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Continuity or mobility: event and reaction at a specific location. A case study from Knossos

ABSTRACT

Mobility or movement implies starting and finishing locations. This paper focuses on finishing points, moments in time revealed by excavation. It recognizes two clearly distinct, successive moments at each stage in a site's occupation sequence, first the moment revealed by a context, for example a destruction event, and second what followed, also an event (or a continuity) but which can be characterized as the response or reaction to the foregoing event. The paper considers whether mobility might or might not be implied by the reaction.

The case study is the occupation sequence over the period Middle Minoan III to Late Minoan II (1700 B.C. - 1390 B.C. at the limits) on the excavated site immediately west of the Knossos Stratigraphical Museum. Over this time at least five events and five reactions are apparent. First, MM III B-LM I A Transition, c. 1600 B.C., a destruction (probably earthquake) and continuity. Second, c. 1525 B.C., the Thera Volcanic Eruption near the end of LM I A, and a major response, new buildings in ashlar masonry. Third, at the end of LM I A, the sudden interruption of the new building work (very probably earthquake) and an unexpected response, change to an industrial site and the erection of a new building with ritual connotations. Fourth, destruction of the building by fire at the end of LM IB and the erection (LM II) of a further new building and the completion of the old unfinished building (event 3), with much use of gypsum. Fifth, destruction of the LM II buildings by fire and construction of circular platforms in ashlar masonry, probably reused, on now open ground (LM III A 1).

Reaction 1 was local continuity. Reaction 2 indicates Knossian mobility, with new wealth and access to increased resources. Reactions 3A and 3B each imply different forms of intra-site mobility and socio-economic or socio-political change. Reaction 4 certainly implies mobility, the initial presence of Mycenaeans. Reaction 5 again implies intra-site mobility, this time under Mycenaean suzerainty.

KEYWORDS: Knossos, continuity or mobility: events and reactions, case study

Mobility – μετακίνηση – whether of people, goods, practices or ideology, may be at any temporal scale and at any physical scale, from macro (for example migration) to micro (for example an individual craftsperson on the move). Mobility or movement also implies starting and finishing locations. The approach in this paper is to turn the subject round, that is to *start* not with mobility but with a quasi *non*-mobility, namely fixed moments in time revealed by excavation, and then to consider whether the fixed moments might or might not imply mobility and, if they do so

imply, what sort of mobility. Although as archaeologists we constantly uncover fixed moments the general explanatory questions seem not so frequently asked.

To begin with it is methodologically important to recognize two clearly distinct, successive moments at each stage in a site sequence revealed by excavation, first the point in time manifested by a specific context, for example a destruction event, and then what followed, the response or reaction to the event. The reaction itself can of course be characterized as an event, but at the same time it may be understood as a response to a previous situation or happening, and is so treated here. The reaction can be negative, for example abandonment, temporary or permanent, or it can be positive, continuity, for example a new level of the same material culture such as pottery shapes and styles within the same building or, as Lefteris Platon showed in *Stega* for houses at Zakros (Platon 2011, especially 156-158), local or familial expansion of an existing building, or, thirdly, it can be change, for example different use of the location, with or without new material culture. So we will look at 'event moments', their possible causes and at whether mobility may be implied by the reaction to the event. In Braudelian terms we are concerned with *histoire événementielle*.

The example examined here is the use of the area immediately west of the Knossos Stratigraphical Museum (Fig. 1) over the time period Middle Minoan III to Late Minoan II (Warren 1980-1981; 1982-1983), approximately 1700-1390 B.C. at the limits. The sequence of events and reactions on the excavated site was as follows.

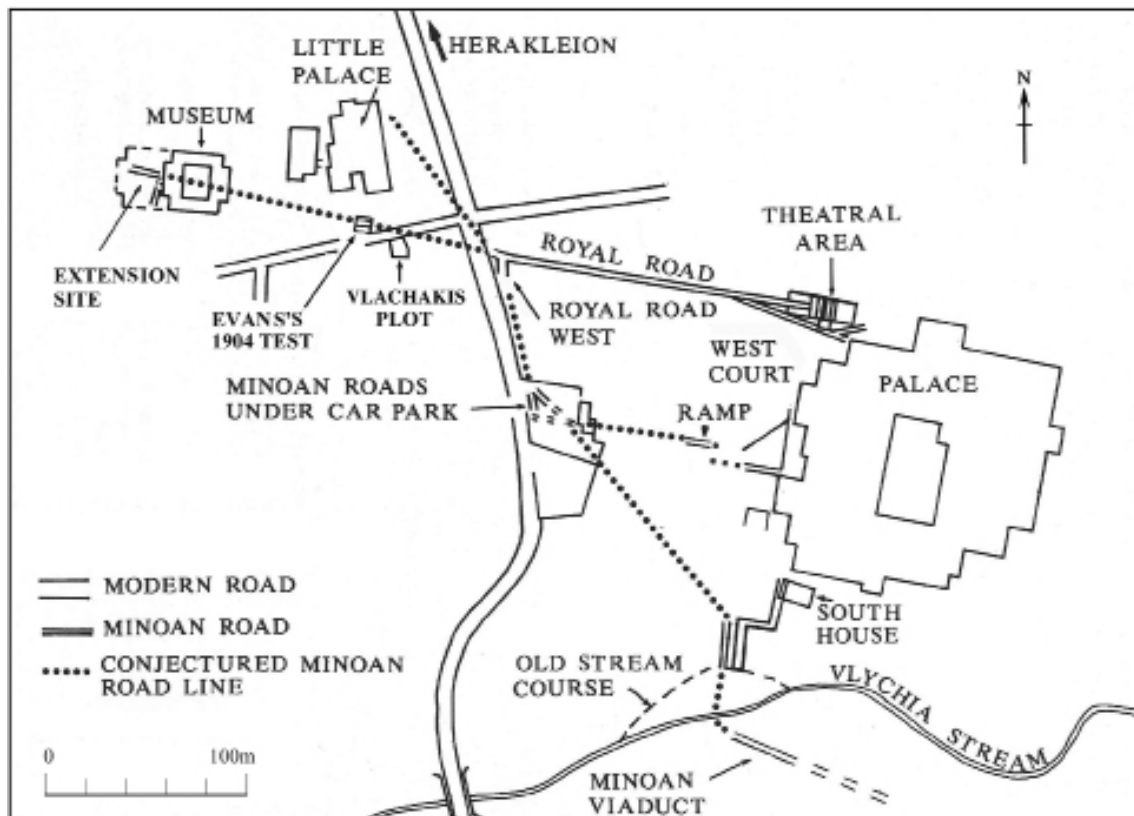


Fig. 1. Knossos area with Stratigraphical Museum Extension site.



Fig. 2. MM III B-LM I A Transition destruction deposit (Trench D Pit VI). Museum Extension site.



Fig. 3. South House north wall with LM I A ashlar courses and LM II gypsum top course.

Remnants of 17th century (MM III A and MM III B) houses with walls of good quality (but not ashlar construction) had occupation levels and fills beside them; this material implies local continuity without any marked changes or differentiating reactions. But *circa* 1600 B.C. (MM III B-LM I A Transition) there seems to have been a major destruction event (EVENT 1) (Fig. 2). The evidence from the site correlates with much other evidence from Knossos and elsewhere, including the Thera Seismic Destruction (Warren 1991). The cause, then, will have been earthquake. But on our site the reaction after the destruction appears to have been local continuity, marked by LM I deposits in rooms already used in MM III (REACTION 1).

EVENT 2. The next event, near but not at the end of LM I A, is huge, the Thera Volcanic Eruption, but marked on our site only by a single piece of pumice from that eruption (Warren and Puchelt 1990, 78-80, Sample A)¹. Its stratification is crucial since its level/context is followed by a truly major reaction on our site, the construction of a large ashlar masonry building, called the South House (Fig. 3), and a superbly laid out and paved accompanying road (REACTION 2) (Fig. 4). This must imply a substantial increase in Knossian wealth, which in turn strongly suggests Knossian mobility in access to increased resources and perhaps also territory.

EVENT 3. The third event is that while this new ashlar building was under construction work was suddenly brought to an end, as also happened to the Unexplored Mansion only 70 metres to the east at the same time (Popham 1984, 261-262). An out-of-position masonry block at the base of the south-east corner of the building strongly suggests that the cause of the stopping of work was an earthquake,



Fig. 4. LM I A South House south east corner, building to south (on left) and paved road.

¹ Warren and Puchelt 1990, 80 give the stratigraphic position of Sample A (SEX 79/526) as 0.33 m. below an LM I B floor in an MM III B-LM I A-LM I B context. 0.33 m is correct, but the dating needs correction, from subsequent study. The floor (Trench T, base of level 43) is LM I A and the pottery below it (level 45) is also LM I A. An LM I B fragment was present in the LM I level above the floor.



Fig. 5. LM I A South House south east corner with base block out of position (arrow).

marking the end of LM I A (Fig. 5). No Minoan builder would have built a wall thus. Pottery spread against the lowest courses of the ashlar walls and in large fills over more unfinished buildings and over open ground on other parts of the site indicates that this was another major destruction event. The response to it (REACTION 3A) was completely different from the response to the preceding event, which had been the decision to build the South House. The decision now was to abandon the building and turn the area west of it into an industrial site,

with channel kilns and fire pits to make lime plaster (Fig. 6). These industrial constructions were set into the thick LM I A sherd spread after the destruction (EVENT 3) and are dated to LM I B. Who decided on this major change of site use? There is no evidence of extra-Knossian presence, but some form of Knossian social or socio-political mobility is indicated.

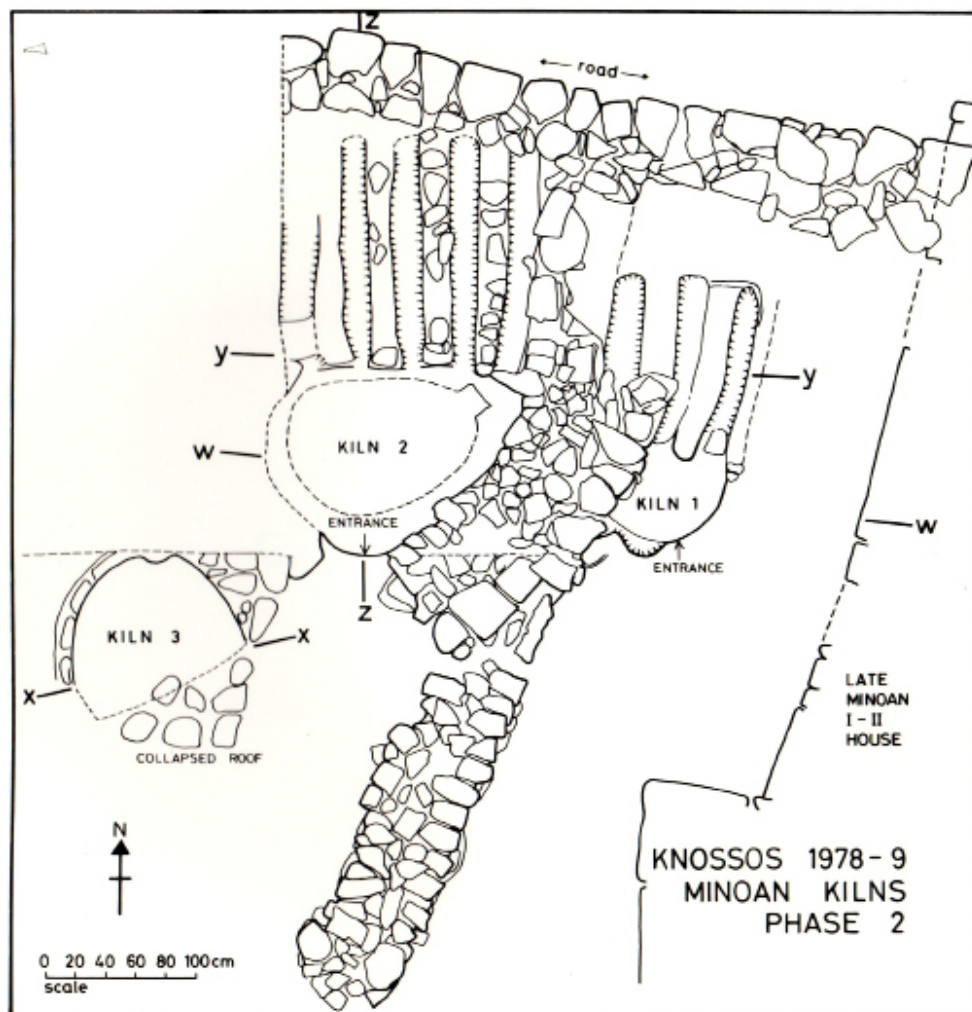


Fig. 6. LM I B channel kilns.

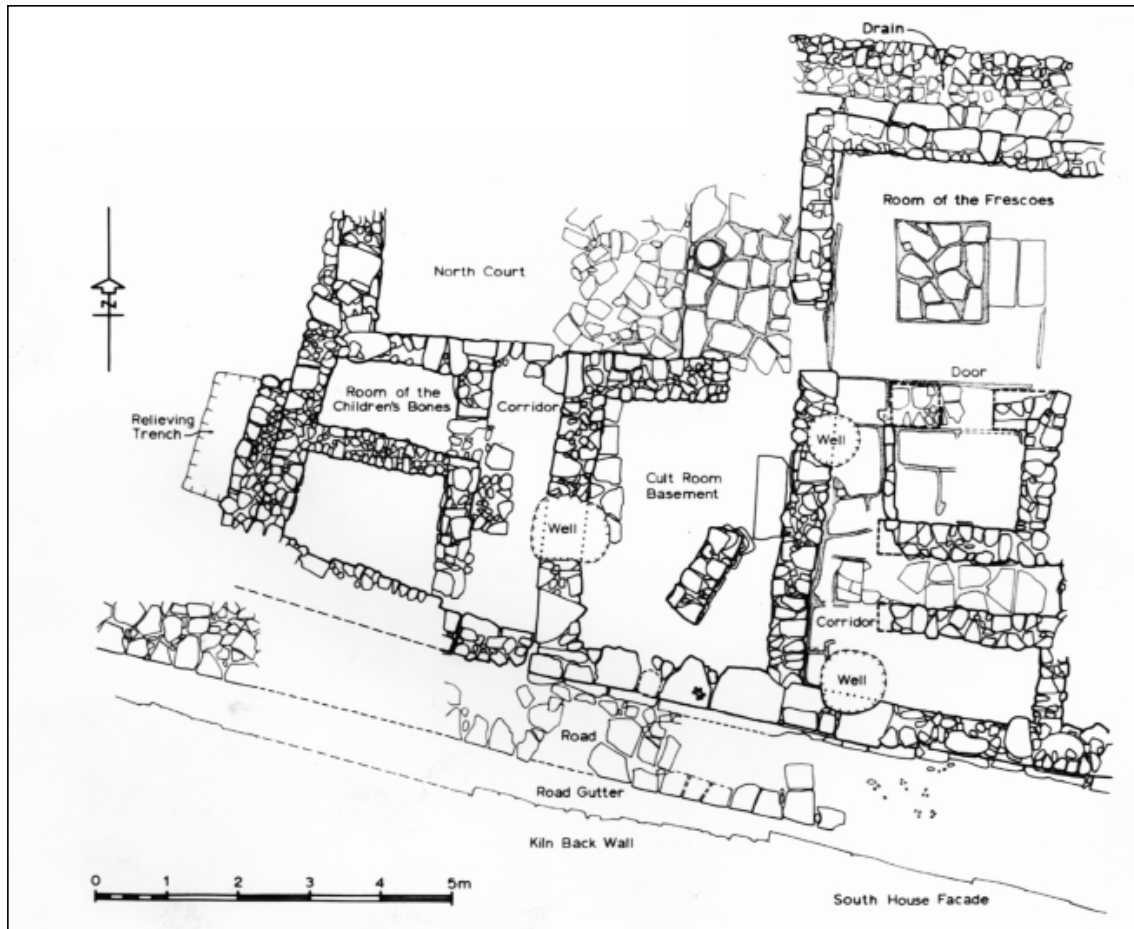


Fig. 7. LM I B North Building plan.

Furthermore at the same time, LM I B, a second, completely different form of response is made (REACTION 3B). The industrial site lies immediately south of the main east-west road through the area (the westward continuation of the Royal Road). Immediately north of the road the decision was made to construct a multi-roomed building, including a small courtyard, called the North Building, on a site not used for building in LM I A (Fig. 7). The North Building has strong ritual connotations and one very small room contained the well known children's bones, discarded there very probably after human sacrifice (Wall, Musgrave and Warren 1986, Warren 2015a) (Fig. 8). Again the contents show no sign of extra-Knossian presence but equally imply mobility to the site in this case to construct a ritual, religious establishment, with no predecessor.



Fig. 8. LM I B North Building, view from north-west.

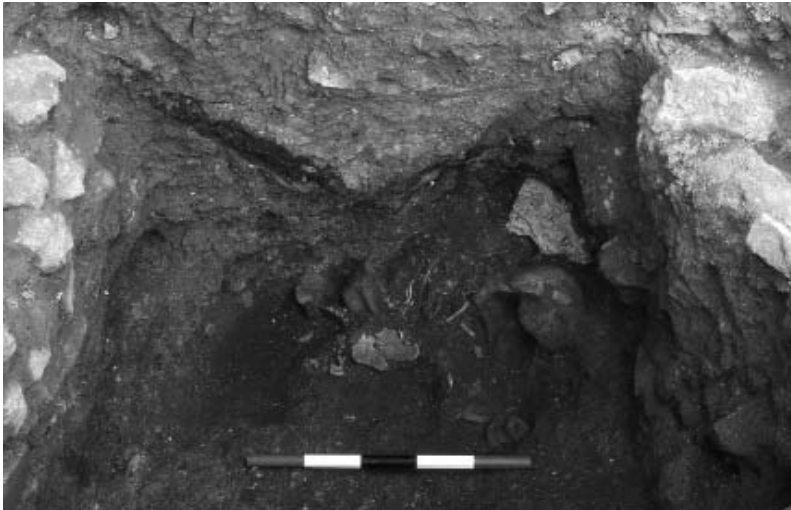


Fig. 9. LM I B Room of the Children's Bones destruction deposit with burnt ceiling/upper floor timbers.

EVENT 4 is the destruction of this building by fire and the cessation of the industrial site, at the end of LM I B. Some of the fine pottery from the building was precipitated over the road and even over the kilns south of the road (Warren 1980-1981, 79 and figs. 11-14; 2015b). The cause of the destruction is open to discussion, though it must be noted that the children's bones, like the other deposits in the building, immediately preceded the destruction event (Fig. 9). Though it cannot be ruled out there is no sign of enemy attack. A strong earthquake accompanying the fire would fit the evidence of the burnt and collapsed upper floor, but the case is not definitive. The destruction on the site at the end of LM I B is replicated, as is well known, at several other sites at Knossos, as well as much more widely throughout Crete (Brogan and Hallager 2011).

The response to this event (REACTION 4), whether or not the event was of human agency, and whether the response was immediate or after a short interval, certainly implies mobility. There are two main components. One was the construction of a new house north of the road and west of the destroyed LM I B building, the house made, for the first time on the site, with very extensive use of gypsum for floors and walls (Fig. 10). The other was that the old LM I A South



Fig. 10. LM II Gypsum House.

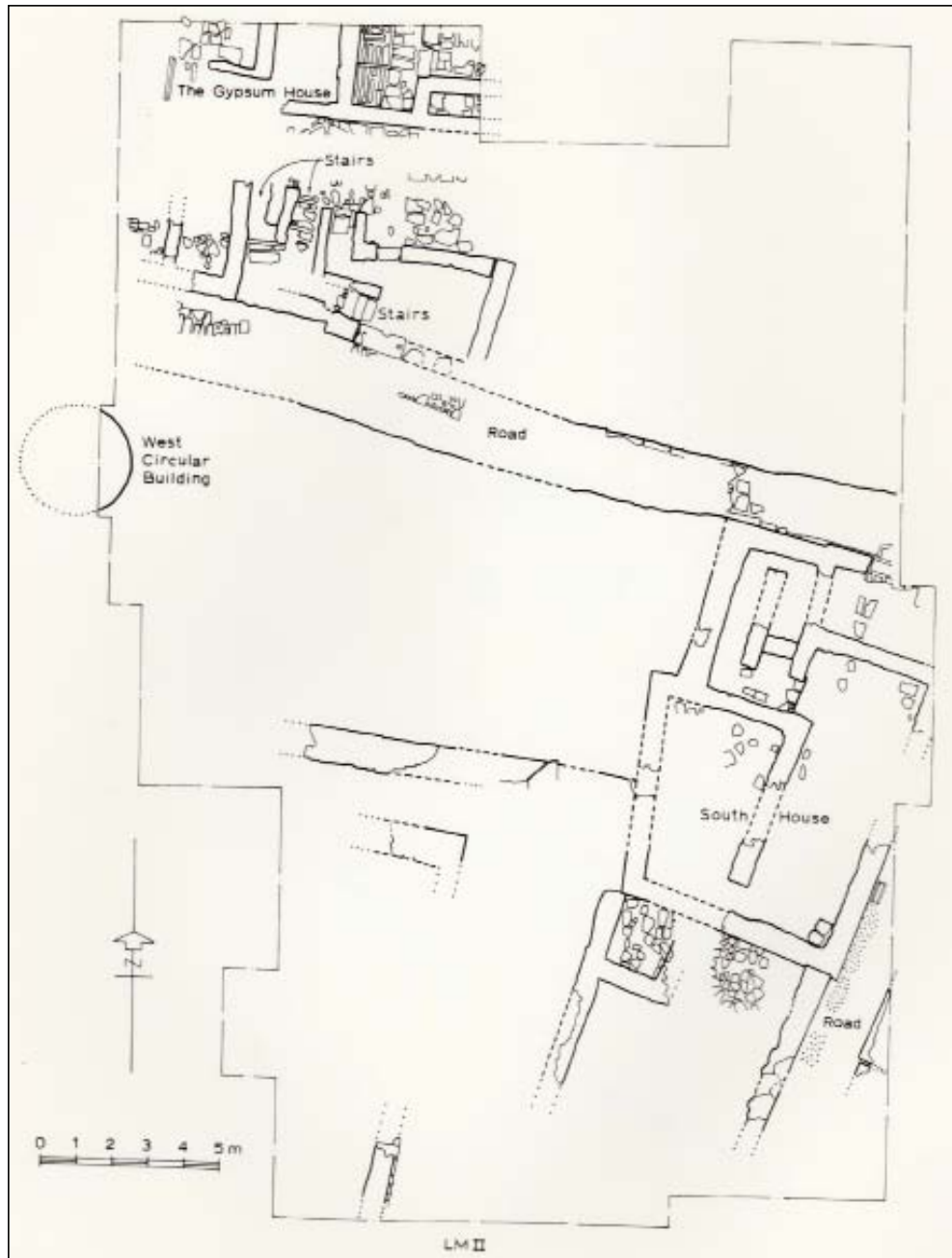


Fig. 11. LM II South House plan. Fig. 6. LM I B channel kilns.

House, abandoned through LM I B, was now completed (Fig. 11), with its exterior walls also of gypsum blocks, laid on top of the original LM I A limestone ashlar courses (Figs. 3, 12). The date of these new houses is LM II, their contents including many LM II kylikes (Figs. 13-14) and other shapes (Warren 1982-1983, figs. 5-13). This forms a completely new ceramic package at Knossos – the Unexplored Mansion some 70 metres to the east provided many more extensive deposits of the same date (Popham 1984) – and I follow Mervyn Popham's view (Popham 1984, 263) that this ceramic package, together with other evidence, indicates the presence of Mycenaeans. Our South House and the Gypsum House must have formed elegant residences.



Fig. 12. LM II South House west wall with decayed gypsum top course above LM I A ashlar courses.

The fifth and final event of this contribution (EVENT 5) is the destruction of these houses, certainly again by fire in the case of the South House, at the end of LM II, *circa* 1400/1390 B.C. (Fig. 15), and at the same time as the destruction of the Unexplored Mansion. The cause of the fires is unknown, but there followed yet another major change of site use (REACTION 5), namely the construction of at least three circular platforms, probable dancing places, in LM III A 1, now on open ground (Warren 1984) (Fig. 16). But the Mycenaeans had not left Knossos, remaining in control



Fig. 13. Gypsum House LM II kylikes (P 1149 (left), P 1150 (right)).



Fig. 14. South House LM II kylix (P 109).



Fig. 15. South House LM II destruction with tumbled blocks in area south of the house.

at least until the destruction of the palace at the beginning of LM III A 2 *circa* 1370/1360 B.C. So the Mycenaeans must have been responsible for or at the very least party to this major change of site use after the LM II destruction. But their presence means that mobility had given way to stability (σταθερότητα) and a new local continuity, at least until the palace destruction.



Fig. 16. LM III A 1 Large Circular Platform.

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