Prehistory and Protohistory

Sarah C. Murray, *The Collapse of the Mycenaean Economy. Imports, Trade and Institutions 1300–700 BCE*. pp. xiv + 354, 16 ills, 10 maps, 42 tbls. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. ISBN 978-1-107-18637-8, hardcover £94.99.

This book derives from a PhD dissertation defended at Stanford University in 2013, added to by further research in following years. It treats a topic of considerable importance in any discussion of the degree of continuity between the civilisations of the Aegean Bronze Age and that of the early Greeks, which was becoming well established in the eighth century BC (all dates cited subsequently are BC), and the reality or otherwise of an intervening 'dark age'. A common view has suggested that, following the collapse of the Bronze Age civilisations, the Aegean became largely cut off from external contacts, especially with the Near East, and these only revived in the ninth and eighth centuries. As stated in the first part of her Introduction, Murray aims to consider whether this view is acceptable, with three specific aims (p. 3): to synthesize the existing evidence from Greece for long-distance trade over the transition from Late Bronze Age (LBA) to Early Iron Age (EIA); to investigate whether the archaeological evidence can be relied on to provide clues to the underlying patterns of change; and to show that there were indeed major changes in the scale and structure of the 'Greek trade economy (and the economy overall) after the LB IIIB period', i.e. after the thirteenth century.

Murray has taken on a topic that is fundamental to the whole study of the civilisations of the Aegean, historical as well as prehistoric, for trade was one of the essential foundations of development. The Aegean had few natural resources of value, and if its communities were to obtain commodities that were not available widely, if at all, in the Aegean, most of them had to produce commodities of their own to exchange for these, whether plant products, animal products, or derivatives from these like liquids or cloth. That even in the LBA quite simple products might play a role in exchange is demonstrated by a reference not picked up by Murray, that an important merchant of Ugarit, Sinaranu, was granted the right to bring grain, beer and (olive) oil by ship from Kapturi, probably Crete, without providing any (as tax, presumably) to the palace.[1] Since these products could all have been obtained from much closer sources to Ugarit than Crete, it seems likely that Sinaranu had discovered that he could get them more cheaply in Crete and thus make a profit marketing them in Ugarit or other Syrian centres. Despite Murray's scepticism (pp. 244, 268, referring principally to the EIA periods), it must seem likely that agricultural and natural products were items of trade throughout the period considered, for what else did many parts of Greece have to offer? In this respect, it is noteworthy that amphorae, most probably containing olive oil or wine, were among the earliest Protogeometric (PG) vases appearing in the Near East and were traded widely around the north Aegean, as far south as central Greece, including Lefkandi.[2] That these pieces do not appear in any great number suggests that in the north Aegean they were the results of cabotage, the small-scale local exchange that forms part of the 'connectivity' considered typical of the Mediterranean in Horden and Purcell 2000,[3] while examples in the Near East could reflect either Greek or Phoenician enterprise.

Murray has gathered a lot of material together and discussed it in an analytical manner. But the overall effect is diminished by the quite frequent appearance of errors and omissions, big and small. The reviewer gets the impression that it was prepared in something of a hurry, so that the text was imperfectly checked, and that it was not closely checked in proof stage either. How else to explain the fact that on Maps 1.1 (p. 2) and 2.1 (p. 118), also on pp. 7 and 354, Teichos Dymaion is misspelled, although on pp. 83 and 353 it is spelled correctly, and also that on Map 1.1 Nichoria is badly misplaced, although more or less correctly on Map 5.4? In p. 32, fn. 5, Dickinson 1994: 73–86, is on a quite different subject from what the list of references supposedly concerns. On the Ahhiyawa texts, p. 37,[4] AhT 27B was not sent by the Hittite king but by a chief scribe,[5] and its recipient was the same as for AhT 27A, Hammurabi king of Ugarit, so not the famous Babylonian Hammurabi!

Such errors might be dismissed as the sort of thing that can get through the checking process, but there are more serious problems. The reviewer feels that Murray is not fully informed or up to date on the

[1] Cline 2009: 120 gives text and translation.

[2] Knapp and Demesticha 2017: 134–135; the quantity of ?Euboean PG material from Tyre, listed in Lemos 2002: 228, is not noticed by Murray, whose only reference to Tyre (p. 202, n. 211) is strange – Tyre was a Phoenician city!

[3] Part Two, Ch. V.

[4] NB that two of the sources discussing the Ahhiyawa texts cited in fn. 26, by Lackenbacher and Malbran-Labat, are not to be found in the list of Works Cited.

[5] Beckman *et al.* 2011: 258.

material and ideas when it comes to the Aegean LBA, and the text is sprinkled with questionable statements and traditional but outdated interpretations. To give some examples (1) to state that at the beginning of the Mycenaean period new ruling groups were established at a series of mainland sites 'occupying building complexes ... known as palatial centers' (p. 5) is the reverse of the truth; it is precisely the virtual absence of such building complexes (there are some traces at Pylos), in contrast with contemporary Crete, that is one of the most remarkable features of the early Mycenaean development. (2) The identification of the kilts painted on Keftiu offering-bearers in the Tomb of Rekhmire as 'Mycenaean' (p. 153, with fn. 45) was disproved by Rehak long ago.[6] (3) Many specialists will balk at the flat statement, with a minimum of qualification, that the bulk of the Knossos Linear B tablets date to the thirteenth century (p. 32, fn. 1). (4) There is a general tendency to think in terms of migration and colonisation (e.g. pp. 198–200, 260, 268), without any examination of the value or applicability of these concepts. (5) In a notably traditional account of the twelfth century collapse on p. 6, the phrase 'Tiryns limped on' seems to shows no knowledge of the evidence now available for major building activity in the Lower Town in LH IIIC. (6) Also on p. 6, the many new settlements established in the hillier regions of Crete at the time of the collapse are described as 'refuge settlements', concerned primarily with defence. While Wallace's publications are cited, no specific reference is made to her most extensive study of the topic, which takes a much less simplistic approach, let alone to her striking suggestion that this large-scale movement of population was *planned*, i.e. organised by some kind of authority.[7]

But perhaps the most unsettling feature is the decision to omit any detailed coverage of the islands of the Aegean, apart from Crete. Not only have these traditionally been seen as the stepping stones along the natural maritime routes between the Greek mainland, Crete, and Anatolia, leading ultimately to the east Mediterranean; the Cyclades and Dodecanese, by LH IIIB, may be considered as 'Mycenaean' as anywhere on the mainland (and more so than Crete, in the reviewer's opinion). The evidence that the still enigmatic state of Ahhiyawa, widely believed to be part of the Mycenaean world, controlled some of the islands and the Miletus region, for at least a period in the thirteenth century, is relevant here, and the well-known late thirteenth century treaty between a Hittite king, very probably Tudhaliya IV, and Shaushga-muwa, king of Amurru, also has relevance. In the treaty the king of Amurru is required to ensure that no ship of Ahhiyawa should 'go to' the king of Assyria, the Hittite king's enemy.[8] Whatever the precise significance of this, it is surely proof that, contrary to a theory that Murray seems to favour (p. 193), ships from the Aegean did indeed travel beyond Cyprus to the Syro-Palestinian coast.

The significance of the islands is quite evident in the postpalatial period, as Desborough pointed out long ago,[9] identifying a network that extended from the Dodecanese to Crete, Naxos, Perati in Attica, and probably other eastern mainland sites, and surely played a major role in connections with the east Mediterranean. Similar patterns of interconnection can be traced in the EIA, starting with the distribution of Attic PG pottery in the Aegean,[10] and incorporating evidently independent Euboean activity in the north and central Aegean, surely linked to the involvement with Tyre noted above (fn. 2). In the north Aegean a local network that extended at least to Lefkandi, also noted above, was well established by PG times. To sum up, giving so little attention to the islands means omitting much material extremely relevant to trade.

To consider the book in more detail: the main part of Murray's Introduction, after her statement of aims and summary account of the period to be considered, is taken up by a series of discussions of previous scholarship in various relevant fields. The most significant of these, given the overall approach, are those which relate to the 'quantitative archaeological record' and the use of the material evidence in approaches to ancient trade. There follow five chapters that consider in turn the evidence of potentially relevant textual material; the direct evidence for early long-distance trade; the problems inherent in using the archaeological record to assess quantitative change; the trade in commodities; and the relevance of changes in the demography and domestic economy of Greece. All these, as is stated at the beginning of the sixth chapter, are intended to establish a firm quantitative basis for understanding the changes in the Greek trade economy over the period, as is emphasised by the large number of tables as opposed to other illustrations. The picture that emerges is summarised in the sixth chapter, entitled 'Snapshots of a trade system in flux', followed by a short final statement of conclusions.

[6] Rehak 1998.
[7] Wallace 2010: 54–68; the idea that the move was planned appears on p. 66.
[8] Beckman *et al.* 2011: 63.
[9] Desborough 1964: 228–229.
[10] Catling 1998, erroneously attributed on p. 290 to H.W. Catling.

The reviewer has no problem with much of the discussion in these chapters, nor with the basic conclusions (summarised pp. 276-277), that Greece did indeed suffer a period of crisis over the LBA-EIA transition, from which it had recovered by the eighth century with a new social order, and that demographic change caused a weak domestic economy, which was responsible for the observed decline in imported exotica in the postpalatial twelfth and eleventh centuries. More specifically, Murray argues that her survey of the evidence contradicts notions that have commonly appeared in the discussion, that identified imports can be a useful index of the intensity of trade, that long-distance connections were controlled from the administrative centres of LB states, and that at one time Greece was cut off from long-distance trade connections.

This all seems well argued and reasonable enough; the point on the likely economic effects of severe population decline is well made, and exotica were surely never the primary purpose of trade, but only a sporadic by-product. But the reviewer feels considerable unease about the emphasis laid on quantification of the data. He feels that even for the thirteenth century, where the material evidence is richest, the state of the data (too often published only preliminarily if at all) is such that it can hardly be treated as a secure basis for the kind of statistics that M. tries to create. This is particularly evident in the attempt to establish a 'benchmark population' for the Aegean (or rather, the Mycenaean mainland and Crete) in the thirteenth century (pp. 232–236). At every step in the calculations, serious objections can be raised. Why choose the notably high figure of 200 per hectare of occupied settlement area as a base? Is this because not merely the supposed 15 palatial centres, but the 284 settlements with evidence of occupation in LH/LM IIIB, are identified as 'urban', as opposed to the 592 'artifact scatters', thought of as evidence of the rural population? To the reviewer this has the potential to be seriously misleading. The vast majority of excavated settlements on the mainland show no urban features whatever, and are best described as villages. Most of the 'palatial' sites are far smaller than seems to be suggested (Mycenae, at an estimated 32 ha, is exceptional; in contrast, the newly identified centre at Ayios Vasileios south of Sparta has been estimated by survey to cover only 5–6 ha), and are unlikely to have been very sophisticated in plan, although Dhimini (perhaps around 10 ha) does have a clearly townlike centre similar to those of earlier Cretan and island sites. As for the 'artifact scatters', we have no real knowledge of what these represent, and their dating can hardly be more precise than 'somewhere in the LH/LM IIIA-B period',[11] so anywhere in a range of 1½-2 centuries. They get marked on distribution maps as settlement sites, and so are often imagined to have been in occupation at the time of the 'Collapse' at the end of IIIB, and their apparent disappearance thereafter is taken to signify a dramatic decrease in the general population. But this involves major assumptions; an alternative possibility deserves consideration, that they were small farmsteads or hamlets occupied for only a generation or two, part of a fluctuating pattern of rural settlement that may be particular to Messenia, and few might have been in occupation by the time of the 'Collapse'. Overall, the reviewer has no faith in the methods by which an estimate of about 600,000 has been reached, and feels considerable scepticism about the estimations of the scale of decline in the postpalatial and EIA periods.

A feature of Murray's discussion of the period 1200–700 is that it is divided into just three phases – postpalatial/final Mycenaean, Protogeometric and Geometric (G) – each of which is assigned over a century (G more like 2) in the standard chronology. This has the effect of grouping together material that actually spreads over periods corresponding to several human generations, and so gives misleading impressions of more abundant material (as on the Chapter 5 maps of PG sites) and a greater degree of continuity over the EIA than the evidence actually warrants. The reviewer feels that more emphasis should be placed on the extremely narrow and biased distribution of the data base, which is such a marked feature that any general impressions can be radically affected by a single major new find, or the investigation of a hitherto neglected area (as in Lokris and Aetolia). In particular, there is a dearth of cemetery evidence over the eleventh to ninth centuries; few substantial cemeteries have been excavated and even fewer published. This matters, because until the eighth century cemeteries are predominantly the sources of the foreign exotica which have been so prominent in the discussion, and also of most of the evidence for the general availability of metals. Now that settlement sites have begun to be excavated on some scale outside Crete, evidence from sites like Asine and Nichoria has improved the picture. But it is difficult to have any faith in attempts to calculate the amount of bronze in circulation, as in Chapter 4, when there are so many imponderables, and this says very little about the increasing demand for iron, as it became the standard material for tools and weapons, and would also have to be obtained by trade by most communities.

[11] Cf. Hope Simpson and Dickinson 1979: 9.

As for the level of population, of course the evidence cannot be taken at face value. This would produce anomalies like the existence of what seem to be regional cult centres at places like Olympia when there is no archaeological evidence for the communities that supported them, and population figures would be so low generally as to be unbelievable. This is not the only period for which evidence of settlements is too slim to represent anything like a plausible population in some regions, and it is not easy to find an explanation, but it may reflect a combination of the lack of easily recognisable diagnostic material, continued later use of land occupied in the missing period, and erosion during a period of desertion. Given the capacity of long-known sites to produce unexpected evidence of what were thought to be gaps in their occupation history, as at Lefkandi,[12] it should also be accepted that our impression of many sites' history should be regarded as provisional and subject to revision. However, that many clearly substantial LBA sites were apparently abandoned by c. 1100, until well into the historical period if not for ever, does seem good evidence for a severe decline in the population over the transition from LBA to EIA. But putting figures on this seems to the reviewer to be beyond what the state of the evidence will allow – and if this is true of the population level, it will surely be true of the levels of demand and productivity that depend, as is pointed out by Murray, on the size of population.

This review is already too long, and the reviewer will therefore end it by saying, in summary, that, although much of the work that Murray has done in assembling and analysing the data is useful, her methodology for arriving at population estimates needs a much sounder basis, and her coverage needs to be more up to date, especially on the LBA, and to give more consideration to the role played by the islands in Aegean developments.

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[12] Cf. Lemos in *Archaeological Reports* 53 (2006–2007): 39 for early reports of Submycenaean and EPG finds on Xeropolis.

Chrysanthi Gallou, *Death in Mycenaean Laconia. A Silent Place.* pp. xi + 280, 248 ills incl. maps and plates. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2020. ISBN 978-1-107-89245-2, hardcover £48.

This substantial study developed out of Gallou's postdoctoral project on the Mycenaean cemeteries of Epidavros Limera, a site on the east Laconian coast that functioned as a major port in historical times. Hence, it very usefully sorts out the exceptionally complicated history of excavations at that site (generally undertaken in response to repeated tomb