

The House of Tiles at Lerna: Evidence for Early Bronze Age social complexity reexamined

The issue of social organization in the Early Aegean Bronze Age has often been addressed by studying the EHII (ca. 2500-2200 BCE) monumental architecture commonly referred to as the “corridor house,” found at several sites on the Greek mainland (Shaw 1987). The traditional view has been that a central authority employed this type of architecture to exercise oversight and control over the production and redistribution of goods (Renfrew 1972; Halstead 1988). Settlements with corridor architecture demonstrate thus a greater degree of social complexity than previously attested. While it seems safe to assume that some societal change did occur with the implementation of such architecture, several scholars have challenged the notion that this change entailed the consolidation of economic activities under a single ruling body (Weingarten 1997; Peperaki 2004).

This paper aims to explore the nature of this social change, through the archetypal “corridor house,” the House of Tiles at Lerna, excavated in the 1950’s by John Caskey (1968). The Lerna residence is significant not only for its well-preserved architectural remains, but also for its informative deposits of clay sealings and ceramics. First, I will examine the architectural plan of the House of Tiles and the extent of public versus private activities using Peperaki’s model (Peperaki 2004). Her model focuses on the division and manipulation of space to “define circulation or interaction that would be both space- and time-specific.” (2004). Therefore individual rooms could have suited the needs of both public *and* private activities rather than being limited to one type.

Any increased degree of accessibility to the House of Tiles and mobility within the structure will challenge the model of a society controlled by a single, central authority. It will also corroborate Weingarten’s hypothesis, based on the clay sealings, that Eastern traders used the house as a trading post for the transfer of goods along an East-West trade route, driven mostly by exploitation of Siphnian metal (Weingarten 1997). This seems especially plausible given that no large storage vessels but only small, transportable ones were found in the house.

A study of the space organization at the corridor House of Tiles at Lerna, the scope of activities conducted inside it, and the identity of its occupants and its visitors will invite us to rethink the role that Lerna and other contemporary corridor house sites, such as Akovitika, Kolonna, Thebes, and Zygouries, played in the wider context of the East-West Mediterranean trade world during the transformative EHII period.

Works Cited

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