



2010

The Gift Outright: Land Use and Resource Acquisition at Late Bronze Age Mycenae

Lynne Kvapil

Butler University, lkvapil@butler.edu

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Recommended Citation

Kvapil, Lynne. "The Gift Outright: Land Use and Resource Acquisition at Late Bronze Age Mycenae," Annual Meeting of CAMWS, Oklahoma City, OK, March 2010. Available from: digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch_papers/414/

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The Gift Outright: Land Use and Resource Acquisition at Late Bronze Age Mycenae

This paper explores the ways the inhabitants of Late Bronze Age Mycenae shaped their natural environment into a meaning-laden cultural landscape. The geological and edaphic formation of the Argolid plain provided Mycenae with a hinterland rich in exploitable resources. The bedrock of the surrounding foothills consists of hard limestone used in the construction of the cyclopean walls below layers of conglomerates ranging from soft, modifiable deposits to veins of architectural grade stone mined for monuments such as the Lion Gate. Rich alluvial soils are found in the head of the plain, while the rocky slopes conceal refreshing springs and pockets of unique clays.

Fundamental research has been conducted by scholars such as Bintliff and Zangger connecting geology and geomorphology to prehistoric settlement patterns in the Argolid Plain. However, an examination of the landscape organization on a microregional scale with a focus on a single Mycenaean center can shed new light on how exploitation of the terrain and the use of resources reflect the growing economic and political complexity at the palatial center. The acquisition of building materials, formalization of overland routes, and construction of weirs, dams, and terraces to control the movement of water and soil suggests increased interest and investment in the land. Spatial connections drawn between the different types of modification set the stage for a discussion of the ways the Mycenae hinterland was used to support and sustain palatial society and the spectrum of control the palatial center exerted over its periphery.