

If You Build It, Will They Come? Will They Stay? The Mycenaean Port Town of Kalamianos

Daniel J. Pullen

Florida State University

USA

The process of population aggregation into nucleated urban settlements is often not explicitly modeled, but rather seen as the inevitable by-product of political and economic intensification in a society. Some, such as Michael E. Smith, have proposed that population aggregations came before the socio-political intensifications often associated with urban settlements. In this paper, I propose to look at a different situation, one of “top-down” urbanism, that is the imposition of an urban community by an external power into a region lacking such agglomerations, in order to examine what organization, structure, and resources might be needed for such an urban community to thrive.

The port town of Kalamianos on Greece’s Saronic Gulf was established by one or more palatial centers of the Argive Plain (Mycenae, Midea, and/or Tiryns) in the mid-fourteenth century BC (LH IIIA2) to take advantage of shifting and expanding maritime trade patterns in the Saronic Gulf and beyond. A tremendous outlay of capital and labor was invested in constructing the 7.2-hectare town with its buildings, streets, and circuit walls, and at least 15 hectares of agricultural terraces outside of the circuit walls, and 2 hectares of terraces within, were constructed at the same time. Yet, Kalamianos failed to last beyond the collapse of the palaces ca. 1180 BC (end of LH IIIB), and indeed no urban aggregation was ever to exist here thereafter.

This situation raises many interrelated questions of the sustainability of an urban settlement, and how an organizational elite could ensure the success of that urban settlement. Some questions to be addressed include:

- What role did the (palatial) elites play in the founding of this settlement?
- What arrangements were made for that settlement’s self-sufficiency?
- What role did the (palatial) elites play in the daily maintenance of this settlement?
- How connected was the hinterland to the urban core at Kalamianos?
- Was the terraced area sufficient to supply the food needed for the urban settlement?
- What was the degree of centralized control over agricultural production and distribution in the Kalamianos region?
- Would Kalamianos have depended upon one of the palatial centers for provisioning of the inhabitants, in some system of rations or mobilization?