

April 2021 (125.2)

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Book Review

A Companion to the Archaeology of Early Greece and the Mediterranean

Edited by Irene S. Lemos and Antonis Kotsonas. 2 vols. Medford: Wiley-Blackwell 2019. Pp. 1464. \$420. ISBN 978-1-118-77019-1 (cloth).

Reviewed by [Guy D. Middleton](#)

This publication is an eagerly awaited two-volume set that forms part of Blackwell's ever-expanding "Companions to the Ancient World" series. Its focus is Greece and the Aegean, but a section is devoted to the wider Mediterranean. In chronological terms, it covers the long period from the Mycenaean era to the seventh century BCE—the Late Bronze Age (LBA) through to the later years of the Early Iron Age (EIA)—a period that saw the rise of complex society, its collapse, and its re-emergence some centuries later.

Volume 1 has three sections: "The Background" (four chapters), "State and Society" (10 chapters), and "Material Culture and Society" (11 chapters). Volume 2 has two sections: "Regional Archaeologies of Greece and the Aegean" (19 chapters) and "The Mediterranean" (11 chapters). Thus in total there are some 55 chapters. There are also 23 maps in the front of the book and mainly black-and-white illustrations throughout. The chapters have been written by an international cast of specialists, many notable for their previous contributions to Aegean studies and their regional and thematic specialisms. Given the size of the book and the sheer volume of content, this review will discuss only a selection of chapters that caught the reviewer's eye and make some broad comments about the impression of the volume on an interested reader.

The opening section serves as an introduction, with a chapter by John L. Bintliff (ch. 1.1) on landscape, climate, and the thorny topic of demography and another by Kotsonas (ch. 1.4) on the history of research. In chapter 1.2, Oliver T.P.K. Dickinson reviews the evidence provided by archaeology, discussing chronology, pottery, excavation, and survey. Importantly, he identifies gaps in the evidence that come, in part, from biases in research toward more famous or richer sites and away from smaller, less glamorous ones (Dimitri Nakassis later states just how few "houses" we know of [275]). Another gap falls between the abandonment of Linear B script in LBA Greece, where it was restricted to the palaces in its use, and the appearance of the much more widespread and publicly used alphabet (literacy is discussed by Philippa M. Steele in ch. 2.6). Along with Dickinson, Lisa Bendall and Martin West (ch. 1.3 on written sources) include discussion of the Homeric epics and their relation to a historical reality—all contributors are skeptical—and introduce the Hittite texts, including the Ahhiyawa texts that probably refer to a Mycenaean kingdom and others that some take to bear on the Trojan War question. In various regional chapters, these themes of later Greek traditions—and what, if anything, can be gleaned from Homer—recur.

Three must-read chapters cover the overarching developments through time from a political perspective in the second section, "State and Society." The first, by Joseph Maran and James C. Wright, is on the development of the Mycenaean period, the Mycenaean collapse, and the Postpalatial period (ch. 2.1); the second, by Birgitta Eder and Lemos, covers the Postpalatial to the eighth century BCE (ch. 2.2); and the third, by James Whitley, also covers the collapse and developments down to 600 BCE and the rise of new states (ch. 2.3).

Maran and Wright's chapter proceeds from much of their own previous work in focusing on the Mycenaean palace. They see the development of Mycenaean culture as "a transcultural phenomenon that was based on the agency of social actors in regions of the Peloponnese, and probably the Argolid in particular, who during the Shaft Grave period created a fusion between various local and foreign cultural traits" (1:102). They discuss the early developments of the Mycenaean period, including the likely continuing influence of Minoan culture on mainland actors, visible at least in the early architecture of Pylos. In the mature Palatial,

they argue for the presence of several independent kingdoms, not being convinced by the recent suggestions for the existence of hegemonic or supraregional states. What is particularly interesting is the discussion of the extent to which the kingdoms existed as entities that the wider population identified with (or not); the authors argue that some traditions and practices may have been restricted to the elites within and with access to the palace centers, and thus in the collapse easily forgotten. (Andreas Schachner makes a similar point about the Anatolian Hittites in ch. 5.2.) They then point out the regional post-collapse diversity after the destructions at the end Late Helladic (LH) IIIb—reconstruction in a new form at Tiryns; abandonment and apparent depopulation in Pylos, Messenia, and probably Thebes; and continuity and even flourishing of peripheral and nonpalatial areas like Achaia. This history chapter is an important and balanced contribution.

Eder and Lemos' chapter also draws on their previous work on the Greek Postpalatial and EIA periods. The picture they paint of the Postpalatial world is one of lively interaction and continuing international contacts and exchange, even amid the fragmentation of the old order. They suggest that palatial collapse would have provided opportunity for the development of new groups, probably with strong leaders or chiefs emerging in a context of conflict. While it seems likely enough that "warlike operations . . . characterized the Postpalatial period" (1:136) (though Andreas G. Vlachopoulos and Xenia Charalambidou argue for prosperity in the Aegean islands, in ch. 4.16), it is worth remembering that, without claiming the Mycenaeans to be especially warlike, conflict was likely a characteristic of the Palatial period, too, and was a part of state formation and maintenance, as well as of collapse.

Eder and Lemos raise interesting distinctions between communicative and cultural memory, the former being more of an everyday memory embodied in social interaction that lasts only a few generations and the latter being a kind of collective social memory more reliant on institutions and specialists that can survive longer. Thus, they rightly note that specific memories of the Palatial age, and continuity of its traditions, would not have lasted particularly long after it ended—especially if, as Maran and Wright argue, certain aspects of palace culture (e.g., literacy, palace-focused cult) were restricted to a relatively small elite. But notable, too, are the continuities they point out in material culture, including in sword types (the Naue II), the chariot, and the oared galley; the continuities, they observe, "[are] another indicator of social and economic stability in the LBA/EIA transition" (1:137). These certainly point to real continuity in the transmission of technical know-how through generations of craftsmen regardless of what happened to the palatial elite and their culture. The authors also note the continuity of certain traditions illustrated on Postpalatial pottery, such as "warriors on foot, mounted on chariots or engaged in naval battles, and scenes of hunting or burial rites" (1:138), which were picked up again in the eighth century, suggesting continuity in both values and practices. Thus did the Postpalatial Mycenaean period set the tone for subsequent centuries.

Whitley's chapter on the re-emergence of political complexity adopts a slightly more theoretical tone, beginning with a position statement on how Aegeanists interested in "palace to polis" need to engage with the wider discourse on states and state formation that has come out of American comparative cultural anthropology and the "Michigan School" (scholars such as Kent Flannery, Joyce Marcus, Norman Yoffee, and Henry Wright; 1:162–63). Whitley draws on three case studies, Askra in 700 BCE, Athens in 600 BCE, and Dreros in 640 BCE, to argue that the polis form of political arrangement, with laws, magistracies, and citizens, emerged fairly quickly between 700 and 640—a system that was completely different from the palace states. This is an interesting suggestion and not at all improbable in terms of state-building, which may be rapid and strategic rather than slow and organic. These states characterized by "an ideology of a political community" (1:169) developed from a varied but minimally ranked and fairly unstratified society. Both changes in warfare (the hoplite revolution) and in communal cult practice may have acted as binders in generating a sense of citizenship. One wonders if communities of the Postpalatial and EIA valued a greater degree of egalitarianism following the highly unequal palace societies, and whether this principle was later extended into communities of equals made up of citizens. The continuity in nonpalatial areas that were never palace states, and their resilience, may be parts of this pattern.

The "State and Society" section also contains thematic chapters on such topics as gender issues and childhood (ch. 2.8 by Barbara A. Olsen), religion and cult (ch. 2.9 by Matthew Haysom), and death and burial (ch. 2.10 by Yannis Galanakis). Nakassis contributes a needed new summary of ideas on the LBA and EIA economies (ch. 2.7), beginning with a discussion of how earlier models must be dispensed with. The first of

these rejected theories is the old notion of palaces as monopolistic centers of an LBA command economy, collecting and redistributing almost everything, which was a model based on how the operation of Near Eastern palaces had been viewed (1:272). The second is the unfounded belief that Homer provides a clear guide to the EIA economy (1:274–75). The third is the idea that the one type of economy was completely wiped out and replaced by the other (1:284). Nakassis argues instead that Greek economies were always created “bottom-up” from the household level, under the principles of “diversify, store, and redistribute” (1:272, 284). The very real changes in the economy over time were connected to the changing interrelations between different parts of society, not to wholesale economic changes of type. Thus, palaces did form a major economic stimulus in the LBA, but they were never the whole economy; their demise, though, will have real impacts on households, as the palaces are no longer there to consume what the rest of society could produce. This relational view of the economy makes much more sense than a replacement model and helps counter an apocalyptic view of collapse. There must have been significant continuities.

The “Material Culture and Society” section covers a variety of thematic topics on material culture, including architecture (ch. 3.1 by Ulrich Thaler), pottery (ch. 3.3 by Walter Gauß and Florian Ruppenstein), and weapons (ch. 3.5 by Matthew Lloyd). Olga Krzyszkowska’s chapter on seals and sealings (ch. 3.8) reveals how these objects, used for a millennium in Greece by the end of the LBA, then disappeared for several hundred years—after 1200 BCE “the craft of seal engraving experienced a veritable dark age” (1:583). It is also refreshing to find a chapter (ch. 3.9), by Marie-Louise Nosch, on textiles, since these played “a major role in the Mycenaean palace economies” and continued to be “indispensable to the . . . economy of the Early Iron Age” (1:589). She explains the archaeological evidence of surviving textiles themselves, for example the numerous fabrics, some dyed with purple, found in bronze cauldrons from Aitolia, which date to the 10th century (1:590). She also discusses fabric-making technology, including spindles, looms, and weights (1:592–94), and clothing (1:595–97). But she reminds us that the textile industry went further than just clothes—ships’ sails had to be manufactured, as did sacks and bed linen (1:596); textiles played a role in both private and public life in a range of contexts. She suggests a general continuity in textile production, albeit in different locations, after the LBA collapse (1:593, 597).

Volume 2 opens with the section on regional archaeologies of Greece and the Aegean, which is particularly rich, as each chapter discusses its region from the height of the Mycenaean palace period, through the collapse, and into the Iron Age. Included are the areas of major palace states, such as Mycenae and the Argolid (ch. 4.3 by Maran and Alcestis Papadimitriou) and Messenia (ch. 4.2 by Jack L. Davis and Sharon R. Stocker). Also discussed here are other areas without their own palace centers, including East Locris and Phocis (ch. 4.8 by Antonia Livieratou) and the central west mainland comprising Aitolia, Acarnania, Achaia, Elis, and northern Arcadia (ch. 4.9 by Anastasia Gadolou and Kostas Paschalidis).

Regarding the last group, part of the discussion concerns their relationship with palace states. Interestingly, the authors of both chapters conclude that their regions (apart from Aitolia and Acarnania) were under palatial control: Achaia, Elis, and northern Arcadia by Pylos and Messenia or the Argolid, or both (2:841), and East Locris and Phocis from Boeotia, possibly Orchomenos (2:816–17, 828), or they may have had their own as yet unlocated centers. However, while arguments of palatial control of nonpalatial areas have been made before, that seems a rather palace-centric view of the Mycenaean world; the participation of these regions, and indeed the islands, in Mycenaean culture does not require any external control to be explained. Indeed, a different sociopolitical makeup in the form of nonstate societies could help explain the apparent resilience and flourishing of these regions in the Postpalatial period (East Locris and Phocis, 2:819; Achaia and Elis, 2:842). There is also the matter of form and function: would a central place have to be a megaron-type palace or could equivalent power, in a different guise, have existed without that particular and specific form? Another nonpalatial area, Corinthia, is discussed by Ioulia Tzonou and Catherine Morgan (ch. 4.4), who note that “the collapse of the palaces in the Argolid had no effect” on Corinth or its harbor at Korakou (2:721).

Maran and Papadimitriou’s chapter (ch. 4.3) on Mycenae and the Argolid provides a good overview of the rise of Mycenae and its neighboring key sites of Tiryns and Midea and a useful focus on the Postpalatial developments at Tiryns, which “seems to have risen to the status of the most important center of the Argolid, perhaps even the whole of Greece, during the early twelfth century” (2:702). Although habitation and burial continued at Tiryns and Mycenae, this late prosperity and population level did not continue into the Sub-Mycenaean, and this is partly blamed on emigration (2:705). By the tenth century, Argos seems to surpass the other sites in importance, perhaps due to maritime trade and metalworking (2:706).

Davis and Stocker's chapter on Messenia (ch. 4.2), one of the most intensively studied Mycenaean regions, ranges from the development of the palace and state through their destruction and on to the issue of the antiquity of a unified Messenian identity (2:682–86). While it incorporates the recently found Griffin Warrior tomb into its narrative, the chapter has little to say about the possible significance of Linear B found at Iklaina, which might indicate the presence of a rival state to Pylos. What is particularly interesting is the region's Postpalatial fate. The authors note that even though the area has long been observed to have become very depopulated, continuities are apparent from the Bronze Age around the Bay of Navarino and the site of Romanou, with the Tragana tomb used in LH IIIC and the EIA (2:678–79). It may be that, while the memory of the LBA Pylos palace faded, the name "Pylos" became attached to this coastal community.

The final section, "The Mediterranean," places the work on early Greece into a regional context, with chapters on Anatolia (ch. 5.2 by Schachner), Egypt (ch. 5.6 by Jorrit M. Kelder), the western Mediterranean (ch. 5.11 by Eleftheria Pappa), and the northern and southern Levant (ch. 5.4 by Alexander Vacek and ch. 5.5 by Tzveta Manolova). Each examines the area's relationships with Greece and the Aegean through written sources, where available, and archaeological evidence. The section also includes Christoph Bachhuber's chapter on the Uluburun shipwreck (ch. 5.1), with its 11 tons of metal ingots (10 tons of copper and 1 of tin), and other wrecks such as Cape Gelidonya and Hishuley. In addition to LBA shipwrecks, he discusses the EIA Tanit and Elissa wrecks, linked to Phoenician activities. These all attest to trade and contact at a variety of scales, from elite or diplomatic exchange to tramping. These remains preserve fascinating snapshots of activities often discussed in a fairly abstract way.

With any book that addresses the end of the LBA, the ubiquitous Sea Peoples of Ramesses III's Medinet Habu reliefs are bound to appear in some form. Fortunately, their place in this volume is minimal. In chapter 1.3 support is given to a Sea Peoples' destruction and migration narrative, despite the authors' caveat about the role of pharaonic propaganda in royal compositions such as those of Medinet Habu and the authors' observation that the text fails to mention the archaeologically attested destruction of Ugarit. Vacek in his chapter (5.4) on Ugarit, Al Mina and coastal north Syria, also discusses the Sea Peoples briefly (2:1171–73). While he suggests that there may be a link between the type of destructive activities mentioned in the Egyptian and other written sources and the archaeology of destructions around 1200 BCE, he mentions that concerns over the narrative have been raised, and he questions whether the sources refer to one major event or a series of events that took place over decades. In chapter 5.5, on the Levant, the mass migration interpretation of Philistine origins is repeated by Manolova and is claimed to represent scholarly consensus without critical discussion or reference to recent reassessments. This Sea Peoples story is based on a 19th-century interpretation of Ramesses III's Medinet Habu inscriptions that has been perpetuated quite uncritically ever since.

The sheer size and breadth of the book demonstrates how far work has progressed since the pioneering overviews of the 1960s and 1970s and how much evidence is now available. It would be difficult for a single author to have full command of all this evidence and to synthesize it in one volume. Indeed, the format of the *Companion*, with its regional and thematic chapters, is valuable, as it allows coverage of a broad range of accounts that do not need to be subsumed into a more selective narrative. Readers can compare and contrast areas for themselves. It is ultimately refreshing that "Early Greece"—the Greeks of the LBA and the EIA—are now viewed and presented as part of a continuum. The differences between the cultures and societies of earlier and later Greece make their relationship and the intervening period more interesting and far more than just a "dark age."

The publisher should be congratulated on enabling this ambitious two-volume work, which provides adequate space for the various parts and chapters; any edited publication seeking to include contextual, historical, thematic, and geographical contributions will find space a challenge, especially when covering seven centuries. The experienced editors have succeeded in bringing together a sizable group of expert authors, who have produced informative and up-to-date chapters that combine summary with relevant theoretical discussion. The book's closing section will help orient Aegeanists to the region from the outside, and the full publication will be a necessary reference point for all scholarly and student Aegeanists, in particular those who are interested in studying change over time and who want to get an overview of, and introduction to, specific regions and themes. The price of the set will no doubt be beyond most students and many academics, but as a library book, whether in hard copy or in chapters downloaded as PDFs, it is sure to be referenced for years to come.

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American Journal of Archaeology Vol. 125, No. 2 (April 2021)

Published online at www.ajaonline.org/book-review/4274

DOI: 10.3764/ajaonline1252.Middleton