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

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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

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I use the following chronological abbreviations:

SM: Sub-Mycenaean
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. 1050–980, 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. 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. 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. 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.

The earliest remains of cultic activity on the low hill of Aghia Kyriaki at Amykles date to the Late Helladic IIIB2–IIIC 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.

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