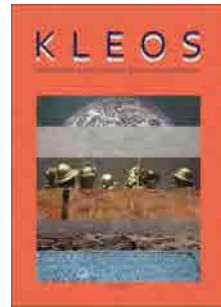




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# Unveiling the Symbolic Significance of Mycenaean Weaponry: Exploring Material Culture and Death in the Late Bronze Age Argolid

Meilin Lyu

## ABSTRACT

This paper delves into the Late Bronze Age Mycenaean civilisation's burial customs, to elucidate the dynamic relationship between weaponry assemblages and evolving societal dynamics by focusing on Mycenae, Dendra, and Prosymna. During the Palatial period, these societies underwent significant transformations, transitioning from kin groups to nuclear families as political units, reflecting shifts in societal organisation and power dynamics. The research scrutinises the specific weaponry findings in shaft graves, tholos tombs, and chamber tombs, elucidating their roles in combat functions and as prestige objects. By categorising the morphology of weaponry types, this study investigates the practicality of these weapons in warfare and their symbolic significance. The contextual analysis of burial sites unveils military identity and broader social conditions. The presence of precious material and intricate designs in weaponry underscores their roles in projecting social status and identities. This paper emphasises the intricate relationships between weaponry, elite representation, and cultural identity, providing fresh insights into Mycenaean militarism and social dynamics.

## INTRODUCTION

During the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1700-1100 BC), the Mycenaean civilisation in the Argolid region of mainland Greece underwent changes in burial customs that reflected ideological and political shifts in societal organisation and power dynamics. Emerging palatial centres like Mycenae and Midea, originally developed as small settlements, consolidated, governed by individual chiefs or allied groups who acquired wealth through various means. Burial customs symbolised identities after death and evolved from earlier single burials in pits and cists to the reuse of Middle Helladic (MH)

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burials, marking a transition from kin groups to nuclear families as political units. In the Palatial period, power became concentrated within the Mycenaean network, focusing on individuals and the control of prestige goods as indicators of status.<sup>1</sup> Rich burials in chamber tombs and tholos tombs demonstrated control over exotic materials. The peak of Mycenaean civilisation in the Aegean occurred in Late Helladic IIIA2, leading to an expansion of settlements. Consequently, the emphasis shifted from luxurious burials to labour-intensive building programs, resulting in a decline of prestige objects in tombs. As such, chamber tombs were popular throughout the Argolid in Late Helladic III and were continuously in use until the end of Late Helladic IIIC.<sup>2</sup>

This paper aims to explore the specific weaponry findings in different tomb types within the Mycenaean civilisation, namely shaft graves, tholos tombs, and chamber tombs. The Argolid region, known for its fertile soils and strategic location, played a prominent role in the Mycenaean world. The primary focus lies on the burial sites located at Mycenae as the dominant site, with Dendra and Prosymna as independent centres in the direct neighbourhood of the Mycenaean king. These sites were selected based on the abundance, quality, and diversity of weaponry funerary offerings, allowing for a detailed, topical exploration of their significance.

The prominent Shaft Graves of Grave Circles A and B in Mycenae marked a new era of elite burials, with the former being located south of the Lion Gate and enclosed by shelly sandstone slabs.<sup>3</sup> In comparison, Grave Circle B was distinguished by a greater number of burials and complex construction techniques, with a roof that sealed the lower part of the shaft and earth filling the upper part to prevent water seepage.<sup>4</sup> Both grave circles have a similar, diversified range of weaponry assemblages; in particular, the swords and daggers have outstanding depictions of hunting and fighting scenes, which could symbolise the ideals of men.<sup>5</sup> Tholos tombs, such as those in Prosymna and Dendra, were circular structures with a narrow dromos and a stone corbel vault roof.<sup>6</sup> They were primarily used for single burials and displayed conspicuous consumption. The tholoi tomb at Dendra has demonstrated a highly diverse range of sword types and rare finds

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1 Nakassis et al., 2010.

2 Lantzas 2014.

3 Grave Circle A dated from late MH/early LH to LHIIA, and Grave Circle B dated from the latter half of MH to LHI (Mylonas, 1966).

4 Mylonas 1966, 98-99.

5 Voutsaki 1999, 115.

6 Ibid., 118.

TYPE	DATE	TOMB
Shaft Graves	late MH/early LH — LHIIA (Mylonas 1966)	Grave Circle A
Shaft Graves	latter half of MH — LHI period (Mylonas 1966)	Grave Circle B
Tholos Tomb	LHII ca. 1500-1400 BCE (Wace et al. 1953)	Prosymna
Tholos Tomb	LHIIIA ca. 1450-1350 BCE (Persson 1931)	The Royal Tomb of Dendra
Chamber Tombs	LHI-LHIIIA1 (Steinmann 2020)	Dendra Site
Chamber Tombs	LHI-LHIIIB2 (Steinmann 2020)	Prosymna

**Figure 1.**

Approximate datings of tombs discussed in this article (created by author).

of defensive weaponry, including armour pieces and ornaments of helmets, despite instances of looting. Additionally, the Argolid region had numerous chamber tombs, including 16 at Dendra and 50 at Prosymna, which were underground graves with a passage and a sealed entrance. In comparison to other forms of tombs, chamber tombs were recognised as encompassing a more extensive and more varied community, both in terms of social interactions and economic dynamics.<sup>7</sup> As such, these burial customs and sites provide valuable insights into Mycenaean militarism and evolving societal dynamics during the Late Bronze Age (see figure 1).

### RESEARCH QUESTION AND AIM

Mycenaean funerary practices have been extensively researched and supported by rich but somewhat fragmented archaeological evidence due to varying publication and excavation documentation styles, degrees of preservation, and the limited contexts of buried individuals, leading to divergent interpretations.<sup>8</sup> Scholars have proposed various theories on how Mycenaean

<sup>7</sup> Wright 2008.  
<sup>8</sup> Lantzas 2014.

treated their ancestors and constructed their identity through burial structures, depicted iconography on steles and funerary monuments, and the re-deposition of the dead by examining the positioning of human remains and traces of commemorative feasting.<sup>9</sup> However, it remains debatable whether modern concepts can be used to deduce past agents' behaviours. The concept of "ownership" is a modern Western idea and may not be suitable for interpreting the distant past of another society. It is also contentious whether prestige materials necessarily imply status and wealth, whether weaponry symbolises ideal masculinity, and whether burial artefacts directly reflect biography of the deceased, as the individual may not have used these items. Additionally, the use of typology has been criticised for not taking into account of burial contexts and making generalisations about individual actions.<sup>10</sup>

This paper aims to explore the social construction of death representation during the Mycenaean period, focusing primarily on weaponry assemblages and arrangements as material evidence. By gathering detailed datasets on the morphology of weaponry types, lengths of objects, and their chronology, this research aims to examine the use and function of specific weaponry objects, to gain insights into both their practicality in military actions and their significance as ornamental items within the ideological framework of Mycenaean civilisation.

Adopting a Foucauldian archaeological analysis approach, this paper does not seek to uncover a "historical truth" but rather (re)produce a discursive "truth-making process".<sup>11</sup> This approach deconstructs how power relations and discourse were embedded in and supported by changing social conditions and structures, reflecting the collective attitudes of Mycenaean communities towards death across each period. By analysing both the funerary cycle of tombs and the arrangement of material goods, as Cavanagh & Mee suggested, in relation to the broader socio-economic context of Mycenaean society, this paper aims to uncover the emotional states and attitudes towards the dead.<sup>12</sup> Special attention is given to the details of buried weaponry types and decoration features to postulate the reasoning behind their placements and to understand how weaponry assemblages reflect the socio-economic and ideological developments of the time, genealogical ties to ancestors, regional characteristics within Mycenaean burial traditions, and norms of behaviour established

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9 Gallou/Georgiadis 2006.

10 See Voutsaki 2010c, Boyd 2014, Brück 2016.

11 Khan & MacEachen 2021, 4.

12 Cavanagh/Mee 1998.

through repetition and continuity.<sup>13</sup>

## **WEAPONRY FURNISHINGS AT BURIAL SITES FOR COMBAT FUNCTIONS**

Swords were related to the unique warrior identity, requiring individuals to train themselves in this specific technique of martial arts, therefore symbolising "an ancient tradition of exercising legitimate, socially sanctioned violence on behalf of a community".<sup>14</sup> The bronze sword, in particular, had limited sharpness due to its material, in comparison to iron. Long and thin swords could be used to cleave the target through bending, causing extended slicing to the skin, in contrast, short swords had the drawback of losing balance for the user when inflicting a deep cut on an opponent.<sup>15</sup>

Conversely, daggers were traditionally widespread and conveyed the "pluralistic" identities of warriors, butchers, hunters, etc. Their popularity also indicates it was a personal item carrying the male identity, suitable for small-scale combat to injure legs and arms as attack targets. From the cross-sections of swords and daggers, we can determine that low convex midribs or high angular midribs could result in elliptical or rhomboid shapes, providing greater force to the blades.<sup>16</sup> Further, bows or spears as weaponry would require increased distance and be optimal for group performances.<sup>17</sup>

### *SWORDS (SEE FIGURE 2)*

Karo categorised Mycenaean swords from Grave Circle A into Types A and B. Type A had a narrow Minoan blade, a short tang, and a flared handle with cylindrical handles made of wood or perishables, and knobs of alabaster, marble, or ivory. An example from Grave Circle A had a gold-adorned handle with a lion and panther design.<sup>18</sup> Designed for wide slashes, Type A swords were slow and ceremonial, symbolising status, and eventually fell out of use.<sup>19</sup> Type B swords were more practical, featuring a strong, rounded midrib, a widened blade, and a long-handled tang covered in gold. An example from Grave Circle A has intricate spiral, leaf, and wavy line patterns on the handle.<sup>20</sup> Single-edged swords used until the Late Helladic II were effective for slashing

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<sup>13</sup> Hobsbawm/Ranger 1983.

<sup>14</sup> Molloy 2010, 424.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 419.

<sup>16</sup> Papadopoulos 1998, 34.

<sup>17</sup> Molloy 2010, 413.

<sup>18</sup> Numbered IV 295.

<sup>19</sup> Georganas 2010, 306; Kilian-Dirlmeier 1993, 41; Molloy 2008, 416; O'Brien 2009, 187.

<sup>20</sup> Numbered IV 3398, Karo 1915, 197.

Type	Date Range	Description	Length Range (cm)	Cross-section
Type A	MHIII-LHIIIA1	long, tapering blade, pointed mid-rib, short tang with 1-3 rivets and 2 in shoulders organic handle has decayed	55-100 (considerable variability)	flat-blade with midrib
Type B	MHIII-LHIIIA1	projecting tongue of metal blade forming the handle, squared shoulders, broad tang with 1-3 rivets and 2-3 in shoulders	33-55	graduation to pointed oval
Single-edged/ <i>Schlachtmesser</i>	MHIII-LHIIIA1	full tang handle with organic hilt plates; (Type II) solid cast handle with a loop	35-70	extended triangle
Type C	LHI-LHIIIB	horned hilt, full tang handle, 0-3 rivets and 2 in shoulders, with flanges, shoulders, quillons, and ricasso;	50-90	flat-blade with midrib
Type Di „cruciform“ sword	LHIII-LHIIIB	rounded knob, blade form similar with Type C with greater percentage of shorter blades; 0-3 rivets and 2 in shoulders,	35-65	flat blade with midrib; variants with flat mid-rib to pointed oval
Type Dii	LHIIIA2-LHIIIC	T-shaped plate, reduced midrib profile compared to Type Di; pointed-oval blade cross-section for deeper cuts, 0-3 rivets and 2 in shoulders,	35-45	flat midrib to pointed oval section

**Figure 2.**

*Sword types relevant to the burial sites discussed in this article (adapted from Papadopoulos 1998).*

but had slippery handles secured with wrist cords.<sup>21</sup> Type C swords, with improved hilt-blade attachments, were shorter, lighter, and used for cutting linen or leather.<sup>22</sup> Type D swords had enhanced shoulders, offering balance and power for close combat.<sup>23</sup>

#### *DAGGERS (SEE FIGURE 3 AND FIGURE 4)*

In general, Type I, II, and cruciform daggers were apt to deliver slashing strokes, with the cruciform type especially suited for stabbing. Additionally, they served as secondary weapons alongside swords and spears.<sup>24</sup> Type I tangless dagger likely served as an auxiliary weapon for well-equipped warriors. In particular, Types I and II were found exclusively in the shaft graves A and B. The homogeneity in shape and technique also indicates them having been locally manufactured. From the rivet-scheme of daggers, we can also observe that rivets in the Mycenae and Prosymna were either thick and short or thin and large, which was influenced by northern styles.<sup>25</sup>

From the meticulous categorisation and physical testing of weaponry by scholars, we could see the continuous efforts of the Mycenaeans placed on the technical performances of weaponry corresponding to different attacking strategies. Additionally, these weaponry assemblages were also elegant and decorative in appearance. As such, we can deduce the concentrated efforts spent on weaponry production in this period. The overwhelming distinctions in weaponry types also highlight the level of expertise and craftsmanship involved in the processes. At these three sites—Mycenae, Dendra, and Prosymna—evidence of a wide range of weaponry types indicates the wide circulation and popularity of weaponry enjoyed in the Argolid. Finally, this weaponry assemblage could imply that there was advanced military development, possibly indicating standardised military formations and active military activities conducted in this period.

#### **WEAPONRY FURNISHINGS AT BURIAL SITES AS PRESTIGE OBJECTS**

Mycenaean funerary practices included intricate burial arrangements, such as the separation of grave circles by peribolos walls. Grave Circle B at Mycenae suggested competition among elites through conspicuous consumption, leaving the centre-left section vacant.<sup>26</sup> The exclusivity of tholos tombs and clustered chamber tombs, like at Prosymna, indicated prolonged use and

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<sup>21</sup> Also referred as "Schlachtsmesser". Molloy 2010, 417.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 418.

<sup>23</sup> Molloy 2008, 420.

<sup>24</sup> Papadopoulos 1998, 47.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

		Description	Date Range (from the specimens provided)	Length Range (cm)	Sites
	<b>Type I</b>	tangless, broad and convex butts; tapering blades with/without a midrib; slant edges, 2-4 gold or silver plates rivets on the edge of the butt	Late MBA— Early LBA	not more than 20 (L) 5.5 (W)	
	<i>Type IA</i>	mostly tapering, slightly thickened daggers	MHIII— LHIIIA2?		Dendra, Grave Circle A
<b>Tangless Daggers</b>	<i>Type IB</i>	tangless midrib daggers, mostly oval	MHIII- LHIIIA1		Grave Circle A and B; Prosymna; Dendra
	<b>Type II</b>	elongated triangular „winged“ blades; with/without midrib, slant edges, four huge rivets of gold or silver plates in the butt in a triangular pattern	MHIII-LHII	23.6-43 (L) 6cm (W)	
	<i>Type IIA</i>	tangless	MHIII—LHI		Grave Circle A and B
	<i>Type IIB</i>	short tang	(MHIII)— LHII?		

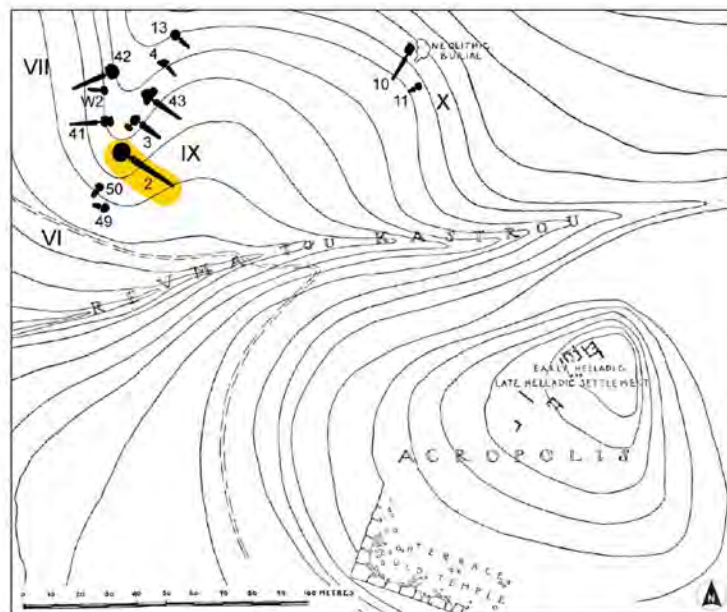
**Figure 3.**

*Dagger types relevant to the burial sites discussed in this article (adapted from Papadopoulos 1998).*

Type	Description	Date Range (from the specimens provided)	Length Range (cm)	Sites
Tanged Daggers	little homogeneity in forms, all tongue-shaped (rectangular tang), U-shaped or tapering blade; flat or rounded butts, 2-3 rivets	LHI/LHII —LHIIIA/ LHIIIB	15.4-31 (L) 3.2-5.7 (W)	
Variant B	Tapering blade	LHI— LHIIIA		Prosymna (Argolid)
Horned Daggers	comparatively rare, upward horned shoulders, with long and broad tang, triangular blade with or without sharp midrib, 2-7 rivets with large variations in formation	MHIII— LHI	26.4-39.5 (L) 6.3-8 (W)	
Variant A	Triangular blade	MHIII-LHI		Grave Circle A
Variant B	Elongated Triangular blade	MHIII-LHI		Grave Circle B

**Figure 4.**

(continued) Dagger types relevant to the burial sites discussed in this article (adapted from Papadopoulos 1998).



**Figure 5.**

Arrangement of chamber tomb 2 at Dendra (adapted from Persson 1931, figure.53), showing its proximity to the Acropolis.

individual investment.<sup>27</sup> Burial spaces communicated social status, with chamber tombs hosting dozens and the dromos above housing hundreds.<sup>28</sup> Strategic placements of burials, such as Chamber Tomb 2 at Prosymna's hill (see figure 5) and Dendra burials near the citadel, linked burials with daily life, thereby acting as a steadfast backdrop to the daily rituals of the living, while simultaneously expressing the nuanced facets of military identity.<sup>29</sup>

Weaponry, often combined with precious metals, bronze utensils, gold jewellery, and seals, functioned as prestige objects. Examples include gold-covered handles, ivory or semi-precious stone knobs, and decorated rivets. These decorations, though not impairing weapon usage, manifested aesthetic appreciation and socio-economic motives. Artefacts made of gold, silver, amber, and ivory were scattered, with shaft graves displaying them dramatically. Swords and daggers in shaft graves were elaborately decorated, indicating individual craftsmanship and early experimentation for "self-representation and wearing, owning or displaying".<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the swords deposited in the grave circles were of an impressive diversity and quantity.<sup>31</sup> These deposited swords with diversified midrib profiles and rivet systems have further indicated that they were likely individually made by bronze-smiths in single-use moulds. Further, the diverse designs reflect early experimentation, with distinct decorations showing continuous improvement. The weaponry in shaft graves represents the palatial display of material wealth, connections to distant regions, and bellicose tendencies.<sup>32</sup> This cultural concept of "conspicuous consumption" intensified social stratification in the Early Mycenaean period, as the swords were likely associated with a select few high-ranking warriors, perpetuating social inequality among lesser warriors and non-military officials.<sup>33</sup> Comparatively, the royal tholoi at Dendra were simpler, with weaponry mainly inlaid with gold. Chamber tombs lacked prestigious objects, possibly due to the Mycenaean belief in circulating wealth rather than depositing it. During the Mycenaean Palatial period in LHIIIA-B, palatial elites controlled conspicuous consumption, consolidating power through the

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27 Steinmann 2020, 403.

28 Boyd 2015, 207.

29 Ibid., 212.

30 Schallin 2016, 184.

31 A minimum of 36 blades were restored in Grave V, and a minimum of 42 in Grave IV, Harrell 2014, 4.

32 Ibid., 3.

33 Kramer-Hajos 2016, 81.

distribution of gold and exotic materials.<sup>34</sup>

## **MYCENAEAN MILITARISM CULTURE AND IDENTITY IN BURIAL CUSTOMS**

The weaponry assemblages in Mycenaean burials served fluid purposes, reflecting the changing social constructions and ambitions of the living. These assemblages were not homogeneous hoards; the sources could be obtained through trade, interpersonal exchange, marriage, or custom orders. From the evidence of the increasingly tailored weapons in the Shaft Grave Period, including Type A, B and C, though they were capable of inflicting mortal injuries, Molloy through test-wear analysis hypothesised that they were more suitable for a series of minor, unpleasant, non-lethal injuries, suggesting unique social functions.<sup>35</sup> This form of "highly ritualised" public sword fights would have projected swordsmen's masculine honour and personal worth at their highest, as a symbol of equality. Also, this type of autonomous activity would be considered as an external authority, where the faction leader profited by extending swordsmen's social obligations.

As Voutsaki notes, the representation of swords in burials reflects an "agonistic ethos" akin to that promoted in Homeric epics.<sup>36</sup> She recognises these weapons as luxurious gift exchanges or symbols of conspicuous consumption. Drawing a parallel to modern military enthusiasts, weapon collections in Mycenaean societies signified battles fought or diplomatic gifts received. Evidence of advanced weapon production suggests that high-ranking elites possessed custom-made collections for special occasions. Alternatively, Chapman theorises that these precious objects were initially exchanged and collectively owned by the community as joint property.<sup>37</sup> Over time, the accumulation and appropriation of these gifts by specific individuals led to social stratification, with the most powerful ruling the communities.

Malafouris extends the analogy of the body schema from neurology to archaeology, suggesting that Mycenaean swords became "phantom limbs" for their owners, inseparable from their identity.<sup>38</sup> When a Mycenaean warrior or leader died, the sword symbolised the person beyond temporal and spatial constraints, serving as an inter-space symbol during life and continuing after death. This argument goes beyond Vermeule's anthropomorphism,

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<sup>34</sup> Voutsaki 1997, 45.

<sup>35</sup> Molloy 2008.

<sup>36</sup> Voutsaki 1993.

<sup>37</sup> Chapman 2000.

<sup>38</sup> Malafouris 2008.

where the weapon is seen as animated.<sup>39</sup> The rich decorations and practical functions of these weapons, participating in battles and rituals, made them "psychological weapons" that transmitted a "message" on various occasions. The weapon itself does not entail life, but it is instilled with it through its owner's use.

Harrell hypothesises a complete cycle of weaponry gift exchange between faction leaders and swordsmen.<sup>40</sup> A swordsman demonstrating military ability or true warrior characteristics would receive a sword from the faction leader. Upon the leader's death, new power dynamics emerged as successors bestowed swords. Initially, these swords served as proof of the swordsmen's prowess, strengthening social bonds and fuelling competition. In LHIIIA, similar material assemblages and burial customs emerged, indicating competition among elite peer-polities at local and regional levels, such as the ephemeral monumentality in tholos tombs.<sup>41</sup>

During the palatial period, Mycenaean society transformed into a redistributive state dominated by a powerful central authority controlling economic activity.<sup>42</sup> In LHIIIB, imports of prestige goods were tightly controlled, with valuable materials like gold and ivory exclusively manufactured at Mycenae, while Midea processed the semi-precious stones and glass.<sup>43</sup> Although there is no direct evidence of palatial centres under attack, the use of Type D swords and spears indicates increased warfare, mobility, and raiding.<sup>44</sup> Superior weaponry played a vital role in the Mycenaean palatial centres. Ortner describes these warriors as 'domesticated', subordinated to the palace and losing their individual prestige, contrasting with the Shaft Grave period's luxurious burials.<sup>45</sup> The commemorative ceremonies, heroic athletic games, and feasting held in memory of ancestors within Mycenaean communities or corporate groups illustrate the transformation of an individual's identity after death.<sup>46</sup> These ritualised performances in dark, enclosed tombs underscore the symbolic relationship between the deceased and their kin group. The tripartite architectural structure of Mycenaean tombs, comprising dromos, stomion, and chamber, adds to this symbolic transformation.<sup>47</sup> Imagining the interlinked sequences of funerary

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39 Vermeule 1975.

40 Harrell 2014.

41 Kramer-Hajos 2016, 73-75.

42 O'Brien 2008, 28-29.

43 Voutsaki 2010b, referenced by Kramer-Hajos 2016, 143.

44 O'Brien 2009, 319.

45 Kramer-Hajos 2016, 104.

46 Gallou/Georgiadis 2006; Boyd 2014.

47 Boyd 2014.

processions, we understand that the Mycenaeans believed in a liminal stage between life and death, holding funerals to console the deceased and signal the legitimate transference of power and succession rights.<sup>48</sup> Accepting that inanimate objects could intercommunicate with humans through their materiality, they could transform into "intermediaries" or "agents" to convey the symbols of power and prestige, that are "created, read and understood by all".<sup>49</sup>

The placement of weaponry in burials by family or community members, with rich ornamentations, clearly aimed to enrich the deceased and highlight the actions of the living. These weapons could be interpreted as the deceased's belongings, gifts from close members, or acts of community obligation for ancestral worship.<sup>50</sup> Frequent disturbances to tholos and chamber tombs by family members, such as in the Prosymna chamber tombs 4 and 29 where only skulls and long bones were preserved, show that remains were transformed into ancestral hoards, no longer viewed as significant individuals.<sup>51</sup> Initially, weaponry burials aimed to depict an individual's martial identity, but over time, through competition and emulation, they came to symbolise the broader 'Mycenaean identity'. Secondary mortuary practices often involved re-arranging the last burials while sweeping aside bones from previous ones, in line with Mycenaean beliefs that decomposition signified the spirit joining the ancestors.<sup>52</sup> This practice of 'breakage' reflects a social trend that placed less emphasis on individualism in funerary burials. It could further be argued that these re-used and multiple burials would make individuals unable to determine for whom the tombs were placed, therefore cohering to the deeper cultural ideology of the common mainland identity.<sup>53</sup>

Further, according to Cavanagh & Mee, approximately 1000 Mycenaeans were buried in Prosymna's 48 chamber tombs.<sup>54</sup> Over time, the number of rich burials decreased while poorer chamber tombs increased, suggesting a shift towards consumption during life and indicating economic stability through formal burials.<sup>55</sup> Noticeably, the settlement at Prosymna, which had remained a site for small community burials since the Middle Bronze Age until the beginning of the palatial period, transformed into a large-

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48 Gillis 2016, 286-288.

49 Ibid., 208-211.

50 Boyd 2014.

51 Gallou/Georgiadis 2006, 132.

52 Mee 2010, 288; Boyd 2015, 208.

53 Voutsaki 2010a.

54 Cavanagh/Mee 1998.

55 Shelmerdine 2006, 79.

sized "proto-urban" mortuary form without kinship ties.<sup>56</sup> However, the surrounding tombs of Chamber Tomb 2 at Prosymna may still have been placed with close family members.<sup>57</sup> This mortuary change suggests the emergence and establishment of a central administration, which attracted followers and ruling elites, forming a central agency and consequently increasing population and cultural uniformity.<sup>58</sup>

Whitley suggests that weaponry burials should be understood as symbolic representations of high elites and low elite warriors, rather than mere biographical facts.<sup>59</sup> The "excessive" number of swords at the Grave Circles and Dendra were functional types with material decoration, only later embellished with gold hilts for the burials.<sup>60</sup> Although the jewellery on weaponry mainly displayed ornamental functions, its styles conveyed important political and social messages about the protected status of the deceased to other elites. Ornamental spiral motifs observed in Chamber Tomb 2 at Prosymna, related to sovereignty in Mycenaean art, lacked explicit iconography for the king himself. By mystifying the role of the divine king, the funerary weaponry assemblages imply the general Mycenaean ruler ideology.

## CONCLUSION

This study mainly examines weaponry in the Mycenaean civilisation, focusing on shaft graves, tholos tombs, and chamber tombs in the Argolid region, particularly Mycenae, Dendra, and Prosymna. The paper then analyses weaponry types such as swords, daggers, and spears, revealing their practical military utility and symbolic significance within the Mycenaean ideology. A central finding is the evolution of burial customs from single burials in cists to the reuse of Middle Helladic burials. Chamber and tholos tomb burials, rich in exotic materials, attest to this change in societal values and resource control. The zenith of Mycenaean civilisation during Late Helladic IIIA2 led to settlement expansion, shifting focus from lavish burials to labour-intensive construction projects, reducing the prominence of prestige objects in tombs. This shift indicates a move towards greater economic stability and the centralisation of power, transforming smaller community burials into larger, more organised mortuary practices.

The study has also highlighted the glorification of death as a characteristic feature of Mycenaean civilisation and the fluidity of

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<sup>56</sup> Wright 2008, 149.

<sup>57</sup> Steinmann 2020, 406.

<sup>58</sup> Wright 2008, 148.

<sup>59</sup> Whitley 2002.

weaponry within tombs, often being displayed, reused, and incorporated into new burial contexts. Weaponry burials were initially symbols of individual martial prowess, and a powerful political weapon in social and political competitions, reserved for a select few. Gradually, they evolved into representations of broader social identities and elite status, highlighting the role of material culture in signalling power and prestige within Mycenaean society. Lavish ornamentation and complex engineering of the weapons serve as semiotics, functioning as both agency and performance, motivating their "coming-into-being" in the world. Through the artifact, the enacted person temporarily possesses the artifact, which in turn becomes a "person." When that person dies, the weapon, having symbolically "died" with them, becomes the enduring symbol of the deceased. This symbol detaches itself from the deceased and reattaches itself to the next owner, perpetuating the cycle of symbolic association. By depositing these assemblages in burials, they accompanied the deceased to the afterlife, inadvertently serving as markers of group membership and potentially indicating ethnic identity acceptance. Thus, just as mourners participate in the circulation of life, weaponry also participates in the circulation of representations.

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