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Chapter 3

Burials with arms

1. Introduction

Burials with arms—also called ‘weapon graves’ or ‘warrior graves’—are the subject of the present chapter. They are a valuable source of information for answering the questions posed in this book’s introduction. Firstly, in order to examine different types of fighters, I shall look at assemblages of arms and armour rather than attempt to build a new—and unnecessary—typology of individual (types of) weapons and armour. I shall mention types of weapons only in passing; further details can be obtained by reading, for example, Anthony Snodgrass’s *Early Greek Armour and Weapons* (1964). Secondly, the evidence allows us to examine regional diversity easily. Thirdly, some of the burial plots or cemeteries discussed in this chapter were used for a fairly long time, which makes it possible to examine diachronic developments. By comparing the data from different areas, it should also be possible to understand changes in funerary practices with regard to arms in different parts of the Aegean.

In addition to these three focal points, the evidence can be used to examine the sociopolitical nature of warriors in Early Iron Age communities in the Aegean. What was the position of warriors in these communities? How many of the men buried in these cemeteries or plots were identified as warriors, and why? To answer these questions, it is necessary to examine quantitative aspects (number of graves with weapons *versus* graves without any arms), qualitative aspects (are other high-status objects found in the graves with weapons?), and spatial aspects (are graves with weapons limited to specific plots or cemeteries?). Whenever a cemetery or plot remained in use for a longer period in time, it might also be possible to say something about diachronic developments (is there an increase in the relative number of weapons graves or are there any changes with respect to the types of weapons deposited in graves?).

2. A survey of the evidence

In the following subsections, I shall examine a number of burial grounds that should allow us to answer the questions posed in the previous section, which means that small plots, finds of solitary graves, and cemeteries that do not contain any weapon graves have been excluded. The following five sites will be discussed: Lefkandi and Eretria (both on Euboea), the Kerameikos en Agora cemeteries in Athens, and a cemetery or burial plot in

Argos. Due to constraints of time, I have done little in the way of data collection and primary analysis. Instead, I rely on already published syntheses, in particular the works of Andrea Bräuning, Jan Paul Crielaard, Ian Morris, and Pierre Courbin.¹¹⁸ However, by examining these larger and well-published graveyards, I hope to gain a better understanding with regard to why and when some men in certain Greek communities were buried with arms, although a full understanding may not be possible until we put the different strands of evidence together in this book's conclusion.

One question that should be addressed, is whether or not the burial grounds in question are cemeteries, used by a large segment of the community, or rather family plots? Lemos has put forward some criteria for distinguishing the one from the other. According to her, 'Burial grounds with more than thirty burials can be taken as cemeteries. Another criterion for considering them to be cemeteries might be their continuous use for more than three or four generations. Cemeteries with long periods of use were located in Athens, Lefkandi, Asine, Atalanti, and Kos. Smaller burial grounds also existed. These are often considered as family burial grounds.'¹¹⁹

a. Lefkandi

Lefkandi is situated between the ancient towns of Chalkis and Eretria on the island of Euboea. The Iron-Age settlement was located on and around Xeropolis hill on the coast and is especially known for its cemeteries, which were in use from the eleventh century to about the end of the ninth.¹²⁰ There were at least six burial plots, all located around or on a hillock near the modern village of Xeropolis. These plots are, from West to East: Toumba, Palia Perivolia, the East Cemetery, Skoubris, Khaliotis, and the South Cemetery.¹²¹ Of these, the Toumba cemetery has been the most thoroughly investigated.

Chronologically, these plots range from Submykenaian down to Subprotogeometric III (*i.e.*, around 825). Skoubris was the only cemetery in use during Submykenaian and Early Protogeometric times. It consists mostly of so-called cist graves and contained relatively many children. During the Middle Protogeometric period, the cremated remains of a high-ranking man were interred in a large and well-known apsidal building at Toumba that was then covered by a burial mound; this cemetery was afterwards used exclusively by members of the elite. From Late Protogeometric down to Subprotogeometric III at least four burial plots were used concurrently, namely Toumba, Palia Perivolia, the East Cemetery, and Skoubris.

Altogether 178 tombs and 94 pyres have been excavated or located; of

118 *I.e.*, Bräuning 1995; Crielaard 1996; Morris 1987; Courbin 1974

119 I.S. Lemos 2002, 187.

120 Main excavation reports: Popham *et al.* 1979-80 (settlement and cemeteries); Popham *et al.* 1990 and 1993 (Toumba building); Popham & Lemos 1996 (summary of more recent excavations).

121 I.S. Lemos 2002, 161; location, see Popham & Lemos 1996, pls. 1-2.

these, 153 tombs and 73 pyres were fully excavated and published.¹²² Of these, only 22 graves contained weapons, including the remarkable burial within the building at Toumba. This means that only every few years or so a man was buried with weapons.¹²³ These burials with arms have been found only at Skoubris (two), Palia Perivolia (six), and especially Toumba (fourteen in all).

The heart of the Toumba cemetery is the large *tumulus*, which contained the remains of the large building made from perishable materials. At one point, perhaps immediately after the burial, this peerless building,¹²⁴ referred to by some as a heroön,¹²⁵ was covered to make a large burial mound. The central room contained two burial shafts with a monumental krater placed on top of them. One shaft contained the ashes of a man, which had been placed in an antique bronze *amphora* of Cypriot make; a bronze bowl served as a lid: it is the earliest of the urn cremations at Lefkandi. The grave goods identified the man as a high-ranking individual, possibly the chief of the community. The finds consisted of an iron sword, a spearhead, a razor, and a whetstone. This shaft also contained the skeleton of a richly adorned woman, who may have been killed when the man's remains were placed in the tomb.¹²⁶ The other shaft contained the unburnt remains of no less than four horses. Oliver Dickinson suggests that these horses 'make best sense as chariot teams'.¹²⁷

The aristocratic Toumba cemetery, where most of the weapon burials at Lefkandi have been found, is located in front of the east entrance to the apsidal building. The cemetery was installed shortly after the burial mound had been raised;¹²⁸ the graves follow the contour of the mound. The excavators suggest that there were kinship ties between the people buried here and the man interred within the large building;¹²⁹ Lemos points out that in any event, they were probably all members of the ruling elite.¹³⁰ The 'epic' characteristics of the tomb have often been noted; burials such as here at Toumba no doubt inspired descriptions of funeral rites in the Homeric epics.¹³¹

The interments at the Toumba building seemed to have led to a sudden and temporary increase in the amount of weapon burials in the period immediately following the construction of the burial mound. More than twenty graves have been unearthed at this cemetery that belong to this period that last perhaps a generation; half a dozen of these graves (over one

122 Cf. also Crielaard 1996, 323 (tables 1 and 2), for some further details.

123 The graves at Lefkandi represent only a small portion of the population, refer to Crielaard 1996, 38.

124 Mazarakis-Ainian 1997, 48–49.

125 But note Antonaccio 1995, 243.

126 Popham *et al.* 1993, 21.

127 Dickinson 2006, 247.

128 See, *e.g.*, I.S. Lemos 2002, 161.

129 Popham *et al.* 1988, 123.

130 I.S. Lemos 2002, 165.

131 *E.g.*, Morris 2000, 228–238; *cf.* the cremation burials at Eleutherna, which correspond quite closely to descriptions in Homer's *Iliad* as regards the burial customs and the killing of prisoners (Stampolidis 1995).

quarter of the total number), possibly more (depending on exact date), contained weapons. Excluding graves that straddle the Late Protoegeometric and Subprotoegeometric I chronological divide, the total number of graves at Toumba from the Subprotoegeometric I period onwards is less than forty.¹³² In other words, the example set by the burials in the Toumba building appears to have inspired the less grand burials of other dignitaries at Lefkandi. Most of the burials with weapons here are dated to the Late Protoegeometric period.

Grave no.	Date	Knife	Dagger	Sword	Spear	Arrow	Axe
S-46	EPG		1				
Building	MPG			1	1		
P-16	MPG	1					
P-31	LPG	1					
T 14.1	LPG			1	1		
T-26	LPG			1		10	
T-39	LPG		1		1		1
T-54	LPG	1		1			1
T-3	LPG	1					
T-p1	LPG?				1		1
T-41	LPG-SPG I	1					
T-50	LPG-SPG I	1		1	1		
P-13	SPG I						1
P-47	SPG I-II			1	1		
T-p8	SPG I-II			1	1		
T-p13	SPG II	1	1		1		3
T-79	SPG II			1	1	x	
T-p14	SPG III			1			
T-p1	?				1		
P-p16	?	1			1		
P-p17	?			1			
S-p13	?	1					
Total instances		9	3	10	11	2	5

Table 1: Overview of weapons in the twenty-two burials with arms at Lefkandi. Numbers marked by ‘p’ are pyres, rather than graves proper. The capital letters refer to the cemetery (Skoubris, Palia Perivolia, Toumba). A small ‘x’ denotes an unknown number.

Table 1 presents an overview of the types of weapons found in the Lefkandi graves. The bottom row lists the number of graves (not the total number of weapons). The weapons at Skoubris were all short blades, namely a dagger and two knives. Of the six weapon graves at Palia Perivolia, two only contained a knife, one an axe (P-13), one contained both a spear and a sword (P-47), and one pyre contained the remains of a sword (P-p17), whereas another contained a knife and a spear (P-p16). By contrast, of the fourteen graves at Toumba, five—including one pyre—contained both a spear and a sword (*viz.* Toumba building, T 14.1, T-50, T-p8, T-79), and seven others—including four pyres—contained either a spear or a sword (*viz.* T-26, T-39, T-54, T-p1, T-p13, T-p14, T-p1); the remaining two graves contained only knives as possible weapons (T-3 and T-41). Pyre 13 at Toumba contained a bronze spike, possibly (part of) a shield boss. All in all, it is clear that these different plots were used by different groups of people,¹³³ with the Toumba cemetery in particular associated with

132 Data based on Crielaard 1996, 325 (table 4).

133 Crielaard 1996, 59–61; *cf.* Brauning 1995, 43.

‘warriors’.

Notable are the finds of arrowheads in two of the graves at Toumba. Most scholars regard the bow as a cheap weapon (a point to which I shall return in later chapters), but the presence of arrowheads in rich graves certainly contests that idea. Grave T-26 not only contained arrowheads, but also an iron sword, an iron pin, and a large array of pottery. The more recently discovered grave T-79 contained arrowheads as well as a sword and spearhead, two knives, and a large number of pots (both local and Attic), two Phoenician and three Cypriot flasks, a bronze grater,¹³⁴ two bronze earrings, and a set of twelve stone weights and a seal. This man’s cremated remains had also been placed inside a bronze cauldron. In addition, a piece of horn in Toumba pyre 1 may have been part of a composite bow.¹³⁵ Clearly, these were affluent and, in the case of T-79, perhaps well-travelled men,¹³⁶ who fought both at close range (sword and spear) and at a distance (arrows).

The finds suggest that both the sword and the spear were a common feature among at least some of the high-ranking men at Lefkandi, throughout the three- or four-generation span covered by the Middle Protogeometric to Subprotogeometric III periods (c. 950–825). Among the rich, adult burials most are without weapons. It is likely that not all of these belonged to women; in other words, some males were buried with weapons, others without. I would suggest that this discrepancy can be best explained if we assume that only community leaders and other heads of high-ranking households, as protectors of the community at large, were identified as warriors during burial by placing one or more weapons in the man’s grave. The different cemeteries at Lefkandi may have been used by different social groups or lineages. Jan Paul Crielaard has emphasised that there may be ‘a connection between permanent exclusive burial grounds, corporate group control over restricted resources and the use of cemeteries to legitimize this monopolisation through lineal descent.’¹³⁷

In sum, a number of cemeteries were in use in Lefkandi down to around 825, of which the Toumba cemetery was clearly aristocratic. By far the most burials with arms were located here, centred on the *tumulus* containing the famous building and cremated remains of a warrior. The spear and sword are the most common weapons in the burials with arms, though some axes are also relatively common. Other grave goods include pottery intended for alcohol consumption as well as exotic objects imported from the Near East. But not all high-ranking men were buried with arms, so we may assume that they were in some way special, perhaps local leaders.

b. Eretria

The earliest finds at Eretria date to the Subprotogeometric period,¹³⁸

134 On graters as heroic apparel, note West 1998.

135 Popham, Sackett, and Themelis 1980, 256.

136 See Crielaard 1996, 64–65.

137 Crielaard 1996, 60; see now also Crielaard 2006, 285–291.

138 Crielaard 1996, 74; I.S. Lemos 2002.

including an *in situ* cremation of a warrior (Subprotogeometric II).¹³⁹ During the eighth century, Eretria consisted of several dispersed habitation nuclei, to which one may link a number of corresponding burial plots. These burials are located at the later West Gate, in the area east of the later agora, and in the coastal zone (Odos Eratonymon and area of the later Hygeionomeion). More sites will probably be added as research at Eretria continues. The graves discovered so far include both inhumations as well as *in situ* and secondary cremations.¹⁴⁰

Excavation of the so-called Hygeionomeion or West Cemetery took place in the late nineteenth century and have never been fully published. Furthermore, much had already been looted by grave robbers by the time that the excavations got underway. A few *in situ* cremations with weapons were unearthed here; an unspecified number of these included spears but not swords. In addition, the graves included a horse burial. Both weapons and horses are, as often noted, typically associated with the aristocracy. In addition, one of the rich Middle-Geometric-II tombs in the agora area contained a single iron sword.¹⁴¹

A small burial plot dated between 720 and 680 has been unearthed at the West Gate;¹⁴² the nearby gate itself and wall are later, perhaps even sixth century.¹⁴³ Six or seven urn cremations were unearthed here, as well as nine or ten child inhumations; they may have belonged to the same family group.¹⁴⁴ A stone triangular feature was constructed on top of the burials, with a curvilinear wall or *peribolos* at the south. There is further evidence that the area came to be used for feasting and offering. 'From the Archaic to the Late Classical period a complex of buildings developed around and over the cemetery', which 'seem to have had a cult function and may be considered a heroön.'¹⁴⁵

The urn cremations at this cemetery show many similarities with the burial beneath the Toumba building and grave T-79 at Lefkandi. The burnt remains were placed inside a bronze cauldron. The graves appear to be centred on what Bérard has suggested is the earliest grave, number 6. Interestingly, this leader 'appears to have possessed a *skeptron*, a bronze spear of the Mycenaean period',¹⁴⁶ although it may also be an Italic import.¹⁴⁷ This individual possessed a staggering amount of weapons (four swords and six spears); it has been suggested that he was some kind of war hero.¹⁴⁸ Two of the urn cremations at the West Gate do not contain any weapons; it has been hypothesised that these contain female remains, which

139 Blandin 2000 *passim*.

140 Excavation report, Bérard 1970; see also Brauning 1995, 43–45; Blandin 2007; Crielaard 2007.

141 Blandin 2007, 17–19.

142 Crielaard 1996, 78.

143 On the West cemetery, see, especially, Crielaard 2007.

144 Antonaccio 1995, 228.

145 Crielaard 1996, 79.

146 Mazarakis-Ainian 1997, 61.

147 Cf. Langdon 2001; note also Whitley 2002.

148 Crielaard 1996, 82 n. 58.

has now been corroborated by osteological analyses.¹⁴⁹ At Eretria, contrary to Lefkandi, secondary cremation and the use of metal urns were thus not restricted solely to high-ranking men.¹⁵⁰

Grave no.	Sword	Spear
5		1
6	4	6
8		1
9	2	4
Total instances	2	4

Table 2: swords and spears in the four graves unearthed at Eretria's West Gate.

Table 2 illustrates the numbers of spears and swords found in the graves near the West Gate. All graves contained spears; in addition, three of the five graves also contained swords. Interestingly, the swords found within a single grave are roughly the same length; Béatrice Blandin suggests that 'ils n'étaient pas produits selon des normes standards, mais forgés sur commande', *i.e.* they were tailor-made.¹⁵¹

Other types of weapons were not found in the tombs at the West Gate. At Lefkandi, most graves contained only a single spear, in half of the total number of graves discussed in the previous section, and in nearly as many cases a single sword. However, at Eretria two tombs (graves 6 and 9) contained not only more than one spear (six in grave 6 and four in grave 9), but also multiple swords (four and two, respectively). The large amount of weapons may be indicative of the high status these men enjoyed; perhaps they were intended to represent their following, to illustrate that they were leaders of men, or they might have been spoils of war. That a hero-cult was established later over their tombs is further evidence that they were held in high regard.¹⁵² The presence of what may be a horse tooth in grave 9 suggests that the deceased was a member of the elite *hippeis* or *hippobotai*,¹⁵³ a horse-owning gentry known from later Greek texts. It is probably no coincidence that two bronze horse blinkers, originally made in the Near East, were found at the Apollo Daphnephoros sanctuary at Eretria.¹⁵⁴

To summarise, the burial plots in Eretria may have been used by different groups of people, as at Lefkandi, with particularly high-ranking individuals buried near the West Gate in the eighth century, where there is also evidence for cult activity from the seventh century onwards. The spear and sword are common, here as at Lefkandi, and some of the burials at the West Gate feature large numbers of both spears and swords, perhaps to indicate that these are not merely high-ranking warriors, not only local leaders, but more specifically warlike leaders of men with their own followers.

149 Blandin 2007, 128–129.

150 Crielaard 1996, 78.

151 Blandin 2007, 112.

152 Crielaard 1996, 87–92.

153 Crielaard 1996, 82; *cf.* Snodgrass 1980, 108.

154 Lipinski 2004, 156 (with references); Crielaard 2002, 253–254.

c. Athens

Because Attika has always generated a lot of interest, we have a relative abundance of archaeological data on the region, as well as its main city, Athens. Not all sites have received equal amounts of care, and the best published and most carefully researched cemetery is that of the Athenian Kerameikos. Outside of the Kerameikos, another important cemetery that contained burials with arms was located in the area of the later Agora.

i. The Athenian Kerameikos

The Kerameikos cemetery is divided into a northern and southern area by the Eridanos river. The northern area is sometimes referred to as the Pompeion burial area, after the Roman building that once stood there. Some 119 graves have been unearthed here, the earliest of which date back to the Late-Helladic-IIIc period. However, graves from the Late-Helladic-IIIc and Submykenaian periods did not contain any weapons.¹⁵⁵ Cremation was the rule, with the remains placed inside a terracotta *amphora*. The ashes of females were initially placed in belly-handled *amphorae* (associated with water), and later in shoulder-handled ones. The remains of men were generally associated with neck-handled *amphorae*. Large pots were used as grave-markers, some of which featured martial scenes (discussed in chapter 6).

Grave no.	Date	Knife	Dagger	Sword	Spear	Arrow	Boss
A1	PG III	1			1		
A2	PG III		?		1		
B	PG III		?		1		
2N	PG III			1			
24	PG III						1
E	PG II-IV			1			
34	PG IV				1		
17	PG IV		?		1		
6	PG IV			1			
28	PG V			1	1	1	
32	PG V				1		
40	PG V						1
48	PG V						1
2	EG II				1		
74	EG II			1	1		
38	EG II-MGI	1		1	1		
13	MG I	1		1			
hs 109	MG I			1	1		
23	MG II				1		
Total instances		3	?	8	12	1	3

Table 3: Combinations of weapons in the nineteen burials with arms at the Athenian Kerameikos. A question mark under dagger indicates that the remains of a bladed weapon have been found, but it cannot be positively identified as either a knife, dagger, or sword.

Table 3 provides an overview of the different types of weapons found in the nineteen relevant Kerameikos graves. Most weapon graves date to the

155 Main excavation reports, Kraiker & Kubler 1939; Kubler 1954; see also Brauning 1995, 16–23.

Protogeometric III, IV, and V periods, or mostly the tenth century, with a small gap of perhaps a generation between Protogeometric V and Early Geometric II. As at Lefkandi, the sword and spear are the most common items, occurring in about half of the graves; four graves contained both a spear and a sword, and an additional three contained a spear and a bladed weapon of unknown type, possibly a sword. Spear and sword are thus the most common combination of weapons. As at Lefkandi, arrowheads are rare, with a single find in one grave. But as at Lefkandi, the grave in question contained other, close-range weapons as well as other grave goods—pottery used in the consumption of alcohol—that clearly mark it as the tomb of a rich man.

In a few burials (*e.g.*, Protogeometric grave 24) objects have been found that were once thought to be cymbals, but Anthony Snodgrass has demonstrated that many of these are actually shield bosses.¹⁵⁶ However, Andrea Bräuning follows the excavators in cataloguing these objects as *phalerae*, *i.e.* horse-trappings (part of a horse's harness mount).¹⁵⁷ They seem to correspond best with depictions of shield bosses, however, so I hold Snodgrass's identification as the correct one. Such bosses were used on single-grip shields. Their presence in some graves tells us that at least a few of the dead were cremated together with their shields; note also the bronze spike mentioned in the subsection on Lefkandi. The fact that only the metal bosses survived means that the shield was made largely of perishable material, probably wood covered by leather. Interestingly, the Athenian examples are not found in association with any weapons, although an iron object in Protogeometric grave 40 can be interpreted as either a chisel (tool) or an axe (a multifunctional item that could also serve as a weapon).

The variety of weapons remains surprisingly consistent from the Protogeometric period onwards. Burial with arms disappears at the Kerameikos cemetery at the end of the Middle Geometric II period. A new kind of funerary ritual may have developed. Especially during the seventh and sixth centuries, it seems that most grave offerings were deposited on the ground above or near the grave.¹⁵⁸ There may thus shift in emphasis from a ritual centred squarely on the deceased to repeated cult practices by the living, with the grave as ritual focal point. The importance of grave goods actually being visible suggests some kind of competitive display, a point to which I shall return in this book's conclusion.

ii. The Athenian Agora

The Agora of Athens is renowned as the civic centre of ancient Athens, a function it did not fully acquire until the sixth century.¹⁵⁹ Earlier, part of the site was used as a cemetery. Forty-seven tombs have been found that date back to the Mycenaean era (including Late Helladic IIIC). Some eighty graves from the period between 1100 and 700 have been unearthed.

156 Snodgrass 1964*b*, 37–48.

157 Cf. Connolly 1998 [1981], 236 (illustration).

158 Morris 1987, 125–128.

159 Camp 1992 [1986], 34.

Forty-nine graves belonged to the Geometric period. Of these, seventeen belonged to men, twelve to women, another dozen to children, and a further eight remain unidentified.¹⁶⁰

In the agora, both primary and secondary cremation was practiced, and a sizeable number of bodies were interred.¹⁶¹ The earliest burials with arms date to the Late Protogeometric to Early Geometric I period, which is later than the earliest burials with arms from the Kerameikos. Only five graves contained any weapons, which is nearly a third of the total number of male burials at the Agora,¹⁶² but the graves are spread across a period of more than one century. Weapons disappear from the funerary record at the Agora after the Middle Geometric I period, around 800, slightly earlier than at the Kerameikos (Middle Geometric II).

Grave no.	Date	Knife	Sword	Spear	Axe
N 16:4	LPG–EG I	1	1		
XXVII	LPG–EG I	2	1	2	1
AR II	EG I		1	1	
R 20:1	EG II–MGI	1	1		
AR V	MGI		1		
Total instances		3	5	2	1

Table 4: Combinations of weapons found in the graves at the Athenian Agora.

Table 4 summarises the weapons found in the relevant graves at the Agora. Each of these five graves contained a sword, while only two also contained a spear (or a set of two spears, in the case of grave XXVII). Knives were unearthed in a total of three graves. However, the total number of graves used here is small and the evidence covers a period of some two centuries, which works out to an average of one burial with arms every forty years! So what is the significance of burial with arms? One possibility is that these men somehow represent the cream of the Athenian elite, the heads of important households. However, they might equally well be war-heroes, or men who died in battle.

The Agora cemetery, or at least the part on the slope of the Areiopagos, may have been the burial ground for the Athenian ruling elite, possibly even a ‘royal’ family.¹⁶³ The richness of these graves certainly suggests that they belonged to the highest echelons of the local community. Camp compares the burial of ‘the rich lady of the agora’ (c. 850) with that of the warrior buried in grave XXVII (c. 900). Both were cremated and the remains placed in a large *amphora* (a belly-handled *amphora* in the case of the woman and a neck-handled *amphora* in the case of the man). The pottery interred with the woman included a ceramic box or miniature chest decorated with five granaries, which ‘hints at her high status and the source of her family’s

160 Excavation reports: Blegen 1952, Brann 1960, Brann 1962, Smithson 1968, Thompson 1948, Thompson 1950, Thompson 1956, Young 1939, Young 1949, Young 1951; see also Brauning 1995, 24–31.

161 Brauning 1995, 25.

162 Cf. Morris 1987, 148.

163 Smithson 1968; Coldstream 1995.

wealth',¹⁶⁴ namely the ownership of land. The man was also given some pottery and a number of metal items: his sword was 'killed' by being bent around the shoulder of the *amphora*, two spearheads were placed in the grave, as well as the bridle-bits of his horses, and an axe-head.¹⁶⁵ The association of horses, weapons, and axes, in addition to pottery used for the consumption of alcohol, are all hallmarks of the aristocracy, as will be discussed in this book's conclusion.

d. Argos

Over two hundred graves, most of which date to the eighth century, have been unearthed in and around the city of Argos; of these, 182 were found in distinct clusters or family plots.¹⁶⁶ Andrea Bräuning has catalogued the relevant burials unearthed up to the early nineties.¹⁶⁷ The graves contained skeletons; cremation appears not to have been practiced anywhere in the Argolid.¹⁶⁸ Of the total number of 182 graves, 19 could be attributed to women, 27 to men, and 25 to children. The sex and age of the remaining 111 graves cannot be positively established, neither by analysis of the remains, nor by examining the grave goods. Of the 27 burials that are male, no less than fifteen contained weapons and also, in three cases, a helmet. There main types of graves at Argos are cist and pithos tombs. All of the tombs discussed in the present subsection are cist graves. A cist grave consists of a rectangular shaft, lined and covered by stone slabs. The earliest warrior graves date to the Middle Geometric I period (graves T14.2 and GG15).

Grave no.	Date	Dagger	Sword	Spear	Axe	Helmet	Cuirass
GG69	MG I	1					
T14.2	MG I			1			
GG15	MG II		3				
GG81	MG-LG		1			1	
GG18	LG		1	1			
GG25	LG		1	1			
GG 25	LG		1	1			
GG91a	LG I		1				
GG91b	LG I			5			
GG107	LG I		2	1			
T179	LG I		1	1			
T176.2	LG II		1	3			
GG110	LG II			2		1	
T45	LG II				2	1	1
T6.2	LG II		1				
GG70	LG II	1					
Total instances		2	10	9	1	3	1

Table 5: Finds of weapons and armour unearthed in the fifteen burials with arms at Argos.

Table 5 illustrates the weapons found in the graves at Argos. As at Lefkandi and Athens, swords and spears are the commonest weapons. Six of the

164 Coldstream 1995, 397.

165 Camp 1992 [1986], 30–31; on the axe, see Snodgrass 1964*b*, 166.

166 Main synthesis, see Courbin 1974.

167 Brauning 1995, 33–37.

168 Brauning 1995, 34; Hagg 1974, 100*ff*; I.S. Lemos 2002, 157–60.

fifteen graves with weapons contained both a sword and a spear. Some graves even included multiple swords or spears. A similar phenomenon has been observed for Eretria, and here too the larger number of weapons may indicate that these men are high-ranking and warlike individuals, who were probably leaders of men. Unique at this early date, are the inclusion in three graves of pieces of armour: they each contain a single helmet, and one grave even includes a complete bell-shaped cuirass (discussed below).

Of all the Argive graves, T45 is especially noteworthy. In this grave were found, among other things, a helmet and a complete bell-shaped cuirass, as well as a pair of double-axes, and two strips that may have belonged to greaves.¹⁶⁹ The warrior's bell-shaped cuirass 'is so named from its distinctive shape, with an inward curve near the waist, from which the lower rim curves strongly out, or even juts diagonally, if one can trust the representations.'¹⁷⁰ It consists of two plates, front and back, which are connected to each other by hinges on one side and leather straps on the other. The cuirass's 'lower edge reached a little below the waist level. In the Argos cuirass, for example, the narrowest part seems to correspond roughly to the level of the navel, and the level of the lower rim has obviously been adjusted in order to provide free mobility for the thighs when running and even when adopting a crouching position.'¹⁷¹ Anderson notes that it would have served a horseman well, since it allows one to sit without chafing the upper legs.¹⁷² The warrior may have ridden to the battlefield on horseback, or perhaps even fought from horseback.¹⁷³

According to the original excavator, Pierre Courbin, the firedogs suggest that the man buried in grave T45 had been a captain,¹⁷⁴ a hypothesis drawn into question by Snodgrass, who regards him instead as a horseman based on the bell-shaped cuirass and two double-axes.¹⁷⁵ I do not believe these interpretations are mutually exclusive, and that the ship-shaped firedogs and the possible connections to horse-ownership ought to be regarded as emphasising simply that this individual was a powerful and wealthy member of the ruling elite, perhaps even the leader of the local Argive community.

In sum, the Argive material is somewhat different from both Lefkandi and Athens and more similar to the finds from Eretria's West Gate (more on this below). Swords and spears are found in most of the burials with arms, sometimes even multiple specimens within a single grave. In addition, a few burials contained pieces of armour, including one tomb with a complete bronze cuirass. Other high-ranking burials, here as elsewhere, do not

169 The burial is described in some detail in Courbin 1957.

170 Snodgrass 1964b, 73.

171 Jarva 1995, 25.

172 Anderson 1961, 143. Indeed, plate armour—along with the slashing sword and the spear—is associated with fighting from horseback in central Europe; refer to Treheme 1995, 110. See also Brouwers 2007a.

173 Snodgrass 1971b, 46; Coldstream 1977, 148–149; see also discussion in Jarva 1995, 128–130.

174 Courbin 1957, 383–385.

175 Snodgrass 1971b, 45–46.

contain any weapons, so once again the men who were buried with arms must have been special for one reason or another, and the weapons suggest not merely warlike prowess, but political might: the inclusion of multiple numbers of the same type of weapon in one grave may, as at Eretria's West Gate, suggest that these individuals were also leaders of men, able to mobilise their own private armies or warbands.

3. General discussion of the evidence

It should be stressed that burials with arms are a comparatively rare feature in the ancient Aegean.¹⁷⁶ Geographically, they were limited to certain regions within the Aegean, especially Euboea, Attika, the Argolid, Krete, and Northern Greece (Thessaly and Makedonia). In other regions, none or only a few of such graves have been found. Some examples include a grave at Nichoria in Messenia, dated to around 725 and containing an iron sword and spearhead,¹⁷⁷ a grave at Lokrian Atalanti that contained an iron sword and a bronze shield boss,¹⁷⁸ and the mid-eleventh-century grave XXVIII at Tiryns, which contained iron daggers, a bronze spear, helmet, and a shield boss.¹⁷⁹

Aside from cemeteries, smaller plots, and isolated burials, the ancient Greeks sometimes used mass graves. When a mass grave contained the remains of dead warriors, it was called a *polyandreion*. *Polyandreia* are mostly a feature of the Classical period. Pritchett discusses eleven burial mounds that contained the remains of men slain in battle in the fourth volume of his *Greek State at War*.¹⁸⁰ Of these, the only Archaic example is that from Akragas (Agrigento in Sicily). It was made in the late seventh century and consisted of a pit, containing the remains of 'dozens of bodies and over 150 Greek vases'.¹⁸¹ Unlike most Classical specimens, this pit was not dug at the battlefield itself, but in a hill at the local cemetery. The contents and location are similar to an earlier, eighth-century *polyandreion* unearthed relatively recently in Paroika, the capital of Paros. The cemetery here featured two large cist graves that together contained around 160 vases filled with the cremated remains of men who were presumably killed in battle.¹⁸² Two of these pots featured warlike scenes, which will be discussed in the chapter on the iconographic evidence. This mass burial shows that fighting in this period sometimes led to relatively large numbers of deaths; these may have been incurred when the inhabitants fought off a piratical raid, but they might equally well have died in a war against their neighbours.

Spatially, warrior graves are only rarely encountered in clusters, and even when we do find more than a few in a single cemetery, they are nearly always outnumbered by other burials in the same graveyard that do not

176 See also Deger-Jalkotzy 2006, 154–157.

177 Coldstream 1977, 162–164.

178 Dakoronia 2006, 498.

179 Snodgrass 1971, 221–223.

180 See especially Pritchett 1985, 125–139.

181 Pritchett 1985, 126.

182 Zaphiropoulou 2006, 276.

contain any weapons or armour. This begs the question whether or not a collection of graves somehow reflects the social makeup of the community that it belonged to. The total number of graves that have been unearthed so far does not tally with the supposed number of people that must have died in the course of time. Ian Morris, in his book *Burial and Ancient Society* (1987), claims that Greek communities were made up of essentially two parts: the elite (*agathoi*) on the one hand, and the common people (*kakoi*) on the other. It is important to note that his *agathoi* included both a governing and a non-governing elite. For Early Iron Age Athens, Morris argues persuasively that while the *agathoi* were always buried in an archaeologically visible way, the *kakoi* were not, or at least not in certain periods.¹⁸³ A related, practical problem is that not all graves may have been unearthed by archaeologists. Burials belonging to individuals with a high status are more visible in the archaeological record than those of low-ranking individuals.¹⁸⁴ In short, high-ranking individuals are over-represented and some of them were buried with arms. This in itself is interesting: apparently, men of lower status were buried in inconspicuous ways and were apparently – to judge by the lack of martial grave goods – not associated with fighting. This is a point to which I shall return in this book's conclusion.

Finally, the practice of burial with arms is relatively long-lived in some regions, covering a timespan of perhaps as much as two centuries, and short-lived in others, lasting no more than a single generation. As we have seen, there were a number of cemeteries in Lefkandi that were in use for at least a hundred years or some three or four generations, at Argos the timespan is limited to perhaps two generations; the 'warrior graves' at the plot near Eretria's West Gate were installed in the span of a century, after which cult practices were established at the site to honour the people there interred.

Some of the question posed at the beginning of this chapter can now be answered, while others will be explored in greater detail in the remainder of this section. It is clear that only some regions possess cemeteries and burial plots where at least some of the men were buried with arms; these are all clearly high-ranking individuals and it has been suggested that the inclusion of weapons (and rarely armour) marks them as warriors, and perhaps more specifically as leaders of men, especially when they are given more than one specimen of a particular weapon (Eretria's West Gate and Argos). The burials with arms are generally found in specific plots, especially those that undoubtedly belonged to the local aristocracy, perhaps even a single kinship group (*e.g.*, Athenian Agora). Burials with arms are a feature of the period between 1000 and 700, with no clear diachronic developments to be observed, except the inclusion of armour in the later eighth century at Argos.

Considering the variety of the evidence, not in the least its relative scarcity or patchiness, a number of further questions naturally suggest themselves. What are the main characteristics of Greek burials with arms

183 Morris 1987, 104–109.

184 Crielaard 1996, 37.

and what regional differences can we observe? Why were some people buried with arms while others were not? What was the reason for nearly wholly abandoning the practice of burial with arms around the end of the eighth century in places such as Athens and Argos? And why did the practice linger in more supposedly 'backward' areas, such as Lokris, Achaia, and Krete?¹⁸⁵ Some authors have attempted to answer the more searching of these questions by examining perceived changes in either Greek social organisation or mentality (ideology).

a. What are the main characteristics of Greek burials with arms?

It is clear that in all regions, local communities adhered to local burial traditions, which included inhumation (Argos) as well as primary and secondary cremation and inhumation (e.g., Lefkandi, Eretria). Offensive weapons are by far the most common martial items deposited in 'warrior graves', especially knives and/or daggers, swords, and spears. In a few graves, including a ones mentioned in passing (such as Tiryns tomb XXVIII), shield bosses have been unearthed. Evidence for armour is slim: the most outstanding examples are from eighth-century Argos, and it seems that with the possible exception of a bronze helmet, most men fought either without armour or with armour made of perishable materials. Gifts of weapons are normally accompanied by pottery intended for alcohol consumption, as well as other objects associated with the aristocracy, such as horse trappings.

The (double-)axes found in a number of graves at Lefkandi, Athens, and Argos are typical items of high-ranking men; interestingly, bronze axes were already items deposited in graves during the Late Helladic IIIC period, such as the 'Tripod Tomb' in Mykenai.¹⁸⁶ Anthony Snodgrass assumes that the double-axes in tomb T45 at Argos are weapons, pointing out that they are the only possible weapons that the dead man was buried with.¹⁸⁷ However, Coldstream assumes the axes to have been obsolete as weapons and were used instead to chop wood.¹⁸⁸ However, Jan Paul Crielaard has pointed out that:

Literary and archaeological evidence shows that axes were multi-functional instruments, used as weapons, but also as instruments at symposia, sacrificial ceremonies, etc.; they were kept as storage and given away as prizes. They were status symbols of the (Euboean) aristocracy [...].¹⁸⁹

Axes are thus items associated with two main activities of the elite: fighting and feasting. This association is made very clear in the case of T45, where the grave goods contained both double-axes and iron spits (for roasting). In addition, this grave included firedogs in the shape of warships: a third element typical of the aristocracy. Double-axes are also a motif on painted

185 Snodgrass 1977, 277–281; Snodgrass 1980, 100–101.

186 Papadimitriou 2006, 543.

187 Snodgrass 1964b, 166–167.

188 Coldstream 1977, 146.

189 Crielaard 1996, 54 n. 116 (with further references).

pottery, often in combination with horses, as also noted by Crielaard; some of these scenes will be discussed in the later chapter on the iconographic evidence.

Interestingly, the swords found at Argos tend to be shorter (never longer than 45 cm) compared to the ones unearthed in Euboia. For example, most swords at Eretria were over 70 centimetres in length, those at Lefkandi range are all between 56 and 74 centimetres in length.¹⁹⁰ In addition, the swords at Eretria are different from one burial to the next, and may be closely associated with the deceased.¹⁹¹ The swords from Athens are perhaps more varied than those from Lefkandi, with lengths ranging from over 40 centimetres up to 90 centimetres. As the Eretrian graves are more or less contemporary with the Late Geometric Argive graves, the discrepancy is even more glaring. Spearheads from both sites are relatively massive, but those from Argos are perhaps slightly larger. They must have been used solely for thrusting.

The combinations of weapons and (the general lack of) armour offer some tantalising insights into how these warriors may have fought, provided that the grave goods are an accurate representation of a warrior's 'typical' equipment. At Lefkandi and Athens, the men fought with spears and swords, and sometimes used shields (of which only the bosses remain). The equipment appears to have been fairly light, allowing for skirmishes and quick raids. The weapons from Eretria are more massive and the swords are very long; these men may have had a proclivity for close-ranged combat. Eretrians are closely associated with horse-riding and a long sword would have offered a mounted warrior the ability to hack away at his enemy below. The Argives clearly fought on foot: the massive spearheads and especially the very short swords are testament to this, although some may nevertheless have ridden to the battlefield (as has been suggested for the warrior in tomb T45). The bronze armour at Argos furthermore supports the notion that the Argives fought at close range. The finds at Argos and Eretria date to the later eighth century, which can thus be considered a period of change toward a heavier style of fighting. In addition, not all men need have fought with spears and swords, but some were equipped with double-axes (Lefkandi, Athens, Argos), while others may have used the bow as well (Lefkandi and Athens), perhaps even as a secondary weapon.

b. Why were some men buried with weapons while others were not?

David Tandy considers burials with arms (and possibly associated hero cults) one of the so-called 'tools of exclusion' through which 'in the eighth century the emerging aristocracy sought to establish and maintain a separate position for themselves to the exclusion of others.'¹⁹² However, if Tandy's hypothesis is correct, one would assume that *all* seemingly high-ranking men were buried with arms. This is not the case. Instead, weapons and armour are deposited only in the graves of *some* high-ranking

190 Brauning 1995, 43.

191 For further details, see Blandin 2007, 110–122.

192 Tandy 1997, 141 (the other 'tools' are gift giving and councils and feasts).

men, and only then in certain places in the Aegean area.

Why are some men marked as 'warriors' whereas others are not? In the case of the man buried in the building at Toumba, the weapons may have served to underscore his position as a leader. At other sites, too, weapons and armour could have been used to mark someone not merely as 'aristocratic', but as a leader of some sort. This may explain why some of the men in the élite cemetery of Toumba were buried with arms while others were not: these particular individuals may have been leaders of households, or other members of the highest echelons. Similarly, the warriors buried at Eretria's West Gate were no doubt leaders of some accord; three of them were buried with multiple spears and swords, perhaps these were signs of their power, *e.g.* their ability to command groups of men in battle. The burials with arms at the Hygeionomeion at Eretria may have contained warriors of lesser standing, perhaps the followers of the men buried at the West Gate?

An examination of the Homeric epics, in which burial with arms is also very rare, suggests a few other possibilities. The material will be discussed more fully in later chapters, but I will briefly discuss the two relevant examples here. The first is Andromache's father Eëtion, who was defeated and then cremated in his armour by Achilleus, as a sign of the utmost respect (*Il.* 6.416–420). The second concerns Odysseus' unfortunate shipmate Elpenor, who died in an accident; his ghost later asks Odysseus to burn his body in full armour (*Od.* 11.66–78). In both cases, a large mound is raised over the graves. The textual evidence, slim as it is, points in the same direction as the archaeological material: burials with arms are exceptional and serve to mark the deceased *specifically* as a warrior: Eëtion as an honourable opponent (despite, perhaps, his advanced age: he has a grown-up daughter, after all), Elpenor probably to show that, despite the unfortunate circumstances of his death, he was nevertheless a warrior who took part in—and survived—the Trojan War. It is certainly no coincidence that two of the greatest warriors in the epic, who both died in actual combat, namely Patroklos and Hektor, are poignantly *not* buried with arms: their martial prowess may have been considered beyond question.

c. Why did the practice of burial with arms end?

Hans van Wees has put forth an interesting hypothesis regarding the relatively sudden disappearance of burials with arms. He suggests that this change can best be related to changes with regard to how elites conceived of themselves. As communities grew larger and more anonymous, it became necessary for the elite to emphasise their wealth rather than their martial prowess—symbolised by the bearing of arms—in order to distinguish themselves from the more common ('poorer') element of Greek society. In other words, in the Archaic period, 'those who can afford to do so begin to represent themselves more as men of leisure and less as men of strength.'¹⁹³

The idea that wealthy Greek men began to emphasise their status as 'men of leisure' after 700 seems to me problematic as an explanation for the entire

193 Van Wees 1998, 352.

phenomenon. The hypothesis takes certain grave goods as typical, and then tries to explain on the disappearance of these particular types of goods. But lavish grave goods in general, and weapons and armour in particular, are relatively rare throughout the Early Iron Age, often found only in specific places and at specific times. In other words, they are wholly dependent on particular, local or regional circumstances. Furthermore, it appears that burials with arms are closely associated with specific individuals and groups within a community (the Toumba cemetery, the burial plots at Argos, and so forth), and might therefore also not conform to a particular, supposedly supraregional or 'cultural' tradition associated with weapon burials.

On closer examination, there seem to be very clear reasons why burials with arms disappeared in most of the sites examined so far. In the case of Lefkandi, burials with arms disappear after 825 while the settlement continued to exist down to 700, but the cemeteries for the later period are unknown. At Eretria's West Gate, it is clear that the men buried there with their weapons were in some way exceptional, as demonstrated by the hero cult that was established there shortly after they had been entombed. In addition, excavations at Eretria have not unearthed any graves dated to the seventh century, with the exception of child burials. At Argos, most of the burials with arms date to the latter half of the eighth century, which was perhaps a particularly warlike period (or more so than usual), possibly ending with the destruction of Asine by the Argives around 700.¹⁹⁴

In the case of the Athenian Kerameikos and the Agora, there does appear to be a shift in emphasis toward luxury goods. However, this is again a phenomenon with local peculiarities. Weapons disappeared from the Athenian funerary record in the course of the eighth century. At the same time, there is an apparent increase in prosperity in Athens after c. 770, when at least three new cemeteries were founded by leading (rival?) aristocratic families (at Odos Peiraios, Kynosarges, and Odos Kriezis). The graves in these cemeteries contain no weapons, but they are exceptionally rich and include gold jewellery; at Odos Peiraios monumental painted pots were used as grave markers, which coincidentally did feature martial scenes.¹⁹⁵

Anthony Snodgrass already observed that the disappearance of metal grave goods in general during the eighth century goes hand in hand with an apparent increase in the number of metal votive objects at sanctuaries, especially Olympia.¹⁹⁶ As a 'grand' theory, 'The change of competitive venue from funeral display to sanctuary, where cauldrons and weapons are dedicated, shifts the scene, but not the terms, of competition.'¹⁹⁷ The key words here are 'display' and 'competition'.¹⁹⁸ As communities grew larger and came into more frequent contact, it would no doubt have led to an

194 See, for example, Hall 1995, 582–583.

195 Coldstream 2003 [1977], 87–88.

196 Snodgrass 1980, 104–109.

197 Antonaccio 1995, 242–243.

198 Morgan connects the shift to a change from the *private* to the *public* sphere (1990, 19), but there is nothing particularly private about aristocratic funerals, with their processions, public mournings, and possibly also funeral games.

increase in rivalry among the elites of neighbouring territories. Public funerals would in such cases have probably been too small and too fleeting, requiring instead a more permanent display, such as the dedication of arms and armour at (regional) sanctuaries. But that is the subject of the next chapter.

d. Why did the practice linger in supposedly more backward regions?

Andrea Bräuning, in her important 1995-study on Greek burials with arms, makes a fundamental distinction between a central 'core' region of Greek civilisation (Athens, Argos, Lefkandi, and Eretria) and its 'periphery' (Thessaly, Makedonia). Her analysis shows that in the Greek settlements some of the male burials contained weapons, whereas in the periphery all of the men were buried with arms. Bräuning concludes that the centrally placed Greek communities may have been more socially stratified than their peripheral counterparts.¹⁹⁹

However, Bräuning's application of a core-periphery model on Early Iron Age Greece strikes me as teleological: since Athens and the other 'core' regions were important in Classical times, they must have been more socially stratified (more 'advanced') in the Early Iron Age than the more backward 'periphery', places like Thessaly and Makedonia (already much scorned by some Classical authors, such as Demosthenes, after all). Furthermore, there is still much left to do with regards to Thessaly,²⁰⁰ and, to a lesser extent, Makedonia. The current evidence is patchy: for example, the total number of burials with weapons from Thessaly is still very small.²⁰¹ Also, burial customs might have been very different, with not everyone buried in an archaeologically visible way, which further makes simple comparison useless. Finally, the argument that Thessaly and Makedonia were less socially stratified also seems too simplistic. For example, at Makedonian Pella, no less than twenty warrior-graves have recently been discovered that reportedly date to the period between 580 and 460.²⁰² Does Late Archaic or Early Classical Makedonia (still) qualify as 'peripheral' or 'less advanced'? Or is it merely different?

4. Conclusions

If the equipment deposited in the graves correspond more or less with how a warrior took the field, then the evidence discussed in this chapter demonstrates that most warriors were equipped with spear and sword, and also a dagger in many cases; a few may have used double-axes in combat. Some of these warriors used shields, which were of a single-grip variety and equipped with bronze shield bosses (shields without bosses would normally leave no trace in the archaeological record). In addition, some of

199 Bräuning 1995, 101; cf. Whitley 2001, 187–188.

200 Note, for example, the remarkable cremation burials at Halos, described in Coldstream 1977, 87.

201 On Thessaly, see Georganas 2005.

202 Reuters news report of 11 September 2008; the project was headed by Pavlos Chrysostomou.

these men in the tenth, ninth, and part of the eighth centuries were apparently also proficient with the bow and arrow.

Exceptional are the Argive graves of the late eighth century that also contain elements of bronze armour. The men at Argos also fought using stout swords and heavy spears, which when taken together suggest a much closer-ranged form of fighting at Argos than can be demonstrated for other places. This preference for heavily-armoured troops in the Argolid in general can perhaps be dated to the eleventh century if the helmet in Tiryns tomb XXVIII is any indication, and might even be extended further back in time if we include the Mykenaian bronze panoply unearthed at Dendra (see chapter 2).

Only some men in some Greek cemeteries were buried with arms, and it seems very likely that the inclusion of weapons and armour marked them as exceptional. Burials with arms may be limited to high-ranking heads of particular households or other leaders, as well as men who demonstrated exceptional martial prowess or who were represented in the funerary record as warriors for some other reason (the Iliadic examples, discussed above). Weapons and armour are usually associated with pottery intended for the consumption of alcohol. They are sometimes also associated with other aristocratic objects, notably *obeloi* (iron spits for roasting meat) and horse trappings. The consumption of meat and drink (feasting) and wargear (fighting) thus emerge as part of an aristocratic lifestyle.²⁰³

Burials with arms disappeared in many regions at the end of the eighth century, usually for very specific reasons, such as the emergence of new aristocracies with their own forms of representation (Athens). The change also goes hand-in-hand with a perceived increase in the amount of metal votive offerings at some sanctuaries, notably Olympia. However, the custom persists in some areas often regarded as 'peripheral' when contrasted to the civilised Greek 'core', notably regions such as Thessaly and Makedonia. It has been argued that the regions in question are somehow less socially complex than supposedly more developed regions like Athens or Argos. However, the evidence as a whole is extremely patchy and it strikes me as odd to label Late-Archaic Makedonia as 'primitive', when it might simply have been 'different'.

203 For more on this subject, see Treherne 1995 and the conclusion of this book.