

Feasting and Polis Institutions

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Feasting at the Sanctuary of Apollo Hyakinthos at Amykles: The Evidence from the Early Iron Age*

Vicky Vlachou

Introduction

Feasting was a pivotal aspect of the social and religious life of early societies, involving the shared consumption of food and drink. In a recent article, James Wright defines feasting as:

A fundamental social practice that marks most celebrations of life stages and natural cycles when people gather, and in varying ways display, reaffirm, and change their identities as individuals and as members of groups. It is an integral part of ritual and religious practice, occurring nearly universally as a component of other activities.¹

Homer has served as a primary reference point for heroic feasting in varying contexts and under different circumstances. Homeric feasting appears as one

* My warmest thanks to the organizers Josine Blok, Floris van den Eijnde, and Rolf Strootman, for inviting me to participate in the very interesting and successful conference at the University of Utrecht and for accepting my paper for publication in this volume. I am most grateful to Prof. A. Delivorias and Prof. S. Vlizos, who invited me to study and publish the ceramic assemblages from the Amyklaion, and to the team of the Amykles Research Project for an excellent collaboration. Since 2015 the research is funded by the F.R.S.-FNRS chargée de recherches).

I use the following chronological abbreviations:

SM: Sub-Mycenaean

PG: Protogeometric (ca. 1050/25–900, after Desborough 1952 and Lemos 2002)

EG: Early Geometric (EG I ca. 900–875, and EG II ca. 875–850, after Coldstream 1968)

EIA: Early Iron Age

EPG: Early Protogeometric (ca. 1050/25–980, after Desborough 1952 and Lemos 2002)

MG: Middle Geometric (MG I ca. 850–800, and MG II 800–760, after Coldstream 1968)

LBA: Late Bronze Age

LG: Late Geometric (LG I ca. 760–735, and LG II 735–700/690, after Coldstream 1968)

LPG: Late Protogeometric (ca. 960–900, after Desborough 1952 and Lemos 2002).

1 Wright 2004, 135. See also Dietler 2001; Hamilakis 2009; Hamilakis and Sherratt 2012.

of the most frequent activities in various stages of the narration.² Homeric heroes share a meal together as a token of hospitality that is offered before the departure of the hero, to celebrate a victory after a battle, and to propitiate the gods and win them to their side. Within this framework, and as is outlined in the introduction to this volume, there are a number of variations regarding the purpose of a feast, the people involved, the degree of their involvement, and the place where a feast is hosted.

From another point of view, drinking and dining vessels used for feasting activities are common finds in almost every context within the Early Iron Age Aegean. Recent scholarship has emphasized the role of feasting as a powerful medium for the self-representation of social groups and the formation of bonds.³ Joining in a feast, on a specific occasion, seems to have created a cohesive link between the social groups, facilitated communication between the participants, and presumably also created obligations for all (equal) participants. Archaeological evidence associated with drinking and dining is common in cultic contexts. Vessels associated with drinking and dining constitute common finds from open-air shrines in later sanctuaries manifesting the importance of the shared consumption of food and drink by the participants in the context of ritual activity.⁴ In this framework, the sanctuary of Apollo Hyakinthos at Amykles remains one of the few religious sites where it is possible to follow the transformations in ritual activity and structure from the final stages of the Bronze Age through the Early Iron Age.⁵

The earliest remains of cultic activity on the low hill of Aghia Kyriaki at Amykles date to the Late Helladic III B2–III C periods according to the numerous finds of pottery, terracotta human and animal figurines, and various smaller votive offerings. The open-air shrine has been considered the center of regional ritual activity lasting from the late thirteenth to the mid/late eleventh century.⁶

2 Van Wees 1995; Carter 1995; Sherratt 2004, 301–306.

3 For a treatment of Early Iron Age societies, cf. MazarakisAinian 1997, 375–396; Wecowski 2002; 2014; Duplouy 2012.

4 See also the contributions to this volume by Alexandridou, van den Eijnde, Whitley and Madgwick, Lynch and Steiner.

5 The early beginnings of the extra-urban Amyklaion sanctuary may be understood when compared to other mainland sanctuaries, such as Isthmia: Morgan 1999; Olympia: Kyrieleis 2006, Eder 2001; Kalapodi: Felsch 1980, 1996, 2007, Nitsche 1987, Niemeier 2013; Epidauros, Maleatas: Lambrinoudakis 1976, 1981, 1982.

6 Demakopoulou 1982, 80–81; 2009; 2015; Wright 1994, 65; Pettersson 1992, 92–99; Eder 1998, 89–113. The location of the contemporary settlement has been suggested in the plain of Amyklai near the modern village, on the surrounding hills, and at Vapheio, see Demakopoulou 1982,

Material evidence dating from the transitional period, from the late eleventh to the mid/late tenth century is admittedly scarce; however, the evidence does indicate that the site was never forgotten. This evidence is mainly associated with the consumption of food and drink, demonstrating the importance of such activities in maintaining the memory of the specific place, presumably within a ritual context. The large corpus of material dating from the mid/late tenth century onward clearly shows that by that time the site already attracted quite a large number of visitors, possibly on a regular basis. By the middle/late eighth century, the growing range of votive offerings and the quantity of the material remains on the hill suggest an increase in cultic activity, possibly associated with the consolidation of the ritual practices into a festival, the Spartan Hyakinthia. According to literary and epigraphic evidence, the Hyakinthia was one of the most important religious festivals of the Spartan polis.⁷

The beginnings of the Hyakinthia festival have been largely placed in the late eighth century, although the earliest literary evidence of the festival does not predate the fifth century.⁸ The most important reference to the festival is in the fourth book of *Deipnosophistai*, where Athenaios (*Deipnosophistai* 4. 139c–f) quotes at length Polykrates's description of the meal at the Hyakinthia.⁹ The festival honored the hero Hyakinthos and Apollo, and celebration of each included a different type of meal, revealing the complexities and transformations of the religious practices that must have originated at an early date.¹⁰ During the first part of the rituals, the mourning of the dead Hyakinthos included restrictions to eating and drinking, and the absence of almost any festive expression. By contrast, restrictions were dismissed during the second part, when joyful celebrations and sacrifices were offered to Apollo. The differential access to food and drink assumed particular importance during the Hyakinthia and thus feasting was an integral part of the ritual activity. It is possible that the existence of two consecutive ritual phases within the same festival gradually developed beginning in the late eighth/early seventh century, after the incor-

80–81. Recent excavations of the 5th Ephorate in the wider area of Sparta, namely, the 'acropolis' and the surrounding area, have revealed evidence for Middle and Late Helladic habitation. Zavvou and Themis 2009, 111. For a group of chamber tombs of the Late Helladic IIIA/IIIB in the area of Spelakia, see Spyropoulos 1981, 126–129, pl. 60.

7 Conde 2008, 13–19, 47–56; Vlizos 2009; 2015; Zavvou and Themis 2015; Petropoulou 2015.

8 Dietrich 1975; Calame 1997, 181–182; Conde 2008, 13–14; Petropoulou 2015.

9 Also Paus. 3.19.3; Bruit 1990; Brulé 1992; Pettersson 1992, 9–29; Conde 2008, 13–59.

10 For a discussion see Sourvinou-Inwood 1989, 53; Morgan 1999, 369–372; Dickinson 2006, 219–222.

poration of Amykles into the Spartan polis and the transformation of the older local cult into one of the most important Spartan festivals.¹¹

Archaeological evidence forms the only source for tentative reconstructions of the earliest phases of the Early Iron Age. This paper will discuss material evidence, in particular the ceramic assemblages connected with drinking and dining at the Amyklaion from around the late eleventh century, when the latest dedications to the Mycenaean shrine have been dated, to the late eighth century, when the earliest peribolos wall marked the area of the cult.¹² The quantity and quality of the drinking and dining equipment demonstrate that the consumption of food and drink by the participants formed an important part of the activities throughout the whole period. Feasting seems to have served as a means of communication in the reappraisal of community identity during the earlier phases of the Early Iron Age, a period of marked social and economic changes. It is perhaps worth considering that feasting activities acquired a particularly marked distinction during the same period, while the investment in feasting and cult equipment and the competitive display of various votive offerings marked the development of the sanctuary until the late eighth century, consistent with a lasting increase in activity.

The Space of Ritual Activity

The sanctuary is 5 km southeast from the center of Sparta, on the west bank of the Eurotas and roughly 600 m to the east of the modern village of Amykles, also known as Sklavochori or Slavochori.¹³ The low hill of Aghia Kyriaki has a steep incline to the east but gentler slopes from all other directions. It offers a fine view to the south, framed by the mountains of Taygetos to the west and of Parnonas to the east (fig. 4.1).

Excavations took place in four distinct periods between 1890 and 1925 and began again in 2005 under the joint direction of the Benaki Museum and the 5th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities.¹⁴ A significant corpus of

11 Dietrich 1975; Calame 1997, 181–182; Pettersson 1992, 106–112; Vlachou 2015.

12 Vlizos 2009, 14; 2015, 94–95.

13 Tsountas 1892, 3; Fiechter 1918, 223 nos. 11, 12; Buschor and Von Massow 1927, 61–64 nos. 1–16; Conde 2008, 61–93; Vlizos 2009, 11–13.

14 Tsountas 1892; Fiechter 1918; Skias 1907, 104–107; Buschor and Von Massow 1927; for a short history of the excavations in the sanctuary area, see Demakopoulou 1982, 29–42; Calligas 1992, 31–33; Pettersson 1992, 92–99; Conde 2008, 61–69; Vlizos 2009, 11–13; 2015. The results of the more recent excavations on the site are currently being prepared for final



FIGURE 4.1 *The hill of Aghia Kyriaki, view from southeast*

PHOTO FROM THE AMYKLES RESEARCH PROJECT ARCHIVE

material has been associated with the postpalatial shrine that was founded on the hill at the end of the thirteenth century.¹⁵ The initial phase of cult activity at the Amyklaion spanned the Late Helladic IIIC period to the mid/late eleventh century, and was followed by a number of dedications and a cult during the succeeding Early Iron Age. The sanctuary was almost completely reorganized in the late Archaic period. The sanctuary housed the famous Throne of Apollo, a giant throne with the column-shaped statue of Apollo at its center; the tomb of Hyakinthos, which served as the base for the statue of Apollo; the altar; and other monuments delimited by a strong temenos wall.¹⁶

The continuous use and rebuilding of the area during the successive phases of the sanctuary left us without a stratigraphic sequence, but only a large number of mixed deposits.¹⁷ Unfortunately the results of the older excavations on

publication; the author is responsible for the publication of the ceramic assemblages. The suggestions in this paper should thus be taken only as preliminary conclusions that may be modified in view of the study of the rest of the material uncovered in the sanctuary.

15 Demakopoulou 1982; 2009; 2015. See also de Polignac 1994; Antonaccio 1994, 88, 103.

16 IG V 1, 863B, 863 C, 1515C: "Ἀπόλλων(ος) ἐν Ἀμυκλαίοι." For a short treatment of the bibliography on the throne of Apollo, see Vlizos 2009, 12–13; 2015; Delivrias 2009.

17 Buschor and Von Massow 1927, 24–33; Coulson 1985, 63–64; Vlizos 2015; Vlachou 2015. Concentrations of Mycenaean and Early Iron Age material, usually mingled with later material, were found close to the altar, in the area to the west and south of the modern church of Aghia Kyriaki and mainly along the Archaic peribolos wall.

the hill permit only general observations, and it is impossible to make any chronological distinctions within the deposited debris. Early activities were presumably centered on an ash altar. A mixture of ash, pottery, votive offerings, and a few animal bones were found in a layer of black fatty earth in and around the area of the later altar of the sanctuary investigated by Ch. Tsountas (fig. 4.2).¹⁸ The area immediately to the southwest of the altar seems to have also consisted of a mixture of ash and black earth with animal bones, pottery, and metal objects. In this area Tsountas identified among the animal bones some sheep horns and cattle teeth. It seems, however, that such a mixture of ash, bones, and pottery is commonly found in Greek sanctuaries, and taken to represent both burnt sacrificial remains and residues from the preparation and consumption of food.¹⁹

Other material culture collected from the area in and around the later altar includes a number of miniature vessels, a few figurines, bronze and iron weapons and artifacts, a few pieces of jewelry, and a large quantity of mainly fragmentary pottery dating from the LBA, EIA, and later periods. This evidence reveals the diversity of the activities in this area. It is important to note that the focus of cultic activity seems to have been already fixed at an early date in the southwestern part of the hill, in the same area where the later altar of the sanctuary was located. This circumstance is comparable to other early shrines such as, for example, the shrine of the later sanctuary of Apollo Maleatas at Epidauros, the early cult in the area of the Classical Pelopeion at Olympia, the altar of Zeus on Mount Lykaion, and the sanctuary at the site of Herakles on Kos.²⁰

By the late eighth century the first peribolos wall, which was revealed during the most recent excavations, enclosed a much larger area and encompassed at least the southern and part of the eastern side of the hill (fig. 4.1). The wall is 30 m long and 2.10 m wide and is located approximately 6 m north of the Classi-

18 Tsountas 1892, 1–26. The deposition of the LBA and EIA material was marked in certain areas by the existence of a clay layer, on top of which later material was deposited. Conde 2008, 66 and n. 239, has associated this situation with works undertaken for the construction of the Throne in the Archaic period, and has used this as an argument in favor of the continuity of ritual activity in the same area from the Mycenaean to the Geometric period.

19 Berquist 1988; Sourvinou-Inwood 1993; Morgan 1999, 319–321. Pyres at Eleusis have been interpreted as the remains of *enagismoi* related to chthonic cult, in the absence of animal bones. Kokkou-Vyridi 1999, 181; Cosmopoulos 2014, 422.

20 Epidauros: Lambrinouidakis 1976, 202–209; 1981; 1982. Olympia: Morgan 1999, 379–382; Eder 2001; 2009; Kyrieleis 2006. Mount Lykaion: Romano and Voyatzis 2010. Kos: Skerlou 2004.

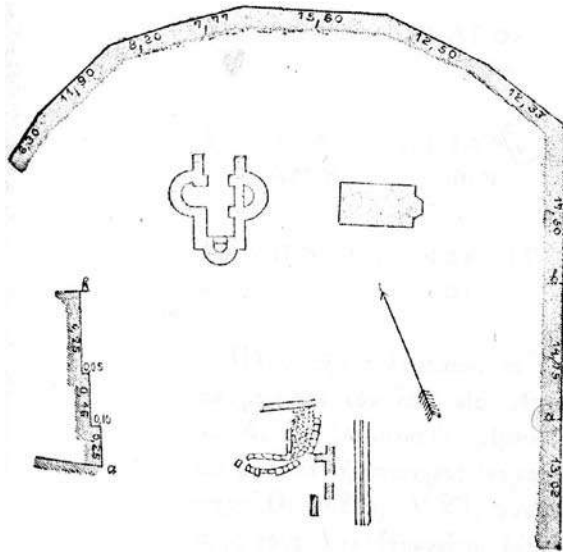


FIGURE 4.2 *Drawing of the architectural remains excavated by Chr. Tsountas. The circular constructions to the southwest indicate the location of the altar of the sanctuary.*

AFTER TSOUNTAS 1892, 1

cal monumental peribolos.²¹ This wall represents the first attempt to organize and increase the size of the sacred space by retaining the large hill slope and marking out a temenos. Large quantities of Mycenaean, Protogeometric, Geometric, and later material were found in the filling layers along the two enclosure walls of the sanctuary, possibly representing secondary deposits from the top of the hill.

The Bronze Age to Iron Age Transition at Amykles (Mid/Late Eleventh to Mid-Tenth Century)

The question of religious continuity from the Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age has been a primary concern in the study of the sanctuary at Amykles. A hiatus in the material record that seemed to follow the Late Helladic IIIc activity at the Amyklaion was largely seen as a gap in activity for more than a century.²²

²¹ Vlizos 2009, 14; 2015, 94–95.

²² Desborough 1952, 283–290; Snodgrass 2000, 130–131, 395; Eder 1998, 97–111; Cartledge 2002, 70–80.



FIGURE 4.3A–B *Fragments of open vessels of EPG style*
PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

Nonetheless, according to the detailed study of K. Demakopoulou, the latest offerings to the Mycenaean shrine, such as the late female Psi figurines and certain wheel-made bull figurines, may well date from the end of the twelfth century to the mid/late eleventh century, while the decoration of the latest specimens in these series foreshadow the distinct Lakonian Protogeometric style.²³ The late date of those figurines may now be further supported by the presence of some pottery sherds of SM/EPG style (fig. 4.3a–b).

Drinking sets spanning the Late Helladic IIIC period, comprising medium-sized kraters, high-stemmed kylikes, and deep bowls, as well as a few amphora sherds and possibly a few stirrup jars, indicate an emphasis on ritual consumption. Ritual drinking is suggested by the presence of the unique though fragmentary clay human figure that is shown holding the high stem of a ky-

23 Demakopoulou 1982, 43–68; 2009, 96; 2015, 110–111. See also Nicholls 1970, 10; Coulson 1985; Antonaccio 1994, 88, 97; Pettersson 1994, 91–100; Vlachou 2015, 113–115. For the dedication of bull figurines in open-air shrines, see Guggisberg 2009. Very similar to the wheelmade bulls found at the Amyklaion are the numerous finds from the site of Herakles on Kos and the sanctuary of Apollo Dalios on Kalymnos, where such figurines were offered until the LG period. Similarities in cultic activities at the Amyklaion and the site of Herakles on Kos can also be seen in comparing the space of an open-air shrine and what seems to be an ash altar in use from the LBA to the LG period. For the site of Herakles, see Skerlou 2004.

lix.²⁴ Despite the paucity of material dating to the late eleventh and early tenth century, a particular emphasis is once again placed on drinking and possibly also dining. Drinking from kylikes with high ribbed stems mark a certain continuity in the practices from the LBA,²⁵ while a number of conical feet of different sizes are consistent with drinking vessels of the PG period.²⁶ A few more pieces of local manufacture seem rather early in date but, because stratified deposits are not available, their chronology has to be established by means of stylistic evaluation alone.²⁷ They all belong to small open vessels, mainly skyphoi.

Another piece of equipment that originates in the Late Helladic IIIA/B is an interesting variant of a cup (an arytaína), which has a single tall vertical handle.²⁸ The surface of the PG specimens is either covered with black metallic paint (in contrast to their LBA counterparts, which are covered with an orange-red paint) or the surfaces preserve some characteristic PG decoration. All examples from Amykles are handmade. Within a ritual context, these vessels would seem ideal for libations and they may have been used in this way. It seems however that their shape with one high handle would be most suitable for serving food, especially porridge or soup, from a cooking vessel. Although no evidence survives for the cooking practices during this early period, the presence of a number of small-sized (and presumably votive) tripod cooking vessels and a large quantity of fragmentary handmade stands of tripod vessels seem to indi-

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- 24 Mycenaean terracotta anthropomorphic figures have been considered to represent a development within Mycenaean religious behavior already from the Late Helladic IIIA period, related to the choices and interests of the local elites. According to H. Whittaker, “the terracotta statues can be considered artefacts of power and represent not only the materialization of religious beliefs and cult activity, but also of the social and political power of the ruling elite.” The public display of such figures in religious processions during ritual practices seems quite possible. Whittaker 2009, 108–109. See also Nicholls 1970, 6–8; French 1981, 173. For the terracotta figures found at Amyklaion, see Vlachou 2017, 13–25.
- 25 For the use and symbolism of the vessel during the transitional period in the western Peloponnese and Ithaca, see Eder 1998, 97–107, 127–130, 136–138; 2001, 206–208; Morgan 2006, 244–245; Demakopoulou 2009, 121.
- 26 Buschor and Von Massow 1927, pl. 2.19–22, 25; Demakopoulou 1982, 70–72, pl. 52 nos. 20–23; Coulson 1985, 29–84, esp. 58–59 fig. 11, nos. 354–358.
- 27 Vlachou 2015, figs. 1a–b.
- 28 Buschor and Von Massow 1927, pl. 2.17. The shape looks very similar to the Late Helladic IIIC (middle) undecorated dippers with raised handle that are quite common, beginning in the Late Helladic IIIB. Broneer 1933, 371 fig. 44c; Mountjoy 1993, 96 no. 258; Souyoudzoglou-Haywood 1999, 68, pl. 5, A1082, A1322 (Kephallonia), pl. 23, S551 (Ithaca); Popham, Schofield, and Sherratt 2006, 204–205, fig. 2.32:3–4.

cate that food was prepared mainly by means of boiling.²⁹ The presence of a number of fragmentary clay tripod cauldrons by the ninth century at Amykles may indicate that those vessels served for the preparation of food during those early ceremonies.

Feasting during the Protogeometric Period (Mid-Tenth to Early Ninth Century)

Following these early developments, the first important phase of the sanctuary spanned the LPG period and the early years of the Geometric (mid-tenth to early ninth century). Material assemblages include an increasingly elaborate collection of vessels that would have held liquid and other perishable offerings, a large variety of miniature handmade vessels with or without painted decoration, small offerings such as figurines and loom weights decorated in a distinctive Protogeometric style, vessels of symbolic and cultic value (such as ring vases), and also metal offerings and figurines.

The fine ware assemblage demonstrates a consistently high percentage of small- and medium-sized open vessels that would have served as the basic equipment for the communal rituals, mainly for the consumption of food and drink, and presumably also for libations. The standardization of the drinking and dining sets at Amykles may be associated with a specialized pottery production that met the needs of the participants in the ritual activities. By the middle of the tenth century at the latest, shapes and decoration of the local pottery form a distinct ceramic style.³⁰

Skyphoi, kantharoi, bowls (*lekanides*), and one-handled cups are the most common shapes in the pottery assemblages.³¹ The carinated skyphos is one

29 Ekroth 2007, 266–268; 2008. For the absence of such preparations in the Homeric Epics, see Sherratt 2004, 313–314. For residue analysis on Bronze Age cooking pottery, see Tzedakis and Martlew 1999, 121–122, 127, 131, 183, 186.

30 See Coulson 1985; Margreiter 1988, 19–26; Eder 1998, 107–109; Kōiv 2003, 63–66; Vlachou 2015, 113–115. The idea of a regional pottery production centered at Amykles during the PG was first implied by Desborough 1952, 284, 288 and was further elaborated by Coulson 1983, 111, 321; 1985, 38, 57, 61; 1986, 35–48, 55–56. Pettersson 1992, 98–99 further developed the idea of a local production of this ‘high quality’ pottery at Amykles that would pass from one generation to another, presumably within a family.

31 For a classification of the types, see Coldstream 1968, 212–213. Coulson 1985, 34–45, 52–58; 1983, 66–67; Vlachou 2015. Coulson has convincingly demonstrated the origin of several Lakonian shapes, such as the carinated skyphos, the flaring skyphos, the krater, and certain types of cups, as from the preceding Mycenaean repertoire.

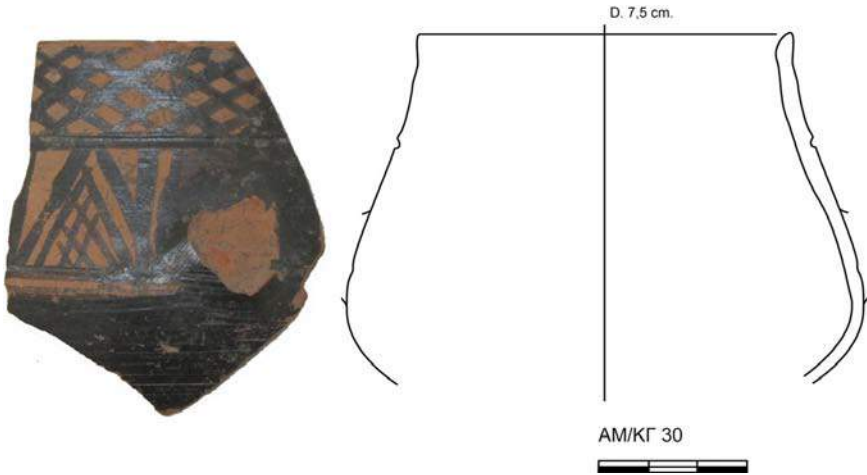


FIGURE 4.4A–B *Carinated skyphos of the PG period from the Amyklaion sanctuary*
PHOTO AND DRAWING BY THE AUTHOR

of the most characteristic types of Lakonian PG, the origin of which has been traced in the LBA stemmed bowls by Coulson (fig. 4.4a–b).³² The profile is characterized by a narrow rim with a diameter that rarely exceeds 0.08 m, sides that slant outwards and make a sharp turn inwards just below the horizontal handles that are attached at the widest diameter. A high conical foot has been restored for this type of skyphos that would match the numerous conical feet found at Amykles.³³ The same carinated profile seems equally to have been shared by kantharoi.³⁴ Two vertical handles are attached to the lip and at the point of the widest diameter on the body. The height of the handles exceeds slightly that of the lip and the contour delineates an angular semicircle. A second variant is characterized by a shallower profile than the carinated type and a lip that overhangs the body (fig. 4.5a–b). This type is better defined here as a lekane because, in contrast to Coulson's original impression, two horizontal handles may now be restored for all the examples.³⁵ The diameter of the lip is usually between 0.12 and 0.16 m, although some specimens may even reach a diameter of 0.22 m.

32 Coulson 1983, 66–67.

33 Coulson's type C1 (1985, 36 fig. 2, no. 39–41) is only rarely represented in the material from Amykles.

34 For a different variant close to the profile of the deep skyphoi, see Zavvou 1996, 130 pl. 45a. Kyrieleis suggests a date for the kantharos in the late tenth/ninth century (Kyrieleis 2006, 156–157 no. 69).

35 Coulson 1985, 52–54.

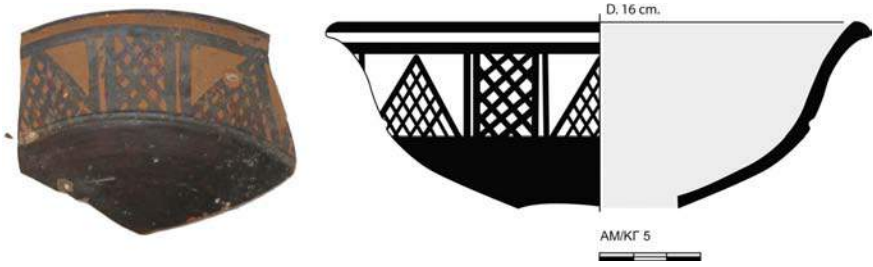


FIGURE 4.5A–B *Flaring skyphos/lekanis of the PG period from the Amyklaion sanctuary*
PHOTO AND DRAWING BY THE AUTHOR

The large numbers of carinated skyphoi and lekanides in the pottery assemblages indicate that those vessels would have served as the basic feasting equipment, complemented by a significant number of kantharoi and monochrome painted one-handled cups. Skyphoi and kantharoi with their deep profile and narrow lip opening would serve perfectly for drinking and the consumption of liquids, while the profile shape of lekanides (or bowls) seems more suitable for eating, mainly for meals prepared by boiling or stewing. Although the use of those vessels may have varied during feasts, we may argue that each shape was intended for a particular function and that already in this early period there was a high degree of standardization of the vessels used during those activities.³⁶

Kraters, although extremely fragmentary, reach large dimensions, with a rather deep body and lip diameter that ranges between 0.30 and 0.48 m for the largest example. The shape may be compared with contemporary specimens from Olympia, Athens, Lefkandi, and elsewhere that are close to the Late Helladic III C tradition.³⁷ No evidence yet exists for the type of foot on these kraters, and it is possible that a conical pedestal, similar to that of the skyphoi and kantharoi from the same assemblages, might have been applied. A different type of large open vessel is very close to the profile shape of the lekanides and thus it seems more appropriate to identify it as a deep lekane rather than as a krater.³⁸

Finds of closed shapes are less frequent and extremely fragmentary. Large amphorae seem entirely absent, while only few fragments from oinochoai or hydriai survive. The rarity of large closed vessels from Amykles, just as from

36 For the use of the skyphos both for eating and drinking, see Howe 1958, 49–50; Morgan 1999, 322–323. For a distinction between the small open vessels that have served for eating and drinking, see Luce 2008, 278–280. For a use of the lidded skyphos as a container for various objects, see Themelis 1983.

37 Kyrieleis 2006, 178–179; Lemos 2002, 48–53.

38 For identification as kraters, see Coulson 1985, 54–55, fig. 9.

contemporary assemblages at Olympia, Isthmia, and Kalapodi, could indicate a marked difference in the use and function of those vessels in a ritual context.³⁹ B. Eder suggested that the rarity or paucity of large storage vessels may distinguish a sanctuary assemblage from a settlement one, where large closed shapes are generally much more common.⁴⁰

Pottery assemblages are characterized by a shiny black glaze and a remarkable consistency in shapes and decoration. They demonstrate a high degree of homogeneity, presumably indicating individuals and/or social groups that shared common social status and identity.⁴¹ The scarcity of imported wares and the rarity of clear external influences in the pottery from the sanctuary area seem to indicate that access to the sanctuary was restricted to local visitors from nearby areas. Although the frequency of those gatherings is impossible to reconstruct with the existing evidence, the large corpus of material found on the hill points to an apparent increase in the number of visitors, possibly also the rate of visitation, and eventually an increase in the ritual activity during the late tenth and in the ninth century. Drinking and dining seem to have enjoyed a central place among the ritual activities during the same period.

Feasting during the Geometric Period (Mid-Ninth to Late Eighth Century)

By the middle of the ninth century, two concurrent ceramic traditions in the feasting equipment indicate social transformations and outside cultural influences at Amykles, with possible political dimensions. While the PG pottery tradition seems to continue as late as the late ninth and the early eighth century, Argive, and to a lesser degree Corinthian and Attic, influences penetrate this idiosyncratic local style. This influence is best illustrated with the introduction of new shapes, mainly skyphoi and cups that draw their shape from the EG/MG Attic, Argive, and Corinthian repertoire, while their decoration reveals continuity from the strong Lakonian tradition (fig. 4.6). The shape seems foreign to local tradition, with a low vertical or slightly off-set lip, shallow body

39 Morgan 1999, 392–393; Eder 2009, 205; Nitsche 1987, 35–49; Felsch 1980, 47–54.

40 Eder 2001, 205.

41 Contrary to the treatment of the PG Amyklaian pottery by Cartledge 2002, 77–78 as the simple and monotone outcome of an isolated pottery production, our arguments are closer to that of Pettersson 1992, 97–100, who considers pottery style as a significant indicator for detecting social change.

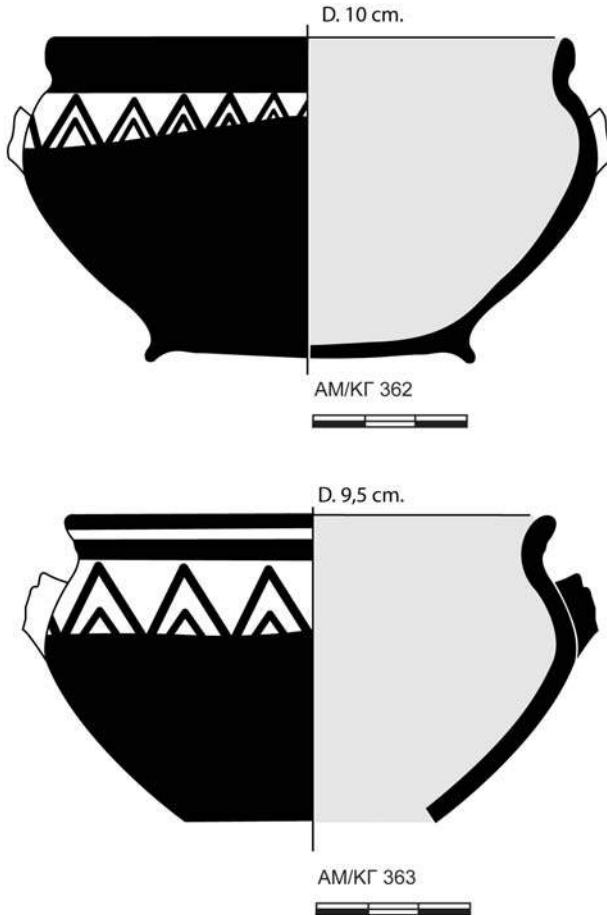


FIGURE 4.6 *Skyphoi of the early eighth century from the Amyklaion sanctuary*

DRAWING BY THE AUTHOR

with accentuated shoulders, and a low ring foot, while their decoration with superimposed triangles derives from the local PG repertory.⁴² In addition, horizontal parallel lines or single zigzags, horizontal lozenge chains, meanders with diagonal hatching, and vertical bars are also alternatives to the triangles: they were introduced via MG Attic influence, even though their popularity during the LG period is closer to the Argive LG. The presence of imported wares is a new element for the sanctuary during this period; flat pyxides with tall knobs,

42 Buschor and Von Massow 1927, pl. 3.19; Margreiter 1988, pl. 9.99–103; Vlachou 2015, fig. 3.



FIGURE 4.7 *A whole and a fragmentary leg of clay tripod cauldrons from the Amyklaion sanctuary*

PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

a lekythos-oinochoe with rope handle, and a few shallow skyphoi follow the Attic MG style, although the provenance for some of these pieces seems closer to the Argive specimens than to the Attic.

The presence of clay tripods with legs attached to the cauldron is of particular interest, considering the significance of their bronze counterparts in the Early Iron Age sanctuaries.⁴³ Only the legs and the distinctive high circular handles survive of some fine painted tripod lebetes of medium size and of clay stands dated to the second half of the eighth century. The earliest examples can be traced back to the early ninth century (fig. 4.7). The use of the bronze tripod cauldron as an object of dedication in the Amyklaian sanctuary was introduced around the same period, prior to similar dedications at other Spartan sanctuaries and among the earliest from Greek Early Iron Age sanctuaries. Their presence at this early date at the Amyklaian hill clearly demonstrates the growing ritual function of the site and at the same time indicates the wealth and social status of the participants in the activities. Nonetheless, one cannot

43 Benton 1934–1935; Snodgrass 2000, 281–285.



FIGURE 4.8 *Miniature tripod coarse ware from the Amyklaion sanctuary*
PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

ignore the utilitarian aspect of tripod cauldrons,⁴⁴ which were very effective for heating meals over a fire. It is possible that some of the clay specimens from the Amyklaion may have served a similar function during the feasting practices. In addition, miniature clay tripod cauldrons were also offered at the shrine, while a large collection of small handmade tripod vessels (fig. 4.8), such as *lekanai*, *chytrai*, and small amphorae, were also found within the sanctuary deposits, most of them dating from the Geometric period. Such vessels may indicate food preparation and complement to a certain degree the information missing as a result of the scarcity of cooking wares.

At the beginning of the eighth century, an increased range of votives suggests an increase in cult activity mainly during the latter half of the century. Although the nature and the basic function of most of the pottery did not change, the increased elaboration of the drinking and dining sets and the growing numbers of imported wares of this type, mainly Argive and Corinthian, suggest an

44 For the use of cauldrons during the Athenian festivals of Pyanepsia and Thargelia either as an intended offering for the god or for the preparation of the ritual dish consumed by the participants, see Bruit 1990, 168–169; for placing the cauldron on the fire for heating water or cooking, see Benton 1934–1935, 74–75. Boiling seems to have been the most frequent cooking method in sanctuaries. Ekroth 2007, 267–268.

increased investment by the participants in the feasting equipment. The uniformity of the technical characteristics of the vessels, rather typical for the PG series, is broken in the Geometric period. Although the largest corpus of the material seems still to belong to a local production, a substantial number of different fabrics may indicate the existence of more pottery workshops in the wider area.

The emphasis on open vessels at Amykles should be taken as indicative of the importance of communal feasting activities. One-handled cups, usually of small dimensions, handmade, and covered in black glaze or painted with vertical stripes all over their surface, become equally common. A new shape is the one-handled deep cup with almost vertical walls and a lip diameter that does not exceed 0.14 m (fig. 4.9). Skyphoi with a tall, slightly off-set lip and broad body are the standard drinking form of the LG period cups. The shape should be considered the immediate predecessor of the Lakonian *lakaina*,⁴⁵ a shape inextricably related to Lakonian drinking practices of the Archaic period.⁴⁶ *Kantharoi* with high strap handles are less common, but not absent in the assemblages throughout this period. An addition to the late eighth-century repertory is the broad shallow dish, usually with two horizontal handles attached at the rim and a low ring base. Thick light colored slip is applied on the surface of some specimens; the large size of these vessels should indicate a votive rather than a practical character and probably were used to hold food offerings or other perishable materials.⁴⁷ Smaller plates and *lekanides* with a deeper profile seem ideal for the consumption of food.

Kraters increased in number and size during the second half of the eighth century and were elaborately decorated, reflecting an increasing investment in material display. A fairly large number of imported finely-decorated Argive kraters could reflect the interregional fame of the sanctuary and of the festival during the second half of the eighth century. Local kraters, although much more fragmentary in the assemblages, seem similar to the type already distinguished by Droop from the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia.⁴⁸ The large size of those vessels, and the fact that some were completely burnt (in contrast to the rest of the material, which only rarely shows any traces of fire), may suggest

45 Coldstream 1968, 215–216; Stibbe 1994, 21–24.

46 Droop 1907–1908, 31 no. 3; Lane 1933–1934, 102–104; Pelagatti 1956, 22; Coldstream 1968, 215–216; Stibbe 1990, 73–113; 1994, 19–24.

47 Shape and decoration are very close to those from the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia (see Droop 1907–1908, 59 fig. 33, 61 fig. 34) and Argos (see Courbin 1966, pl. 67 c. 2570, c. 4128).

48 Droop 1907–1908, 57 fig. 31 b. For a similar although later krater from the Menelaion, see Stibbe 1994, 22–23, fig. A.



4.9 *Fragmentary one-handed deep cup. Late Geometric period*
PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

their use as ritual utensils during the celebrations and not merely as containers of food or liquids for the ritual feasts. Large amphorae appear for the first time during this period in the pottery assemblages, presumably reflecting a new provision of food and drink compared to previous periods.

Feasting and Ritual Practice at Amykles: Preliminary Considerations

Material evidence demonstrates that feasting held a prominent place among the ritual activities at Amykles covering the whole period from the final stage of the Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age onward. The incomplete nature of all the vessels from the deposits, their well-preserved surfaces, and the sharp fractured edges of most of the pieces all point to a deliberate ritual breakage after their use during the dining activities.⁴⁹ The good preservation of the ceramic material and the breakage pattern of the sherds from the deposits indicate that

49 Greenewalt 1978, 10–11; Morgan 1999, 323–324; D'Agatha 2000; Denti 2013a; 2013b.

the material must have been disposed of soon after consumption at the shrine. A large-scale cleaning of the space seems to have taken place in the late eighth century when the earliest enclosure wall of the sanctuary was built, and then again during the late Archaic period, in connection with the construction of the Throne for Apollo and the monumental peribolos wall that defined the sanctuary area. A few vessels from the deposits along the peribolos wall show traces of burning and interestingly enough most of those pieces belong to large finely-decorated local LG kraters. It seems possible that these vessels served as ritual utensils during the rituals, and were either dedicated (presumably as containers of food or other perishable materials) or were deliberately broken in the fire during the rituals, probably as an act of sacralization.⁵⁰

No evidence exists for contemporary constructions on the hill that may have facilitated the communal gatherings during this early period. It is only possible to suggest that the large circular stone altar that formed the center of the cultic activities from the late Archaic period seems to have replaced an older ash altar in the same area. We may see in the circular form of the altar and the stepped contour a possible reference to the earlier form at the same area. It may be assumed that drinking and dining activities took place near the altar, most probably in the open air. It would seem that even in the later phases of the sanctuary, there never existed a specific construction to house feasting activities during the successive phases of the Hyakinthia. From the Archaic period onward the sanctuary housed the Throne with the statue of Apollo, the tomb of Hyakinthos, the altar, and presumably a stoa and a propylon,⁵¹ however no evidence exists to fix a location for dining. It is possible that until the late eighth/early seventh century, when the earliest enclosure wall was erected around the foot of the hill, no permanent structures occupied the top. In this case, all the feasting and cultic equipment would have been transferred by the participants on the event of the festivities. The mixed character of the deposits around the supposed area of the altar and along the peribolos wall seem to indicate that there was no permanent structure to stock the votive offerings and that they seem to have been swept periodically along with the rest of the material.

Although it is not possible to argue on the exact form of the festival during this early period, figured pottery provides us with images of joyful celebrations with a specific focus on initiation ceremonies of the youths.⁵² Male dancers and

50 D'Agata 2000; Denti 2013b.

51 Delivorias 2009, 134; Vlivos 2009, 13.

52 Brulé 1992; Calame 1997, 182–183.



FIGURE 4.10 *Figured decorated skyphos from the Amyklaion sanctuary. Late Geometric period*

PHOTO BY THE AUTHOR

athletes and female choruses are commonly shown on the surface of drinking vessels, namely, kraters and skyphoi, and only rarely on other shapes. The decoration seems to draw its inspiration from concurrent ritual practices, possibly integrated within the already established religious festival at the site. A fragment of a small skyphos (fig. 4.10) is much more difficult to interpret, possibly also depicting a moment of a specific ritual act.

Two clay figures were found in the deposits at the Amyklaion and date to the late eighth century. Only the heads of the figures survive, one female wearing a polos and the other a male with a helmet. They are very similar in technique and decoration and were probably made to be dedicated together at the sanctuary.⁵³ The height of the heads is approximately 0.10 m and thus an estimated original height of about 0.40 m has been suggested, close to the average size of clay figures of the seventh century. Clay human figures of large size reappear in the EIA almost exclusively in sanctuaries and cult areas, interpreted either as the symbolic image of the worshippers or the actual venerated deities.⁵⁴ Although the identification of the male figure as an early image of Apollo is far from certain,⁵⁵ the presence of what seems like a male-female pair among the votives is tantalizing and leads to questions about the character of the ritual practices that took place during the Hyakinthia festival.

53 Demakopoulou 1982, 54–56 and pls. 25–26; 2015, 105–106 and figs. 1–2; Langdon 1998; Vlachou 2017, 25–31.

54 Kourou 2000; 2002.

55 Georgoulaki 1994; Langdon 2008, 276–279.

Concluding Remarks

This paper proposes that drinking and dining at the Amyklaian hill served as the crucial factor in maintaining the memory of the place and constituted a coherent link in the ritual continuity from the Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age. This suggestion focuses almost exclusively on the study of the material evidence from the earlier phases of the sanctuary (late eleventh to late eighth century) and on the treatment of the feasting equipment that constitutes the largest corpus of evidence during the same period. The early phases of the sanctuary at Amykles coincide with cultural shifts and ritual developments that are frequently difficult to completely understand on the basis of the study of the material assemblages alone. There remain unanswered questions regarding those early activities from the late eleventh century onward. What remains indisputable is the prominent role of feasting throughout the early history of the sanctuary. What is equally apparent through the study of the material assemblages is the shifting character of those feasts to better serve the ritual and social structure. In this way drinking at the Amyklaion seems to have formed the core of the ritual activity during the earliest stages, while later the dedication of votive offerings and the conspicuous display of material wealth even during the ritual feasts received exceptional attention.

Material evidence shows that the number of people and the frequency of the activities greatly declined from the mid/late eleventh to the early tenth century. However, the site was not forgotten and human activity never ceased completely. Eating and drinking at the Amyklaion would have served as a coherent link between earlier activity and the beginnings of cult in the Early Iron Age. By the mid-tenth century the Amyklaian hill becomes the focus of interest for the communities living in the vicinity. While drinking and dining activities are clearly demonstrated in the material record, the assemblages include a collection of vessel forms unrelated to drinking or dining, such as *lekythoi* and small-sized *hydriai*, which seem to have held some kind of liquid offerings, as well as clay figurines, spindle whorls, and miniature handmade vessels that may only be understood as dedications within a cultic context. The homogeneity of the ceramic material demonstrates the local character of the activities. Early connections with the Argolid, and probably Asine, may be traced in the pottery assemblages from both regions,⁵⁶ while a further opening may be claimed by the early/mid-ninth century. A few Lakonian sherds of PG style were found

56 Wells 1983, 19, 42, 64, 83; reviewed by Langdon 1985; Coldstream 1985; Vlachou 2015, 116.

on the way to the area of Vrasies,⁵⁷ which seems to have connected Sparta and the sites of the Argolid Gulf. Further to the north, a large amount of Lakonian sherds of PG style were found in a large deposit that has been associated with a presumably open-air shrine under the pronaos of the late Classical temple at Tegea.⁵⁸

The earliest material evidence from the other sanctuaries of the Spartan plain should also be dated to the late tenth/early ninth century on stylistic grounds. Only a few sherds have been reported from the acropolis of Sparta, the sanctuary of Athena Chalkioikos, the Heroon, and the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia.⁵⁹ Further to the south of Sparta on the west of the Eurotas plain, a few PG sherds have been reported from the area of Anthochori, where a sanctuary of Zeus Messapeus has been identified.⁶⁰ Still, the few PG sherds that predate the Geometric material at the Spartan sanctuaries cannot be compared to the large corpus of material from Amykles, and it seems rather probable that the Amyklaian hill was the focus of regional activity during the whole period from the late eleventh to the late tenth century. We may further suggest that the uninterrupted activity on the hill, with its Mycenaean pedigree and the early beginnings of the Early Iron Age shrine, could have been among the reasons for the significance of Amykles during the process of the creation of the Spartan polis and the importance of its festival among the state cults of Sparta.

The latter half of the ninth century represents the second important stage in the development of the sanctuary. The introduction of new shapes in the local feasting equipment, a visible growth of non-Lakonian ware that reached its climax in the second half of the eighth century, and new forms of dedication, such as clay and bronze tripods, demonstrate a clear change in the nature of the wealth investment by the participants in the feasts and rituals. Elaborate offerings, metal dedications, and imported goods display competitive interactions between the local communities and mark a significant change to the homogeneity of the material assemblages and ritual practices of earlier periods. The Early Iron Age shrine at the Amyklaion seems to have progressively evolved to a stage of competitive display reflecting contemporary social, economic, and even political developments.

57 Cave Sitzas: Faklaris 1990, 159–169, pl. 72c–d. For Prasies or Vrasies: Faklaris 1990, 129–137.

58 The beginnings of the cult are dated around the late tenth century, although an earlier date cannot be excluded. Voyatzis 1990, 269–273; 2004, 188–190, fig. 2; 2005; Østby et al. 1994, 134.

59 Coulson 1985; Eder 1998, 107–109; Zavvou and Themis 2009.

60 Zavvou 2009, 29–31, fig. 4.7.

M. Pettersson has argued that around the same period, the late ninth century, prestige and power of the local ruling elites (the Agiadai, the Eurypon-tidai, and the Aigeiadai) should have been largely based on the control of the most important cults of the later Spartan polis.⁶¹ The period from the end of the ninth to the late eighth century has been generally seen as a prolonged period of internal struggles, economic pressures, and increasing competition among the ruling families. The settlements of the Lakonians on Thera (ca. 800) and at Taras (ca. 700) are among the events that marked this period, possibly caused by the contemporary social and economic upheaval.⁶² The annexation of Amykles into the Spartan polis and the creation of Spartan territory through the synoecism of the five villages (Pitana, Mesoa, Kynosoura, Limnai, and Amykles) have been placed around the same period (ca. 760–740). According to the tradition, the incorporation of Amykles occurred in a warlike context that seems to reflect a period of struggles and oppositions.⁶³ In this context, the Amyklaian sanctuary should have had an important symbolic and cultic status in the definition of the Spartan territory, mainly due to its seniority compared to the rest of the cult places in the plain and its Mycenaean pedigree. It thus is possible that the motivation behind the annexation of Amykles was control over the Hyakinthia festival. Thus, the importance of Amykles rests equally on its role as a territorial landmark in the Spartan plain and the significance of its religious role in the formation of the new polis institutions.

The second half of the eighth century coincides with a peak in the activity at the Amyklaion and the third important stage in the early history of the sanctuary. The large corpus of material, the elaboration of the feasting equipment, and the various categories of votive offerings soundly demonstrate the importance of the cult at Amykles in the religious life of the Spartan polis. The tradition that associates the Hyakinthia festival with the events that led to the foundation of Taras (ca. 706) offers more support to the existence of the festival already at an early date, serving thus as fixed point of chronological reference.

61 Pettersson 1992, 105–106, 109–112. For the character of Sparta as a conglomerate of villages, see Thuc. 1.10.2. It has been argued that until the third century, the Spartan territory was occupied by small scattered settlements with the burial grounds in the adjacent areas. Stibbe 1989, 69. See also Zavvou and Themis 2009; Kennell and Luraghi 2009, 240–241, 245–247.

62 Pelagatti 1956, 7–44; Malkin 1994, 67–142; Nafissi 1999; Hall 2009, 111–114.

63 This situation has been largely discussed as the struggle between two culturally different populations, the Achaian Amykles and the Dorian Sparta. See Cartledge 2002, 92–106. Pettersson (1992, 106–112) views this situation as the outcome of interregional struggles between the aristocratic elites.

The construction of the first enclosure wall around the foot of the hill in the late eighth/early seventh century may be taken as additional evidence for the consolidation of the ritual activities that took place on the hill in the form of a religious festival. By the end of the eighth century, a remodeling of the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia at Limnai and the foundation of the cult of Menelaos and Helen manifest parallel transformations of religious practice. The dedication of bronze tripods, weapons, jewelry, and various offerings emphasize the role of the sanctuary as the stage for competitive display among the early elites. A similar situation may be argued for the rest of the Spartan sanctuaries, presumably reflecting a Spartan growth and expansion during the same period as the foundation of Taras and the successful outcome in the First Messenian War.⁶⁴

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64 Parker 1991; Malkin 1994, 67–142; Nafissi 2009, 117–124; Kennell and Luraghi 2009, 249–251.

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