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The Mycenaean Legacy: Patterns of State Formation in Western Civilization

Abstract: State formation is a multifaceted process, influenced by complex socio-political, economic, and cultural factors. Drawing upon evidence from Iklaina, one of the main capitals of the Mycenaean state of Pylos, this paper examines the formation of states in ancient Greece and emphasizes the recurring patterns observed both in ancient Greek and modern European state formation. It highlights foundational governance models and underscores the crucial role of warfare in shaping state systems. This analysis aims at shedding light on the factors that affect state formation throughout history.

Keywords: State formation, Mycenaean, Pylos, Iklaina

1 Introduction

State formation is a multifaceted and intricate process, shaped by the interplay of complex historical, socio-political, economic, and cultural factors. It is this interplay that forges the development of polities, influencing the evolution, interactions, and sustainability of states over time. To understand the dynamics of this process, it is essential to examine how various factors contribute to the patterns that forge the creation of states through history.

Among these factors, warfare plays a particularly transformative role to the creation of centralized and bureaucratic governance structures, large armies, and efficient taxation systems, ultimately leading to the emergence of modern states. Historically, warfare has accelerated the process of state formation through the forcible integration of new territories and the subsequent need for effective administration systems, leading to the transformation of loosely structured societies into organized, modern states with defined boundaries and governance systems.[1]

Sincere thanks are expressed to the editors for inviting me to contribute to this volume in honor of Professor Nikolaos Conomis. I am honored to participate in this recognition of a scholar, whose many decades of scholarship have significantly advanced our understanding of the classical world.

1 Tilly 1975; cf. the chapters in Kaspersen and Strandsbjerg 2017. For theoretical approaches to state formation, see the overview in Vu 2010.

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Another factor is technological and administrative advancements, which enable more effective rule over larger territories through improved communication, transportation, and record-keeping. Additionally, the European state system was shaped significantly by international dynamics, including colonialism and the influence of powerful empires, mirroring the competition and interactions between European states in their colonial policies.

Economic factors have also played a crucial role in the formation of states. The evolution of economies towards increasingly more complex trade networks and industrial economies has had profound implications for state formation. In the early stages, the development of agriculture and the subsequent need to manage and distribute resources necessitated the creation of organized structures of governance. As societies progressed, the rise of trade, both domestic and international, required more sophisticated economic policies and regulatory frameworks. This evolution of economic systems not only shaped the administrative contours of states, but also influenced their external relations, as trade became a vital aspect of inter-state dynamics.

Cultural developments have also been integral to the process of state formation. The shared beliefs, values, and practices of a population form the foundation upon which states are built and maintained. In the early phases of state formation, cultural homogeneity often played a role in unifying populations, while in later stages, the challenge was to integrate diverse cultures into a cohesive national identity. The influence of religion, language, art, and tradition in shaping national identities cannot be overstated. Furthermore, cultural interactions and exchanges, sometimes facilitated by conquests or trade, have historically contributed to the evolution of state identities, affecting everything from legal systems to educational policies.

In western democracies, the concept of the social contract has also been a factor affecting the evolution of state formation. Rooted in philosophical thought and practical necessity, the social contract represents the agreement between the governed and their governors, defining the rights and responsibilities of each. In antiquity, this was often implicit, embedded in the fabric of societal norms and governance practices, but in modern times it has become more explicit, encapsulated in constitutions and legal frameworks. This evolution reflects the growing complexity of societal structures and the increasing emphasis on individual rights and democratic governance, shaping how states are organized and how they interact with their citizens.

The study of the factors that affect state formation in different periods and geographical regions reveals diachronic underlying patterns that profoundly affect the development of political systems. Given that the earliest states in the Western world emerged in ancient Greece, a thorough examination of Greek state formation is pivotal to our understanding of these enduring patterns. Specifically,

the development of the polis in the early historical periods of Greece was forged by factors similar to the ones at play in recent periods.

The frequent warfare among Greek city-states, much like the military engagements in later European history, played a crucial role in their political evolution. The need for defense and military prowess led to the development of organized political structures and citizen armies, paralleling the military-driven state consolidation seen in Europe. Technological and administrative advancements in ancient Greece, such as the development of sophisticated systems for governance, record-keeping, and infrastructure, also find their parallels in the evolution of modern European states. These advancements were crucial in managing the affairs of the polis and laid the foundation for future administrative and technological progress in state governance.

Economic factors were also pivotal. The development of trade, particularly maritime trade in city-states like Athens, necessitated the creation of laws and administrative systems to regulate commerce and manage resources. This mirrors the role of economic transformations in the development of European states, where the growth of commerce and capitalism catalyzed political organization and governance structures.

Cultural and ideological developments in ancient Greece, such as the emphasis on civic identity and philosophical inquiry, can be seen as forerunners to the nationalism and Enlightenment thought that shaped modern Europe. The Greek emphasis on rational thought, debate, and the pursuit of knowledge influenced European intellectual and cultural developments, underpinning the evolution of modern states.

The concept of the social contract, while philosophically formalized in modern times, has its roots in ancient Greek democracy, particularly in the idea of citizens actively participating in governance. Greek city-states, especially Athens, developed early forms of democratic governance, where free citizens had a say in state affairs, laying the groundwork for modern concepts of citizenship and civil rights.

The gist of the matter is that, particular circumstances aside, the patterns underlying the processes of state formation in the western world echo some of the patterns that are first observed in ancient Greece. The Greek city-states provided early models of organized political structures, established forms of governance, economic development, cultural identity, and administrative efficiency. These elements shaped the formation of states and the political landscape in Europe, demonstrating a continuity that bridges ancient and modern political history.

Understanding these historical connections is essential. Ancient Greek state formation is not a phenomenon isolated from our world today, but part of the same socio-political, economic, and cultural continuum, providing useful insights into the mechanisms that lead to the creation of states. By recognizing historical continuities

and influences, we develop a better understanding of the enduring principles of state governance and political evolution. This understanding helps us to see modern state formation in the western world not as a series of isolated events, but as part of a long historical continuum. Additionally, identifying fundamental drivers of state development that transcend particular eras can reveal diachronic patterns of politics and power dynamics relevant even in contemporary contexts. Thus, the study of Greek state formation becomes an indispensable tool in comprehending and analyzing the formation and development of states in the western world.

2 State formation in ancient Greece

The emergence of the ancient Greek polis represents a significant milestone in the history of political organization in the western world and can be attributed to a confluence of economic, social, military, cultural, and political transformations.[2] Traditional, 'formalist' definitions of city-states, rooted in Aristotle's legal/institutional criteria for polis and citizenship, adopt a neo-evolutionary and teleological view of Archaic communities as 'imperfect' or 'incomplete' city-states.[3] Recent scholars express, however, skepticism about this universal application of static criteria to the political formations of different periods and advocate for more 'substantivist' definitions, based on the realities of each period.[4] In this framework, the political institutions of the Early Iron Age and the Archaic period are not seen as stages in the development towards the 'perfect' Classical city-state, but as elements of an open-ended and unpredictable process of political and social change.

Where scholars agree, is that the polis was both a territorial unit with an urban center and its surrounding territory *and* a power unit with an integrated community of citizens, formalized public institutions, and an ideology of allegiance and loyalty to the community. These are characteristics that can be identified with certainty in

2 The bibliography on the formation of the Greek polis is vast. Some important works are Sakellariou 1989; Hansen 2006; Van der Vliet 2011; Davies 2018.

3 For example, Finley (1978, 34) talked about the 'embryonic form' of the Greek polis. Along similar lines, Austin and Vidal-Naquet (1977, 40) think that the meaning of such terms as *demos*, *polis*, *politai* in the Early Iron Age, based on their meaning in the Homeric epics, was 'less full' than their later meanings. Murray (1993, 62–63) associates the development of polis with the process of urbanization and Morris (1986, 104) sees in the polis "the rudimentary outlines of a polity on the verge of statehood". Schmidt (2004, 1376–1377) emphasizes that the usage of the term *polis* in Homer is associated more with the physical characteristics of a settlement, rather than the spirit of a community.

4 See the discussion in Duplouy 2018, 9–14, 47–48 and Hansen 2006, 41–42.

the political communities of many parts of Greece after 700 BC and which seem to have been born out of the social and economic developments of the 8th century.[5]

The origins of this political organization and ideology can be traced back to the small, self-sufficient communities, possibly chiefdoms, that emerged after the collapse of the Mycenaean palaces, in the 11th and 10th centuries.[6] As power was consolidated by the *basileis* (the 'big-men' ruling those chiefdoms), centralized political and religious institutions were formed in the settlements that served as their seats, while the territories around those settlements were consolidated in 'land-people' units — the *damoi*. It is in those *damoi* that the structure and inner dynamics of the later city-states began to be formed by the 9th century, as the *basileis* increasingly formalized their offices and established power-sharing system through short-tenured offices and collegial boards. The increase in the population of those settlements would have been a major factor in turning them into the political, social, economic, and religious centers of *poleis*.[7] At the same time, the increase in the number of burials may indicate the rise of an egalitarian ideology, which seems to have been in place by the end of the 8th century.[8] Still, elites continued to dominate the political scene until the end of the Archaic period, by which time the emergence of the hoplites as a political force had taken full effect.[9]

Overall, early *poleis* did not emerge in a vacuum, but were the products of centuries of socio-political developments going back to the Mycenaean palatial states. Earlier objections to such a continuity were based on the idea of a complete and utter destruction of the Greek world at the end of the Palatial period, an idea that now is outdated and debunked. Although the collapse of the Mycenaean world brought deep changes to the socio-political and economic organization of the Greek world, those changes caused only a *partial* restructuring of life and were less intensely felt in non-palatial areas and in spheres of activity that had previously

5 The developments during the eighth century are discussed in Snodgrass 1980, 15–84 and Osborne 2009, 35–99; cf. Raaflaub 1993, 50–51 and Whitley 2020, 161–162. For the definitions and historical development of the concepts of *ethnos* and *polis* see Morgan 2003, 4–10.

6 The term 'pre-state' is offered by Donlan (1989, 16–17) as an alternative to Runciman's (1982, 352–353) 'semi-state', a polity which has no potential for statehood. For Runciman, the transition to the 'proto-state', a stage which inevitably culminates in statehood, occurred in the eighth century.

7 Donlan 1989, 5, 21, 25–26; Ault 2019, 151–152. Osborne (2009, 74–88) offers a critical analysis of fertility and mortality as factors affecting population growth.

8 Morris 1987, 143–145 and 1998, 24; for a critique of Morris's opinions, see Kistler 2004, 150–175 and Anderson 2005, 185 and n. 31.

9 Raaflaub 1993 and 1997; Donlan 1997; Morris 1998 and 2000, 155–191. For the importance of the assembly of citizens for communal life, see Raaflaub 2013, 76–77. This 'teleological' approach to the emergence of democracy is questioned by Foxhall (1997, 61–62).

operated outside the influence of the Palaces. A gap or barrier between the Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age never occurred and many elements of Mycenaean socio-political organization survived into the early historical periods.[10] Therefore, to fully grasp the origins of historical states in Greece, it is essential that we understand the processes that led to the creation of Mycenaean states.

3 The formation of Mycenaean states

Through much of the 20th century, the emergence of Aegean states, particularly the Mycenaean ones, was interpreted through broad evolutionist models, accepting an evolution from chiefdoms to states.[11] The mechanisms leading to the formation of new states are either integrative or coercive, but in recent years there is a growing consensus that state formation is better understood through models that integrate both integration and coercion.[12]

In the Aegean, state formation theories have ranged from Childe's diffusionism to Renfrew's focus on indigenous political economies and the concept of "Early State Modules". Overall, however, they were based on evidence from major palatial sites, like Mycenae or Knossos, and placed strong emphasis on centralized power structures as seen in the remnants of the great palatial centers. As scholarly understanding deepened, the focus shifted to include the role of peer-polity interactions, the management of wealth and surpluses by regional elites, and the impact of external stimuli on the development of Aegean states.[13] A significant advance in our understanding of Mycenaean state formation was made by James Wright, who proposed that the chiefdoms from which Mycenaean states were formed emerged at the onset of the Mycenaean period, as authority and power became centralized under preexisting lineages led by "Big Men" — factional or kin leaders who had gained prestige and status through a combination of adventurous achievements and access to prestige items from the Cyclades and Crete.[14] Chiefdoms replaced the unstable

10 Dickinson 2006; Maran 2006; Middleton 2010; Papadopoulos 2014, 186; also Papadopoulos 1993, 195, where the Dark Age is called a "mirage"; Whitley 2020, 263–264.

11 Along the lines of Service's (1975) band-tribe-chiefdom-state scheme or Fried's (1967) egalitarian-rank-stratified society line.

12 Yoffee 2005, 15; cf. Scheidel 2013, 11–14 with further references.

13 Childe 2013, 22–40; Renfrew 1972; 1975; 1986.

14 Wright 1995; 2001; 2004, 70–73; 2008, 243; 2010, 814–815. Cf. Kilian 1988.

authority of those Big Men, as their authority gradually became institutionalized and led to the formalization of their power during the period of the Shaft Graves.[15]

In more recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on the significance of regional diversity in understanding the paths toward social complexity. This perspective highlights the important roles played by non-palatial sites and agents in the emergence of layered systems of power and authority, marking a shift from top-down explanatory models focused on major centers to more nuanced, bottom-up approaches that take into account the forces at play at all levels of society. This evolving understanding has led to critiques of the earlier neo-evolutionary models. While these models provided a structured and comparative framework, they often forced diverse societies into predetermined molds, overlooking the unique trajectories of different communities. Current research underscores that state formation is not a linear progression from simple to complex political forms but is instead a fluid, diverse, and dynamic process. This complexity is evidenced by the varying degrees of integration and 'stateness' that different Mycenaean polities exhibited, demonstrating the multitude of paths toward social complexity.[16]

A prime example of this ever-unfolding approach to the study of Bronze Age state formation is the Mycenaean state of Pylos. The Pylian state merits special attention due to the unparalleled wealth of archaeological and textual evidence produced from years of intensive exploration. Excavation of the palatial capital at Ano Englianos (known as the Palace of Nestor) has uncovered over 1,000 Linear B tablets, providing invaluable data about the operation of the Pylian state.[17] These data have been supplemented by decades of intensive fieldwork conducted outside the Palace of Nestor, including excavation of tombs by Spyridon Marinatos and George Korres, and surface surveys such as the Minnesota Messenia Expedition, the Pylos Regional Archaeological Project, and the Iklaina Archaeological Project.[18]

The combined evidence from this fieldwork has enhanced significantly our understanding of several key aspects of the Mycenaean state of Pylos, setting the stage for an in-depth study of the wider issue of state formation in ancient Greece.

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15 A modified timeline for this process is suggested by Petrakis (2010), who dates the beginning of the institutionalization of the power of those chiefs early in the Middle Helladic period and considers the rise of monumental burial mounds of the turn of the second millennium as the manifestation of the high status of specific kin groups.

16 Feinman 2000, 211; Renfrew 2001, xi; Yoffee 2005, 28–31; Pauketat 2007, 3–4; for the Aegean, see Hamilakis 2002, 10–12; For a different view, see Marcus and Feinman 1998, 6. For grades of 'stateness', see Scott 2017.

17 Blegen and Rawson 1966; Bennett and Olivier 1973 and 1976; Bennet 1995; Palaima 1988; 2003; 2004.

18 Korres 1990; McDonald and Rapp 1972; Davis 2008; Cosmopoulos 2016.

4 The Mycenaean state of Pylos

The current model for the formation of the Pylian state was advanced by Bennet and Shelmerdine.[19] According to this model, during the Middle Helladic period (ca. 2200–1700 BC), Messenia comprised numerous regional loci of power. Towards the close of this period and the dawn of Late Helladic (abbr. LH) period in the early 17th-century, increased competition among the rulers of these centers precipitated the establishment of chiefdoms. Over the course of LH I–II (ca. 1700–1420 BC), Ano Englianos progressively ascended as a prominent center, attaining control of western Messenia (the Hither Province of the Linear B tablets) during the LH IIIA1 period (ca. 1420–1370 BC) and of eastern Messenia (the Further Province) during LH IIIA2 (1370–1330).[20] The mounting regional dominance of the Palace, eclipsing rival centers, is archaeologically visible in new tholos tombs proximal to the palace and abandoned tholoi elsewhere.[21] By the end of LH IIIB (1330–1200 BC), Ano Englianos ruled over an integrated domain spanning some 2,000 km^2 across both provinces.

A notable limitation of both textual and survey data lies in their chronological scope. As Bennet astutely observes, the dominance of the Palace over this large territory reflects the situation of the final years of the 13th century, offering no insights into the political landscape of earlier periods.[22] Moreover, surface survey ceramics typically cannot be dated with precision, impeding the reconstruction of the historical development of sites known through surface investigation. Establishing precise chronological shifts in settlement history requires systematic excavation of non-palatial sites, but beyond Ano Englianos, the only other systematically excavated settlements are Nichoria, identified as the Further Province district capital **ti-mi-to-a-ko*, and Iklaina, identified as the Hither Province district capital **a-pu^2*.[23]

19 Bennet 1995; 1999; 2007; Bennet and Shelmerdine 2001; cf. Davis and Bennet 1999.

20 Bennet 1995, 600.

21 H. Morris 1986; Bennet 1995; 2007; Davis 2022.

22 Bennet 2013, 244.

23 For Nichoria, see Rapp and Aschenbrenner 1978; McDonald and Rapp 1972; McDonald, Coulson and Rosser 1983; McDonald and Wilkie 1992. For the identification of this site with **ti-mi-to-a-ko*, see Shelmerdine 1981. For Iklaina, see Hope Simpson 1981, 117: F17–F18; Bennet 2008; cf. Davis 2008; Cosmopoulos 2006.

5 A historical outline of Iklaina

The Mycenaean settlement of Iklaina is located at the western edge of an extensive plateau stretching from the modern village towards the Ionian Sea. Marinatos first tested the site in a brief 1954 excavation,[24] after which the site remained unexplored until the 1990s, when Korres included it in his list of Marinatos' unfinished excavations and suggested that I continue the investigation of the site. The Iklaina Archaeological Project (IKAP) was established in 1998 under the auspices of the Athens Archaeological Society. It is an interdisciplinary research program organized by the University of Missouri-St. Louis and funded by the Greek Professorship at that university, and also the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Science Foundation, and the Institute for Aegean Prehistory. It integrates regional survey, excavation and scientific analyses to explore the process of state formation in Mycenaean Pylos.

The first phase of the project was an intensive surface survey of an area of ca. 22 km^2 from Ano Englianos in the north to the Mycenaean site of Koukounara in the south, which revealed that Iklaina was by far the largest site in the region.[25] The second phase, an ongoing systematic inter-disciplinary excavation that started in 2008, has brought to light a prosperous settlement that thrived from around 1600 BC until about 1200 BC, featuring formal and monumental architecture, residential buildings, and industrial workshops (Figure 1).

It appears that the history of the site encompasses four distinct phases:[26]

Phase 1 (LH IIA – LH IIB, possibly into early LH IIIA1): a large terrace (Terrace V) was built at the plateau's west edge, supporting a now largely destroyed building (Building A) with a paved courtyard in front of its west façade. Reused orthostates discovered in that area may indicate the existence of a now destroyed Early Mycenaean orthostate building.

Phase 2 (LH IIIA1 – LH IIIA2 Late) was a phase of architectural expansion. Terrace V continued to be used, but a large five-room rectangular structure was built (Building T) on top of it and a monumental building (Building X) to the east. Additional buildings were erected to the north and south of Building T, including House B, House A, and Unit K. To the south, Building T was bounded by a courtyard and an open-air shrine. A Linear B tablet (IK X 1) was found in a refuse pit to the north of

24 Marinatos 1954, 309; Hope Simpson 1981, 117.

25 Cosmopoulos 2016.

26 Cosmopoulos 2018; 2019.

Building T, containing a personnel list on one side and a catalogue of manufactured goods on the reverse.

Fig. 1: Aerial photograph of the Iklaina site. © Iklaina Archaeological Project.

Phase 3 (LH IIIA2 Late–LH IIIB Middle) was a period of further expansion. It did not involve changes to the orientation or function of the preexisting buildings, only the monumentalization and formalization of the most important ones. The area of Terrace V was expanded with the construction of a massive (24.3 x 8.2m) rectangular platform built in the Cyclopean style. Its purpose was to support a two- or three-storey monumental building, constructed with ashlar masonry, the "Cyclopean Terrace Building", or CTB (Figure 2). It was decorated with beautiful frescoes and it is possible that it housed a megaron. The CTB became the main architectural focus of the site, visually dominating the landscape; the ashlar blocks, frescoed interiors and exterior plaster denote its formal character. This monumentalization and formalization are compatible with high-echelon administrative complexes, raising the possibility that the CTB constituted Iklaina's administrative center.

Fig. 2: Reconstruction of the CTB. © Iklaina Archaeological Project.

The CTB complex was bordered to the south and east by a courtyard with hard-packed clay loam floor and a paved piazza from which started two paved roads: the South Road led to the open air shrine and the East passed in front of Building X and, through a Gate, led to the residential sector of the site. A network of built stone drains and another network of clay pipes for water distribution served the houses of this sector.

All the structures of this phase were destroyed violently in an advanced stage of LH IIIB, around 1250 BC, as a result of human agency — a violent act of war.

Phase 4 was the final phase in the life of the settlement. The destroyed monumental buildings were never rebuilt and their area was abandoned; in the residential sector new buildings, mostly industrial workshops, were constructed on top of the houses of Phase 3, but with a different orientation. This phase was short-lived, terminating in late LH IIIB–early LH IIIC, after which the settlement was abandoned.

6 Interpretation

To contextualize and assess the historical trajectory of Iklaina, we must compare it to those of the two other systematically excavated sites, Ano Englianos and Nichoria. Ano Englianos exhibits early architectural sophistication and continuous urban expansion already in the beginning of the Mycenaean period, with connections

with Crete apparent in the use of orthostate construction as early as LH II and in the magnificent finds from the grave of the Griffin Warrior;[27] monumental buildings were erected by LH IIIA.[28] In the beginning of LH IIIB, some sectors of the site went out of use following a destruction by fire of the Hilltop and the Lower town.[29] After this destruction, the Hilltop was leveled and the pre-existing buildings were combined in larger complexes: Buildings B and C became parts of the Main Building, Building A was incorporated in the Southwestern Building, and additional buildings were constructed and preexisting buildings reconfigured.[30] The megaron now appeared for the first time. The size of the entire site in this period is estimated at 12.4 ha. In some late phase of LH IIIB some changes in the circulation plan and remodeling occurred, resulting in significant increase in the storage and, possibly, administrative capacity of the Palace. The size of the site in this final phase appears to have been about 14–15 ha.[31]

At Nichoria, a much smaller settlement of about 4–5 ha., a LH II building was succeeded by the LH IIIA1 megaron. Several new buildings were constructed in LH IIIA2, which continued to be in use without major disruptions until the end of the life of the site, in LH IIIB. Monumental buildings, advanced urban infrastructures, Linear B records, and large-scale decorative programs with frescoes are not attested.

The comparison of these two sites to Iklaina leads to important conclusions about the relative functions and hierarchical positions of all three sites. Until the middle of LH IIIB, both Iklaina and Ano Englianos share characteristics of top-tier, primary centers (monumental architecture, sophisticated urban infrastructure, evidence of bureaucracy in the form of Linear B tablets), a fact that challenges the notion that Iklaina functioned as a secondary center; Nichoria, on the other hand, lacks all of these characteristics, which supports its classification as a secondary center. This raises questions about the settlement hierarchy and the process of Iklaina's integration into the state of Pylos, necessitating a reevaluation of the current model for the formation of the Pylian state.

As discussed above, this model posits that the unification of the Pylian state started at the start of LH IIIA. However, at Iklaina, there are not any discernible markers for annexation, peaceful (e.g., substantial changes in the architectural layout and design of the settlement) or violent (extensive destruction horizon) between the beginning of LH II and the middle of LH IIIB. The only potential marker

27 Davis and Stocker 2016; Stocker and Davis 2017.

28 Blegen, Rawson and Taylour 1973, 3; Nelson 2017, 353.

29 Blegen and Rawson 1966, 19, 34, 423.

30 Nelson 2017, 361–362.

31 Bennet and Shelmerdine 2001, 136; Bennet 2007, 34.

of annexation appears to have been the destruction of the monumental buildings around the middle of LH IIIB. The subsequent abandonment of the formal areas, coupled with the emphasis on industrial activities, is compatible with a violent takeover and a demotion of the site from an independent administrative to a dependent industrial center.[32] In turn, this would mean that the territorial expansion and subsequent unification of the Pylian state occurred very late in the Mycenaean period.

A late formation of the Pylian state impacts our views of the form of the polities that preceded this state. It means that, until the closing decades of the Palatial period, Messenia was not one large unified state, but several micro-polities, independent small states with an urban core and a rural territory. A late unification of this state could also explain some of the characteristics of Pylian administrative organization, such as decentralized authority and duplication of administrative structures, traits typically associated with young states that are still in the process of integration and stabilization.[33]

These aspects of Pylian administration suggest that, at the time of its collapse, the transition to a fully integrated state was still underway and that the state was actively engaged in the process of incorporating other polities into its complex administrative system. Because these small peer polities consisted of an urban core surrounded by farmland containing smaller units of settlement, their morphological characteristics may have been akin to city-states,[34] a possibility supported by the evidence from Iklaina. The unification of the Pylian state was the result of the forcible annexation of those micro-polities by the increasingly more powerful polity of Ano Englianos, highlighting the importance of warfare as a driver in the process of state formation.

32 This interpretation should be taken with caution. Given the complexity of political relationships, the binary model of total annexation vs complete independence does not always reflect reality and may oversimplify the nuanced spectrum of the modes of political integration of one state by another. These can range from familial alliances to threats of aggression or gradual integration into a broader political entity (Cosmopoulos 2019).

33 For duplication of structures, see Galaty 1999, 15–17. Duplication exists in officials with similar duties at the levels of the palace (*qa-si-re-u* and *du-ma-te*) and the district capitals (*ko-re-te* and *po-ro-ko-re-te*): H. Morris 1986. The most recent scholarship on the decentralized aspects of the Pylian state suggests that various local *damoi* and sanctuaries were considerably independent of palatial control (Lupack 2008 and 2011; Halstead 2011, 231–232).

34 Parkinson and Galaty 2007, 125.

7 Conclusions: Revisiting the formation of the Pylian State

The evidence from Iklaina contributes significantly to our broader understanding of Mycenaean state formation by illuminating important aspects of this process. For example, it challenges the notion of a homogeneous, pan-Mycenaean route to state formation and underscores the varied nature of sociopolitical complexity in the Late Bronze Age. The unification story of the Pylian state, as evidenced by Iklaina, contrasts with the much earlier integration in regions like the Argolid or the absence of such unification in areas like Corinthia. These regional variances, now more pronounced with the new data from Iklaina, highlight the distinct and divergent paths Mycenaean polities took toward statehood.

Another important aspect is the prominence of war and violence as significant drivers in the process of state formation. The evidence from Iklaina, suggesting a violent conquest around 1250 BC, exemplifies the impact of warfare in the emergence and expansion of early states. This pattern of aggressive unification and expansion is a recurring theme, extending from the Mycenaean era to the classical city-states of Greece to modern European nation-states.

A related aspect is the two-tiered administrative structure of the unified Pylian state, involving a top-tier central administration based in the Palace of Nestor, and second-tier semi-autonomous administrative units based in the district capitals of the state. This kind of governance system appears to have been the product of the forced unification of pre-existing independent micro-polities, which preserved part of their previous autonomy and became district capitals. This Mycenaean two-tiered system, a later version of which is seen in the federal states of the historical periods, was a product of military conquest and once again highlights the complexities and coercive strategies inherent in state formation during the historical periods.[35]

In essence, the story of state formation in ancient Greece, from the Mycenaean states to the Classical poleis, is marked by diverse paths and models. The Mycenaean state of Pylos exemplifies the complex and multifaceted nature of political developments in ancient Greece and the western world, where regional particularities and independent trajectories were pivotal in shaping the unique character of each state and polis. The complexity of the factors affecting state formation underscores the importance of considering regional contexts and individual developmental paths in understanding the evolution of political and social structures.

35 Beck and Funke 2015; Blome 2020.

The intricate dynamics of state formation in ancient Greece, from the Mycenaean period to the end of antiquity, offer useful insights into the influences shaping the formation of modern states in the Western world. The evolutionary path of ancient Greek states, marked by regional diversity, independent development, and gradual integration, has had a lasting impact on the conceptual and practical frameworks of state-building in Western civilization.

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