect the probable truth.

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The funeral evidence is considered to offer the most precisely information about the social dimensions of a past society because, generally, a grave is a closed complex. Thus, the inventory and the other elements of the mortuary practice expressed in variables like grave size, shape and expenditure, body position, orientation and preservation are closely linked with the social status of the deceased. For this paper that concerns with material record and its social implications, the mortuary evidence seems to be the most adequate issue to be analyzed. In the next lines I shall try to sketch a short theoretical framework regarding the restrictive factors in interpreting the funeral record, followed by two particular cases representing the most famous mortuary phenomena of the Mycenaean world: the shaft graves of Mycenae and the *tholos* tombs.

## 2. From Mortuary Data to Social Valences: Subjective and Objective Limiting Factors

A close analysis of all the elements that characterize the funeral depositions can provide clues about the social organization of the past society. There are three dimensions that should be combined in order to obtain mortuary patterns with social relevance: - the material one of grave goods, raw materials used for the grave elaboration and biological information (age, sex and pathology) provided by the human remains; - the time/chronology; - the micro- and macro-space (the place of the body/bodies and the offerings inside the grave, respectively, the place of the grave within the funeral space and the spatial relation with the other contemporary evidence of different type).

A large debate was on how the mortuary variability could be socially interpreted. One of the major objectives of the processsualists was to identify general rules of cultural and social behavior based on the archaeological evidence (TRIGGER 1990, 300, 302). Within this framework they sought to formulate lows of correspondence between patterns of the mortuary treatment and certain living status of the deceased (BINFORD

1972; PARKER PEARSON 1984, 63). But such universal, world-wide applicable laws are impossible to establish since the burial custom depend on the metaphysical believes concerning the living and the dead, believes that are always different from one community to the other. Moreover, they constantly change in time[9], in spite of the idea that the death perception is a constant issue that transcends the changing fashion, the economic evolution or the political compulsion (CAVANAGH 1998, 103). It is not rejected the idea of generalization, but the general rules must be colligated to the smaller cultural and territorial entities, in order to be better sustained by the particular context of study. This is, in fact, the essence of the contextual archaeology promoted by the post-processualists (HODDER 1987, 146).

Another issue concerns the fidelity the archaeological record (particularly the funeral one) shows in reflecting the social reality. Today the unanimous opinion is that "burial ritual is not a passive reflection of other aspects of life. It is meaningfully constructed and our cross-cultural generalizations must take the ideational and ideological into account"(HODDER 1982, 141). There is not always a direct correspondence between the mortuary record and social organization as it was considered few decades ago (BINFORD 1972; HÄRKE 1997, 21). The funeral customs do not "mirror" the social relationships, they distort the social reality (VOUTSAKI 1998, 41; 1995, 56, 57) according to the will of the living persons. Moreover, the same categories of funeral data might not have same meaning because the meaning of the material culture is given by the diverse contexts of the social practice. The material culture is not

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[9] In order to illustrate the spatial and temporal variation it is relevant the Mycenaean *tholos* tomb case that is largely presented in the following sections. The same monumental tomb is thought to be royal in Mycenae (PELON 1990, 107) and not only royal in Messenia. For the later area could be cited Wilkie's (1987, 128) conclusion regarding the *tholoi* of Nichoria. She states that they might represent family tombs of wealthy and powerful people, but not necessarily royalties. As regards the temporal evolution, it can be argued that starting with LH III A a rise of the chamber tomb number can be signaled (VOUTSAKI 1995, 62). Although some *tholoi* continued to be reused and new ones erected, their number is overwhelmed by chamber tombs. For those sites where *tholoi* stop to be used it could be assessed that the former local rulers fit into the large category of population buried in poor chamber tombs, and this phenomenon do not characterize the entire nonpalatial area as Voutsaki (1995, 62) noted. The idea of a progressive restriction of *tholoi* to the palatial centres in LH III A (VOUTSAKI 1995, 62) cannot be sustained by the still  numerous new built *tholoi* in nonpalatial sites.

the result of human behavior, but "the condition that facilitates certain strategies of social practice" (BARRETT 2001, 156).

Another risky factor in approaching material record consists in so called "naturalized power "issue. This thesis convicts the habit of seeing the reality through the present norms considered as being "normal". The incapacity to delimit the today's cultural limits regarding the essential issues of people's identity conducts to a superficial interpretation of the ancient societies (MESKELL 2001, 198-199).

Relating these thoughts to the funeral data we easily observe that a wealthy grave is interpreted as belonging to a wealthy and high positioned individual because in our days the well positioned people are largely the richest. The reverse inference can be done for the poor. This rationalization is most of the time a correct one, but it becomes without value in front of some anthropological evidence that provides the equality of all the members of a community in front of their god.

### 3. The Mycenaean Society and Its Most Impressive Funeral Monuments

### a) A Short View over the Funeral Customs of Middle and Late Helladic Society

The Middle Helladic community is seen as a small-scale society living in centres that had only a local importance and providing little external contacts, in comparison with the neighboring areas as Aegean and Crete. The evidence does not suggest an increase in the population during that time (DICKINSON 1989, 133). It even proves that the mainland suffered an important depopulation (WRIGHT 1995, 69).

The major remark on the Middle Helladic society consists in identifying the kinship as the major source of the social rules (VOUTSAKI 1998, 444). It seems that the wealth and the social status have not a significant importance in a society where the "feeling of togetherness" is still persistent (NORDQUIST 1990, 38). It involves large fractions of the population taking part in the events that mark the community life and it can be traced, especially, in the funeral data. The common practice is represented by the intramural burials. The burials that were placed around or even below the houses, don't display a great expenditure in building and furnishing the grave. Most grave are simple earth-cut pits or pits cut into soft bed-rock. The grave-floor is often strewed with pebbles and the upper part is covered with one or more stone slabs. The adult were placed in

contracted position, while the children were generally buried in *pithoi* or coarse jars. The grave goods are rare and the grave marks are occasional (DICKINSON 1977, 33). The scarcity of rich graves could suggest the idea that the outstanding material or the elaborated grave-building weren't needed to express the social difference since the status of each person was inscribed in kin relations (DICKINSON 1977, 33).

To the end of the Middle Helladic period it can be observed how the phenomenon of extramural burial begins to manifest. While the intramural burials are still common, the cemeteries placed at some distance from the settlements represent an increasing tendency and it can be interpreted in social terms. The new funeral space is considered to be reserved for a certain group of people, a kind of elite. The idea is sustained by the greater attention paid to the extramural burials. Thus, the wish to emphasize the importance of certain members of the community caused the consistent expenditure put into the building of the grave and so appeared the necessity of choosing a formal funeral site (NORDQUIST 1990, 39).

The only other type of burial that is often practiced in Middle Helladic is the *tumulus*. The *tumuli* comprise central burials or constructions, signs of burning and burials in enormous *pithoi*. They show variation in wealth. They also cover different numbers of individuals up to whole families (DICKINSON 1977, 33). The general impression of poverty makes Dickinson (1977, 33) to consider the burial ritual as being uniform. On the other hand, Sofia Voutsaki (1998, 44) sees the mortuary practices of Middle Helladic as being characterized by "a wide diversity of forms and combinations". Anyhow, both of them agree that new important differences occurred in the funeral customs in Middle Helladic III. They can be structured as it follows: a) a greater diversity of grave types and the appearance of new ones, including the famous shaft graves and *tholoi*; b) the occurrence of formal disposal sites, namely the cemeteries; c) the modification of the ritual practices that include reuse of tombs and secondary treatment of the dead accompanied by the removal of the earlier grave goods; the animal offerings, libations, and "funerary meals" are also practiced (VOUTSAKI 1998, 44-45); d) more and more graves display richer offerings.

The cause of the transformation cannot be seen as being unilateral. Sofia Voutsaki (1998, 48) pleads for taking in account both the intrusion of foreign material and ideological values, and the inner will to create a separate identity. It is undoubtedly that the modification of the funeral rite represents the reflection of the changes that occurred within the dawn of the Mycenaean civilization. Some Middle Helladic settlements evolved into

important centers of the so called chiefdoms over much of the mainland, although having regional differences. In the Argolid, Mycenae manages to overtake the control and to have the exclusivity in displaying the most elaborate tombs and wealth. On the other hand, the Middle Helladic sites of Messenia have an equal development since the valuable goods are spread in the many sites in the area (VOUTSAKI 1998, 54).

The Late Helladic I phase represents a moment when the wealth is unequally distributed. The simple pits and cists are poor, while the first chamber tombs tend to be rich, but none of them reaches the extraordinary deposition found in the grave Circles in Mycenae. On the mainland, at this moment, the *tholos* tombs can be traced only in Messenia. During the next period (LH II) the differences of the wealth distribution become less sharp. It is the moment of the richest chamber tombs. The *tholos* tombs start to spread and, in Argolid, they are more and more adopted while the shaft graves are abandoned and the cists and pits tend to disappear (VOUTSAKI 1995, 58; DICKINSON 1977, 33). It is estimated that the *tholos* tombs were as rich the chamber tombs, but this assumption is not entirely sure because most *tholoi* were robbed. Since the chamber tombs and *tholos* tombs represent more than half of the total number of tombs during LH I-II (Fig. 1) it seems correct to appreciate the wealth of LH II period as being more equally and gradually distributed (VOUTSAKI 1995, 58). Mycenae is considered to have already achieved a position in the Argive Plane: at the time it had seven *tholoi* and a number of rich chamber tomb. Still, it hasn't the power to obstruct the development of the neighboring communities (VOUTSAKI 1995, 62).

Starting with the LH III A period there are two processes that can be clearly observed: one of them regards the increasing distinction between the elite living in the great centers of the chiefdoms and the rest of the population; the other tendency concerns the trend to uniformity that characterize the life of the people living outside the palatial centers. These processes continue in LH III B when the features of the ranked society become clearer than before. The centralized system smothers the authority of the local leaders and promotes a higher level competition between the main centers of the Mycenaean chiefdoms (VOUTSAKI 1995, 62). These centers retain the supremacy in richness and elaboration of tombs. This is why the funeral data are good indicators for the social and political changes. As regards the tomb type variety, it must be emphasized the wide utilization of the chamber tombs that represent more than ¾ of the total number graves (VOUTSAKI 1995, fig VII c). Many of the *tholoi* built

in the previous periods (LH I and LH II) continue to be reused, while new ones are constructed[10].

## b) The Social Inferences of the Mycenaean Shaft Graves Evidence

At the beginning of Late Helladic the Shaft Grave Period[11] expresses the gradual passage to the new social and political conditions. In spite of the poor evidence from settlements, the shaft graves from the two Circles at Mycenae and the others less impressive from elsewhere in

[10] Being interested in analyzing the amplitude of the tholos tomb phenomenon, we used a complete catalogue of the Mycenaean *tholoi* (CAVANAGH, MEE 1998, 58, 59, 81, 82, 83, 98) to do some countings. Anyway the first phase is not very well represented during LH I (only 12 *tholos* tombs). Starting with LH II A the number of *tholoi* grows considerably reaching in all the number of 35 *tholoi* for the second phase (LH II A and L H II B). In the following temporal sequence, represented by LH III A and B, the total number of *tholoi* in use is the greatest: 71. Almost half of them represent reused tombs. The new t*holos* tombs building activity is intense. Throughout the LH III period there were erected 39 new tombs, especially in LH III A (22). Starting with LH III B, the cease of new tomb that characterizes the LH III C sequence began to make itself felt. At the end, LH III C period represents a span of time while the burial in *tholos* tombs transforms itself in memory. The number of tombs is considerably smaller (10) and the reused tombs are four times more than those erected now (2).

The statistical situation must be completed with the geographical evolution. The first *tholos* tombs were constructed in Messenia (DICKINSON 1977, 61; CAVANAGH, LAXTON 1981, 132). The earliest two at Koriphasion and Koukounara (Gouvalari 2) are considered to be built in MH and then reused (CAVANAGH, MEE 1998, 58 and the bibliography). By LH I the *tholoi* start to spread to the other Messenian sites: Pylos, Voidokoilia, Tragana 2, Koukounara, etc. In LH II A other regions begin to erect *tholoi* : Triphylia, Elis, Argolid,, Achaea and Attica. In Acarnania and Thessaly the *tholos* is present in LH II B (CAVANAGH, MEE 1998, 44).

For the LH III A and B, O. Pelon distinguishes two categories of areas where the amplitude of the *tholos* tomb phenomenon differed - major areas: Messenia, Argolid, Laconia, Attica, Beotia, Thessaly and minor areas: Achaia, Phocis, north-eastern Greece, Crete, Aegean Islands and Asia Minor (PELON 1976, 392- 423).

By LH III C the man regions where the *tholoi* are still in use are Kephallenia, Aetolia, Phocis, Thessaly, Asia Minor and Crete, a sort of " outer sphere of the Mycenaean world " (CAVANAGH, MEE 1998, 92). It is appreciated that in Thessaly, Messenia and Crete the *tholos* resisted up to the Dark Age

the Mycenaean world[12] represent a precious source. They could provide indices for the wide debated issue of the chiefdom emergence, especially in the Argolid.

The chiefdoms are the result of two processes: a) the centralization of power within certain regions and b) the hierarchical organization of the persons within those regional communities (SHENNAN SUSAN 1982, 28). A) While the important MH settlements from the Argive Plain as Lerna, Argos and Asine follow a descending line, Mycenae displays elaborate artifacts, some of them exotic. The opulence and the monopoly of the external contacts are sufficient to sustain the idea of centralized power in the favour of the Mycenaeans. B) The treatment of the deceased reflected

(CAVANAGH, MEE 1998, 92).

[11] The Shaft Grave Period, which is considered to include "several shorter - lived ceramics phases ( MH III, LH I, early LH II A )" (RUTTER 2001, 125), lasts approximately 200 years whether we choose the year 1550 as the final time border to delimit the early part of the LH II A period. Here is a chronological scheme to help us understand the argument:

Middle Helladic
I     2050 / 2000 - 1950 / 1900
II    1950 / 1900 - 1750 / 1720
III   1750 / 1720 - 1680
Late Helladic
I      1680 - 1600 / 1580
IIA   1600 / 1580 - 1520 / 1480
IIB   1520 / 1480 - 1445 / 1415  (MANNING 1995).

Still, the scholars define the Shaft Grave Era as a period during which burials were made in Grave Circle A and B at Mycenae and they are temped to measure the span of time of the whole Shaft Grave sequence counting the generations that might have been buried only in the two grave Circles. This way, Dickinson finds four or at most five generations, which don't represent much more than a century (DICKINSON 1977, 51). Dietz (1991, 316-21) is more generous: 150 years. These assumptions are correct since they only refer to the graves from Mycenae. If the Shaft Grave Era was defined on the basis of all the shaft graves from Argolid, then we would observe that MH III A becomes a quite well represented period, with two possible shaft graves in Circle B (Λ2 and Φ) and another two at Argos (grave 82 from tumulus Γ and grave 3 from tumulus E) (DIETZ 1991, 246). Thus the archaeologists won't be tempted to see only the great number of MH III B- LH II A graves from Mycenae when they establish the limits of the Shaft Grave Era.

It seems difficult to explain how 100 or 150 years could cover a span of time of about 200 years well represented in all chronological levels from MH III A to LH II A. I think it should be either shortened the chronological scheme or extended the Shaft Grave Era. The last one seems more adequate.

in the body disposal, display of grave goods, elaboration of grave, position within the funeral space, are undoubtedly connected with the role the individual used to play as a member of the community. The special evidence of the Circles A and B from Mycenae indicates high positioned persons that could be part of the same family/clan since the presence of the children can be noticed. It is obvious that they couldn't gain a place in the Circles through individual merit, but inheriting the status (KILIAN-DIRLMEIER 1988, 164; NORDQUIST 1990, 38).

It should be noticed the predominance of men[13] and the correspondence between the military and social status (KILIAN-DIRLMEIER 1988, 164). The earliest mail burials do not show a constant pattern of grave goods association. They contain at most one weapon. Later in the second phase of the two Circles chronology[14], it can be distinguish a

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[12] Beside the well known shaft graves from Mycenae, in the Argolid could be identified another five points where there were found graves that are thought to be of shaft type. The five locations are:

1) Argos, *Prokopion,* grave 82 from Tumulus Γ, dated MH III A;
2) Argos, *Od. Herakleous*, grave3 from Tumulus E, dated MH III A;
3) Asine, *Barbouna*, 2 shaft graves of LH I A;
4) Lerna, 2 shaft graves of LH I B;
   5) Prosymna, *The Argive Heraeum*, 2 shaft graves or cists, dated MH III B / LH I A (DIETZ 1991, 276-277).

[13] Children and females are underrepresented in the Circle B: there are 15 men and only 5 women and children (DIETZ 1991,250, fig. 78). Cavanagh and Mee (1998, 129) state that there are seven child grave, most of them containing adults, too. For the Circle A the sex of the 19 persons is now difficult to be exactly established because the first estimations relied on the grave goods, not on the bone study (DICKINSON 1977, 48). Anyway, Mylonas (2001, 28) states that there were 8 men, 9 women and 2 children.

[14] The most difficult in analyzing the graves from Circle B is to establish a chronology. There are a few main attempts in this direction, which are based either on the pottery (mainly GRAZIADIO 1988 and DIETZ 1991) or on other issues that take into account the size and the elaboration of the graves and the non- pottery grave goods as well. The reuse of many of the graves and the similar finds in them make the establishment of a relative chronology difficult. A punctilious grave order cannot be done but distinguishing phases in the use of the Circle represents a more successful approach. This is the kind of approach the archaeologists adopted (DICKINSON 1977, 42-46; KILIAN-DIRMEIER 1988, 161-163; GRAZIADIO 1988, 343-372; DIETZ 1991, 264, fig. 77) and their opinions meet each other by means of promoting a tripartite scheme (Fig. 2). The three proposed chronological schemes from Laffineur's (1989, 234) table do not present big differences. There are some graves which are not in the same phase

certain group of men that have a complete set of weapons represented by sword, dagger and spear. Further on the pattern in the weapon association changes. The spear is not longer present while the long sword is always accompanied by a short sword or a dagger. The men with complete military equipment also have precious vessels and jewellery. It can be observed that the burial ritual reaches a fixed form that inscribes both the military and social status. The modality the two factors condition each other is difficult to determine (KILIAN-DIRLMEIER 1988, 161,162,164).

The fact that the shaft graves vary in size and offerings suggests differences in rank. Circle B contains a number of pit graves which

at all three schemes, but they find themselves in the next earlier or later phase (for example, I., Ξ, K ). The only big difference concerns P grave.

Dietz has done a diagram of seriation for a wide range of graves from Argolid (including those from Circle B at Mycenae) on the bases of pottery form types and contexts of graves (DIETZ 1991, 243-246, fig. 77).In this diagram we can see that the first graves occurred during MH III A period, but most graves appeared in MH III B and LH I phases. If we consider only the shaft graves as they are delimited by Cavanagh and Mee (1998, table 4.3), then we observe that MH III A level is not longer represented in Dietz's chronological scheme , because the only two graves we meet here are not shaft graves. Also, if we eliminate the pit graves (A1, A2, Σ, H. Λ1, Λ2, Φ) from Dickinson, Kilian-Dirlmeier and Graziadio's distribution the first phase becomes less represented.

Another attempt is to add Dietz's scheme to the others. In this case, for the first phase correspond MH III A and early and middle MH III B. The second phase includes late MH III B and half of LH I A. The last phase can be assigned to the second half of LH I A and LH I B. Here is the detailed scheme:

The first phase       MH III A: Λ2 group 2, Φ;
                      MH III B:    - early: H, I2, Π, Λ 1;
                                       - middle: Z, Ξ2, Λ;

The second phase  MH III B:    - late: Δ2, Ξ1, I1, N2, Y, B, N;
                      LH I A:       - early: Γ group 6,Λ1;

The third phase    LH I A: - late: M, E group 2, Γ group 2, O group 3, O group 2;
                      LH I B: - O group 1, K, Δ1, E group 1, Γ

The above correspondence that I have established is very close to that of Graziadio's (1988, 343):
Early Phase ( the first phase here )= MH;
Late Phase I ( the second phase )= end of MH - early LH I A;
Late Phase II (the third phase)= LH I.

presumably represent individuals of lesser status. It is likely that the elite did not reject the humble members of the community. It would be interesting to figure out the criteria used for the selection for their acceptance inside the Circle. Were the poor fellows included in Circle just because they probably belonged to the same family or because of their personal virtues? On the other hand Circle A is reserved only for the elite.

It would be interesting to establish the report between the two circles in their contemporary phase. P. K. Watson (1996, 102) states that if different components of the funeral rituals characterize contemporaneous groups of burials placed in separate funeral spaces, then they represent social differentiation based on the kin descent, not on the hierarchical scale. This is the conclusion that Laffineur (1989, 237-238) also embraces after his analysis of the weapon imagery and the funeral ornaments. The Circles do not belong to the same family because the motifs that appear in Circle A are totally absent in Circle B. The further considerations about the Atreid family would be just speculations or induced ideas from Schliemann's first interpretation.

It has been argued that the funeral customs are connected with the status, but most see this relation as a direct reflection of the social role in the mortuary practice. Still, the funeral custom "do not simply legitimate status; they also create status in the process of differentiation" (VOUTSAKI 1995, 60). The successors that organize the mortuary ceremony are aware that the veneration of the dead and the richness of the offerings could ensure them a privileged position. The other individuals or groups that cannot display the same wealth risk losing power and social prestige (PARKER PEARSON 1984, 64; BARRETT 1996, 396).

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The only difference consists in ascribing the Early Phase to the whole MH. He explains this choice by means of presence of pottery groups including "only long- lived MH examples and / or vases of late , but not strictly final, MH date" (GRAZIADIO 1988, 343).

As Dietz's (1991, 250, fig. 78) chronological diagram shows, the Circle A graves start to be used during LH I A phrase, then the major burial activity develops during LH I B period and, at the end, the final traces are from LH I A in grave I. Also Dickinson has reasonably argued that Circle B was still in use when burials in Graves VI, II, IV, V and probably III were made and that the Circle B sequence did not overlap more than half of Circle A burials (DICKINSON 1977, 51). Graziadio (1988, 371) states that the two Circles were contemporaneously used during his Late Phase II. Circle B had probably three phases corresponding to three generations, the last one overlapping the first of Circle A to which might have been ascribed two phases/generations.

Another way to gain prestige and legitimate the high status is through securing rare external prestige goods. The aim is to develop exchange relations with more developed societies and to retain the exclusivity of it (RENFREW 1982, 6; SHENNAN STEPHEN 1982, 38; WATSON 1996, 96). In the Early Mycenaean Period such external prestige goods were secured from Crete, Aegean Islands and Egypt.

### c) The Social Valences of the *Tholos* Tombs

Because of its size and remarkable technique, the *tholos* tomb was considered to represent the royal funeral monument (PELON 1990, 107). Still, some specialists have been trying to show that the *tholos* tombs are not the graves of sovereigns, but of rich people. For instance, Darcque did a very simple counting. There are 50 sites with *tholos* tombs in the mainland (PELON 1976, 153-260, table IV, 483-490) on one hand, and, on the other hand, there are only four centers that can be considered palatial: Pylos, Mycenae, Tyrint and Thebe. Beside these sites, there are others that can be seen as "résidences de chef ": Menelaion, Orchomene, Zygouries, Phylakopi (DARCQUE 1987, 202). How could we consider all the *tholos* tombs as being royal since there are so little palaces? Can we than take as being royal the *tholos* tombs that are near the palaces, only? Pelon (1990, 107) states that at least for Mycenae this is true, but, on the other hand, Dickinson (1977, 62-63) sustains that the six tombs from Mycenae dated LH II A are too many to represent a succession of kings. Further on, Darque (1987, 202) analyses the report between the two most representative funeral monuments from Messenia: the *tholos* tombs and chamber tombs. He observes that the two grave types are exclusive. Among the 30 sites with *tholos* tombs that the scientist used for his study, only three contains chamber tombs, too. In this case, Darque asks whether it is correct to consider that in Messenia lived only sovereigns. A possible answer to that question is provided by Wilkie (1987, 127-128), who analyzed the *tholos* tombs of Nichoria and concluded that they might represent family tombs of those who had enough prestige and wealth to afford such a tomb, which could be reused when a member of the family was lost.

So far, we see that the *tholos* tomb corresponds to rich and powerful people (the erection of such a tomb requires a lot of work and the contribution of many people; they must have been controlled somehow by the person or the family for whom the *tholos* was constructed). But how

can we explain then the rich chamber tombs of Early Mycenaean Period? Weren't they belonging to rich people, too? So which are the criteria for choosing one grave type or the other? We cannot know. What we know for sure is that the people buried in *tholos* tombs had families interested in gaining power and prestige. Two arguments can be brought to sustain this affirmation. The first one is that the communities from Nichoria placed their *tholos* tombs along major roads. This suggests the wish to be known and respected by means of displaying an outstanding monument whose great dimensions could also be observed after its covering with earth (WILKIE 1987, 128). The other argument is more suggestive than conclusive. It concerns the human sacrifice that has been argued that was performed during the burial ritual. For instance, at Dendra, two supposed sovereigns, man and woman, are considered to be buried at the same moment. Another four skeletons on the floor or in a pit might also represent servants. The skeletons without offerings from Kazarma *tholos* and Thorikos were thought to be slaves (CAVANAGH, MEE 1998, 53).

It is often said that the *tholos* tombs were reused, some of them, for a long time. Since some *tholoi* had a short life and others a longer utilization, we wonder how can be interpreted the cessation of a *tholos* and the erection of another one? Here are some possible situations:
- the family abandoned this type of grave preferring a chamber tomb;
- the owner chose to construct another more impressive *tholos*;
- a family declined to the advantage of another family, after a period of competition;
- the *tholos* tomb collapsed;
- the tomb was robbed and so defiled.

Also, it is known that there were more such tombs in use during the same span of time in the same community[15].There are even case with more than three *tholoi* contemporaneously used. Thus, it becomes provocative to imagine how those local communities looked like. How was the dynamic of this phenomenon for the whole Mycenaean world? Is it the

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[15] Let us have a short lock over the situation of some Messenian centers (Fig. 2). As we see, there are sites where many *tholos* tombs coexist for a short time (Kakoreata) or centres where a single *tholos* tomb has a long duration (Voidokoilia). Also, there are other communities where there are more than two *tholos* that are contemporaneously used for a longer period of time (ex: Peristeria, Pylos, Koukounara). The chronological dates about each tholos are provided by the Cavanagh and Mee's (1998, 58, 59, 81, 82, 83, 98) catalogue mentioned above and the attached bibliography.

same for every region? Are there differences between neighboring communities? How can be socially or politically explained the existing similarities or distinctions?

The answer to these questions should require an elaborate and detailed analysis that cannot be done here. Still I can comment upon Cavanagh and Mee's (1998, 64) interpretation. They consider the *tholoi* that are continuously used from Early Mycenaean beyond LH III A1 as being an indicator for the process of political centralization within the Mycenaean states. This assertion could be valid for instance, for Argolid, where Mycenae has its nine *tholoi*, while else where in the region burial in *tholos* tombs seems to stop at the end of LH III A. But for Messesia the situation is completely different. Here there are many sites with long lasting *tholoi.* They cannot represent the centralization phenomenon since they are so many.

On the other hand, Cavanagh and Mee (1998, 64) propose a correct interpretation for the medium-sized tombs built in LH III A and B in Thessaly, Attica and Messenia. They "could signal the rise to prominence of rulers at secondary centers: either towns subsidiary to the major palaces, or smaller independent or buffer states in the interstices between the major powers of LH III Greece".

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The shaft graves of Mycenae and the *tholos* tombs of the Mycenaean world represent an invaluable source for identifying the past social reality. It is important to analyze them from as many angles as it could be done. Both the particular and the general perspectives provide important conclusions. Also, viewing them as parts of the people personal life and as components of elaborate social, cultural, economical, ritual structures, they could be totally capitalized.

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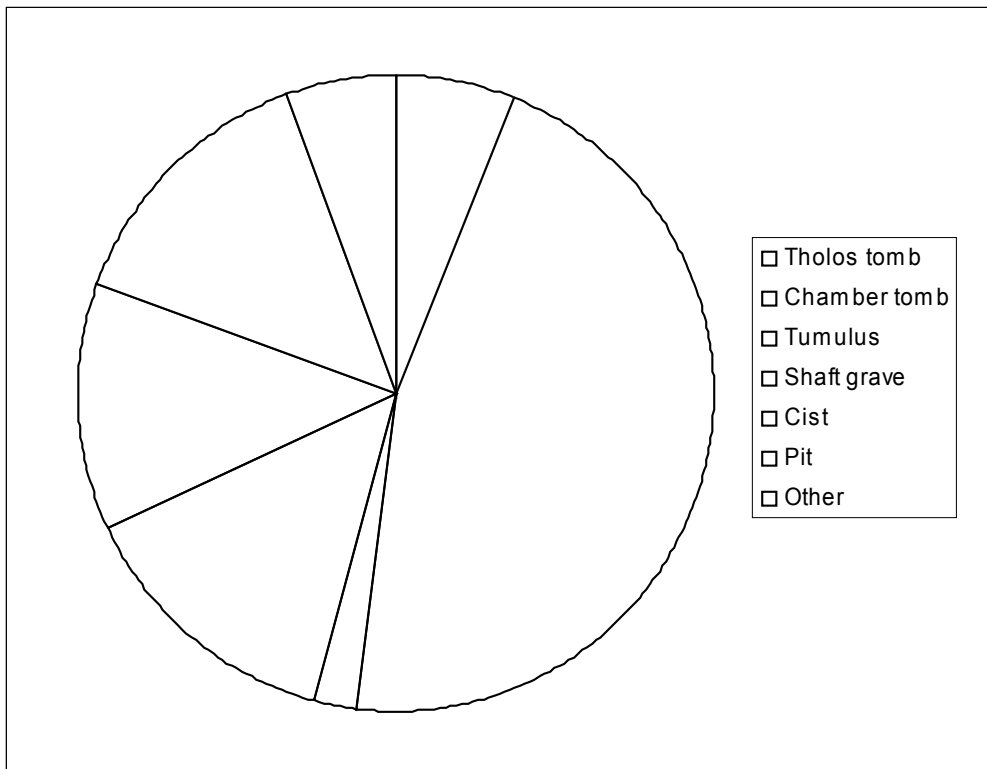


□ Tholos tomb
□ Chamber tomb
□ Tumulus
□ Shaft grave
□ Cist
□ Pit
□ Other

Fig. 1. Types of tombs in LH I-II (VOUTSAKI 1995, Pl. VII b).

|  | Dickinson | Kilian-Dirlmeier | Graziadio |
|---|---|---|---|
| The first phase | A1 | A1  (3) | A1 |
|  | A2 |  | A2  (4) |
|  | Z | Z    (15) | Z    (15) |
|  | H | H    (16) | H    (16) |
|  | Θ | Θ    (17) | Θ    (17) |
|  |  | I    (19-20) | I    (19-20) |
|  | Λ2 | Λ2  (25-26) | Λ2  (25-26) |
|  |  | Ξ    (32-33) | Ξ    (32-[33]) |
|  | Ξ1 | Ξ1  (34) | Ξ1  (34) |
|  |  |  | [P]  (39) |
|  | Σ | Σ    (41) | Σ    (41) |
|  | T | T    (42) | T    (42) |
|  | Φ | Φ    (44) | Φ    (44) |
| The second phase |  | A    (1) |  |
|  | B | B    (5) | B    (5) |
|  |  |  | [epichosis Γ] |
|  |  | Γ    (6) |  |
|  |  |  | [epichosis Δ] |
|  |  | Δ    (10-11) |  |
|  |  |  | [epichosis E] |
|  |  | E    (13) |  |
|  | I |  |  |
|  | K |  | [epichosis Λ] |
|  |  |  | Λ    (23) |
|  | Λ | Λ    (22) |  |
|  | Λ1 | Λ1  (24) | Toit N |

| The third phase | A | N (30) | [A] (2) |
| | B | A (2) | Γ (7,8,9) |
| | Γ | Γ (7,8,9) | Δ (12 or 11-12) |
| | Δ | Θ (35,36) | Υ (43) |
| | | Δ (12) | E (14) |
| | E | P (39) | K (21) |
| | Υ | E (14) | |
| | | Υ (43) | |
| | | K (21) | |
| | | A (23) | |
| | | | Λ1 (24) |
| | M | M (28) | M ([27]-28) |
| | N | N (31) | N (31) |
| | O | O (37) | O ([36]-37) |
| | Π | Π (38) | Π (38) |
| | P | | |

See next page.

Fig. 2. The Circle B chronologies (LAFFINEUR 1989, 234).

## LOCATION   CHRONOLOGICAL SCALE   THOLOS TOMBS

MH    LH I    LH IIA  LH IIB  LH IIIA  LH IIIB  LH IIIC

**KAKOVATOS**

A
B
C

**VOIDOKOILIA**

**PERISTERIA**

1
2
south
3

**PYLOS**

III
IV
GRAVE CIRCLE

**KOUKOUNARA**

AKONA 1
AKONA 2
GOUVALARI2
GOUVALARI 1
PHYTIES 2
PHITIES 1
LIVADITI
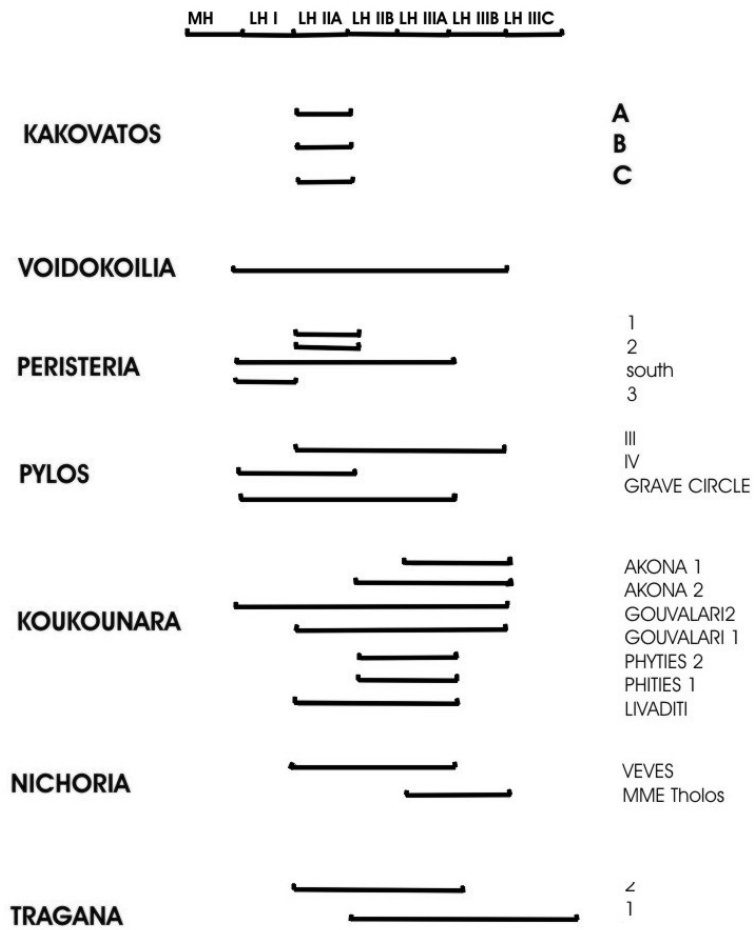
**NICHORIA**

VEVES
MME Tholos

**TRAGANA**

2
1

Fig. 3. Chronological dates of some Messenian *tholos* tombs. The source for this scheme is represented by the catalogues of Cavanagh and Mee's (1998, 58, 59, 81, 82, 83, 98; also see the bibliography).