

**Jack L. Davis (with contributions by Sharon R. Stocker). *A Greek State In Formation. The Origins of Civilization in Mycenaean Pylos*. pp. xxxiv+127, f 38 figures (17 colour), 8 maps (2 colour). (Sather Classical Lectures 75). Oakland: University of California Press, 2022. ISBN 9780520387249 (paperback), 9780520387259 (ebook). £27.**

I have a vague memory of the serried ranks of Sather Classical Lectures hardback volumes in the Ashmolean Library, and by comparison this slim booklet seems something of a comedown. But it contains material quite as interesting and important as those produced by earlier holders of the Sather Professorship of Classical Literature at the University of California at Berkeley, whose main duty was to give six lectures in their year of office and to publish them. Among notable holders of the post who specialised in archaeological rather than literary studies was Carl Blegen, who lectured on his discoveries at Troy and in his first, 1939, season at the site in Messenia now acknowledged to be prehistoric Pylos. His discoveries at Pylos were to revolutionise the study of prehistoric Aegean civilisation. Principally these were a well-preserved palace of the Mycenaean civilisation and its contents, including a very extensive collection of tablets inscribed in the Linear B script, which with those of Knossos provided almost all the data used by Ventris to decipher Linear B as a form of Greek. But Blegen also excavated much evidence relating to the earlier history of the site of Pylos, that raised the possibility that sites in other parts of the Greek mainland might not only have rivalled the great centres of the Argolid as leaders of the Mycenaean civilisation at its height, but have played an independent role in its initial development.

It is fitting, therefore, that after thirty years of archaeological activity concerned with Pylos and its setting in western Messenia, as well as a distinguished earlier archaeological career, Jack Davis should have chosen to lecture on the topic of how Pylos might have developed into a great Mycenaean centre more or less independently of influences radiating outwards from the Argolid. He felt bound to make clear the paths that led to the accumulation of various kinds of information relevant to his theme, and so gives some account of his earlier archaeological career and how he became involved in site survey and the kind of evidence that it could produce, first on the island of Kea, then in the region of Nemea in the Argolid, and finally in the Pylos Regional Archaeological Project. It

was in this context that he became aware of the need to discover more about the history of Pylos before the period of Blegen's palace, also of the problems of preservation of the site of Pylos and of the records and data produced by the original excavation. In the context of the Greek Ministry of Culture's decision to replace the original shelter erected over the palace remains, he became involved in further excavation at the site, and finally achieved access to an untouched field below the acropolis, hoping to find out more about the town that would have surrounded the palace. Instead, the excavation resulted in unexpected and completely extraordinary discoveries, that have made Pylos seem much more of a rival to Mycenae from the very beginning of the developments that resulted in the Mycenaean civilisation, and likely to have played a major role in the exchange of ideas between Crete and the mainland (p. xxii).

A prologue explains how the book came to be written and what it is and is not intended to do. It is made clear that it is based on the six Sather lectures (p. xx), which must correspond to the six chapters that follow, but these probably reflect some revision of the original lectures and the involvement of Sharon Stocker, who has been co-director of the excavations at Pylos and is credited with sharing in writing the sixth chapter and an epilogue. Between the prologue and the chapters are two short preliminary sections, 'About the Aegean Bronze Age', a very brief outline of the accepted chronology for this period and a summary of developments to the beginnings of the Late Bronze Age, the setting for the development of Mycenaean civilisation, and 'About the Palace of Nestor', a short account of the main features of the building that Blegen uncovered and named after the king of Pylos who plays a distinctive role in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (like many past specialists in Mycenaean archaeology he believed that the Greek legends of the 'heroic age' contained much historical information, a viewpoint which the reviewer cannot accept).

There is nothing that requires comment in these preliminary sections apart from the mistaken statement that Schliemann's discovery of the first shaft graves at Mycenae was in the 1880s (p. xxix); the correct date 1876 is cited elsewhere in the book. But in this connection, it is a pity that no credit is given to Stamatakis, whose reports to the Archaeological Society provide much more accurate information about this part of the excavation than Schliemann's letters to the *Times*, the basis of his publication *Mycenae* (1880), which characteristically claims all the credit and barely mentions Stamatakis.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dickinson *et al.* 2012: 163-70.

The first chapter, 'Mycenaean Origins and the Greek Nation-State', explains how the term Mycenaean has come to be applied to the Late Bronze Age civilisation that developed on the southern Greek mainland, and how it has been viewed as an essential element in the history of the Greek people, a viewpoint eagerly espoused by Blegen and his older colleague Wace.<sup>2</sup> This contrasted markedly with Evans's view that what had been classified as Mycenaean on the mainland was simply a provincial version of Minoan civilisation, established by conquerors and colonists from Crete who had subjected the less advanced local populations, including the earliest branches of the Greeks, to their rule.<sup>3</sup> But all such 'racial' interpretations are no longer acceptable, as Davis shows. He offers justification for studying Greek prehistory within a Classics setting in the possible effects that the establishment of an organised state in the Bronze Age might have had on later historical developments in the south Peloponnese, and in the likelihood that the poetic tradition of which the Homeric poems were the finest flower went back to the early Mycenaean period, at least, when a stock of heroic tales, sometimes 'illustrated' in art works such as the Combat Agate found in the 'Tomb of the Griffin Warrior' at Pylos, could have been part of the common culture of the Aegean (pp. 12–14).

The second chapter, 'Farm, Field and Pylos', considers the distribution of population across the landscape and its essential relationship with the society to which that population belonged. This particularly concerns him because, around the time when Pylos was probably becoming an important centre, there is evidence for a considerable expansion of settlement in the region, very probably representing a corresponding growth in the agricultural exploitation of the land. 'Systems theory' gave every reason to suppose that there was a connection, and in Chapter 3, 'A Truly Prehistoric Archaeology of Greece', the evidence of tax records relating to the region of Pylos dating from the 18th century AD, in the period of Ottoman rule is cited as a possible analogy. The records show how the taxes of essentially rural communities, of which there were relatively many, were used to support persons important to the functioning of the state, such as administrators and professional soldiers. It is an intriguing idea that a similar system developed in the formation of the Mycenaean state, so that the expansion of settlement would have been an operation directed from the centre, intended

basically to increase the tax base and provide support for the state's governing personnel. But it does rather assume that a state that could direct such an operation had already been established in the Early Mycenaean period, whereas other evidence has been used to suggest that there were several important centres in the wider region of Messenia at that time (some as close to Pylos as Iklaina and Tragana), so that it might have been a period of instability, and the establishment of a state whose wide area of control seems patent in the Linear B texts might have been a lengthy business. Also, it is not clear that the complex picture of land exploitation suggested in the Pylos texts<sup>4</sup> can be easily interpreted as providing evidence for a system of 'benefices' resembling the Ottoman one; it would be good to see this argued in detail.

Chapter 4, 'Preserving and Conserving Nestor', is essentially concerned with the preservation of the records of the original and later excavations and with the attention given to the material from the original excavations that was preserved in storerooms, but not studied or published. A major element of this material was the animal bones, study of which brought to light some valuable evidence relating to a pattern of animal sacrifice conducted as part of ritual activity in the palace. Some relatively well preserved remains of frescoes were also discovered, that had not received attention in the second volume of the publication;<sup>5</sup> one striking fragment showed the arm of an apparently female archer (restored p. 51 fig. 24), but much more important, because apparently from a higher level on the wall in Hall 64 that showed combat scenes,<sup>6</sup> was a frieze showing three ships resembling those of the well-known Akrotiri Ship Fresco, sailing in a sea full of fish (pp. 52–53, restored fig. 25).

The chapter goes on to consider the information provided by the excavation of deep foundations for the support posts of the improved shelter over the palace remains. These yielded much information about the early stages of Pylos's history, strengthening the evidence for a whole sequence of earlier structures preceding Blegen's palace, starting in the earliest Mycenaean phase and built in a series of masonry styles that clearly derived from those developed in Crete (pp. 54–55). But here the account appears to conflict with the

<sup>2</sup> See especially Wace's introduction to M. Ventris and J. Chadwick, *Documents in Mycenaean Greek* (CUP, 2nd edition, 1973), pp. xxxi–xxxv.

<sup>3</sup> A.J. Evans, 'The Minoan and Mycenaean element in Greek life,' *JHS* 32 (1912), pp. 277–97.

<sup>4</sup> For summary comments and some detail see Dickinson 1994: 83–86, probably overtaken by more recent study.

<sup>5</sup> Lang 1969.

<sup>6</sup> Davis and Bennet 1999. For a colour version of the original reconstruction see Lang 1969, colour pl. M, reproduced on the cover of Sherratt and Bennet 2017, and in monochrome on fig. 4.5 inside.

sequence outlined by Nelson in the publication of the Minnesota Pylos Project:<sup>7</sup> although there are early traces of ashlar work on the site, the remains of two or three buildings in ashlar style are dated by Nelson not to 'Early Mycenaean' but to LH IIIA. Many ashlar walls were incorporated into the structure of Blegen's LH IIIB palace, but whether they are the remains of separate 'mansions', as suggested here, or part of a coherent plan closer in arrangement to Minoan palaces in being set around a central court, as has been argued, remains in question. Nelson questions this last interpretation, but certainly emphasises the Minoan links of these buildings, which may have been decorated with the painted plaster found in later excavations (p. 55).

Chapter 5, 'Science and the Mortuary Landscape of Pylos', is generally concerned with the great contribution that the adoption of a scientific approach and techniques of scientific analysis have made to archaeology, citing the study of the human bone remains from the Mycenaean graves excavated around Pylos, which had not been given much attention, as an example that is still yielding information. This leads to a summary of Mycenaean burial customs in Messenia (p. 62), followed by a brief account of the new discoveries, the 'Tomb of the Griffin Warrior', an intact single burial, provided with a fabulous range of grave goods, in a stone-walled rectangular grave, quite close to Tholos IV, and Tholos Tombs VI and VII, both of which clearly held a series of burials and seem to form a row beyond Tholos Tomb IV (cf. fig. 31, wrongly cited as 30 on p. 66; fig. 30 is also mis-cited as 31 on p. 69), which was apparently the first since it contains material datable very early in the Mycenaean development. The popularity of tholos tombs in Messenia and the possibility that these were favoured because they resembled the Middle Helladic burial tumuli in shape is mentioned (p. 62), but this does not really bring out one of the peculiarities of the Messenian burial record, that tumuli, found sporadically elsewhere on the mainland in the period, were *unusually* common. They were normally used for repeated burials, presumably of 'special people', since their construction would have involved much labour, a point of relevance to the nature of Middle Helladic society in Messenia. Several other interesting features of the Messenian evidence also go unmentioned, including that chamber tombs were rare in western Messenia outside the region

of Pylos and that in form the 'Tomb of the Griffin Warrior' is without close local parallel.

Finally, in Chapter 6, 'Minoan Missionaries in Pylos', the whole question of the links between Crete and other parts of the Aegean, specifically Messenia, is discussed, which requires consideration of the 'Minoanization phenomenon' observable in many islands of the Aegean, but also, in a distinct way, in the development of the Mycenaean material culture in the southern mainland. Here Davis's earlier experience, through involvement with the study of Ayia Irini on Kea, is brought into play (but note that in *Keos XII* Abell reaches what seems a much more balanced assessment of the level and significance of 'Minoanization' at Ayia Irini, see review in this volume). But here there seems an obvious chronological difficulty, that relating the beginnings of Mycenaean development to Minoan influences felt in ideological and ritual areas cites burial evidence that dates well into the Early Mycenaean period, not simply from the Tomb of the Griffin Warrior but the Vapheio tholos cist, whose contents seem to be of a similar period (mid-fifteenth century BC). That these sources are south Peloponnesian may be considered a salutary correction to the once prevalent concentration on Mycenae and its neighbourhood, but it seems to introduce a similar lack of balance to effectively ignore the evidence of the richest Shaft Graves, which date several generations before the 'Tomb of the Griffin Warrior'. Their contents include many items that are of Minoan types and likely to be Cretan products, or utilise motifs that have clear Minoan 'ritual' links, and though there are no gold rings showing clearly ritual-related scenes like those in the 'Tomb of the Griffin Warrior', such rings have been found in later Early Mycenaean contexts in the Argolid.

There are in fact several indications of interesting links between Messenia and the north-east Peloponnese, if not specifically between Pylos and Mycenae. Both have produced evidence for considerable quantities of amber in the highest elite graves, which must often have come as in the form of necklaces of distinctive European types. Both contain a considerable number of early tholos tombs; their dating suggests that Messenia was the influencer. At a humbler level, the first style of decorated pottery ware based on Minoan prototypes that was to become standard throughout the Mycenaean world probably reached its mature form in the Argolid, and was transmitted to Messenia only later in Late Helladic I;<sup>8</sup> but the 'conical cup' type may well appeared in

<sup>7</sup> Cooper and Fortenberry 2017, reviewed in *JGA* 4 (2019), 435-38. Nelson summarises his view of the sequence on pp. 349-65, referring to the buildings in 'the new ashlar style' on p. 357, and discussing the possibility that they formed part of a 'Minoan' plan on p. 360.

<sup>8</sup> Dickinson 2014.

Messenia before the Argolid, and was transmitted in the other direction, although it was never as common as at Ayia Irini or other island sites.

The reviewer is sympathetic to the idea that the burial of items that in their form or decoration have clear or likely Minoan ritual links must have some significance; they are not just diplomatic gifts or acquired through 'trade'. It is not at all impossible that at least some of the new elites of the developing mainland principalities were overawed by the Minoan world-view as encapsulated in the civilisation's religious beliefs and ritual practices, and likely to adopt some of these. Intermarriages between members of the elites might even have aided in this process. However, to go on from that to suggest that the concept of the *wanax*, argued from the Linear B evidence to have been the most important religious and secular male personage in a Mycenaean state, was transferred from Minoan Crete to Mycenaean Greece, and especially as part of the establishment of a state of Pylos, immediately raises the question, what evidence is there for such a figure in Minoan civilisation?

In fact, it is not at all clear that the new and very self-aggrandising elite in the various emerging Mycenaean principalities focussed on single male holders of supreme power, monarchs in fact. That at Pylos several tholos tombs were apparently in use concurrently, and that the 'Griffin Warrior' was not buried in any of them but in a much less impressive grave (not easy to explain if he was the *wanax*), should give one pause before reaching such a conclusion.<sup>9</sup> The establishment of a stable form of monarchy, assuming that it ever was stable, could well have been a process that took generations; in Messenia it may have been associated with the process whereby other principalities were brought under Pylos's control, but the evolution could have taken different forms in the different leading regions.

Overall, then, this book is a mine of information on the archaeological discoveries at and around Pylos in the last generation, including those re-discovered in museum storerooms, and offers intriguing hypotheses concerning matters of the first importance when considering the rise of Mycenaean civilisation. Although these hypotheses raise many questions, it is very useful to be made to consider them, and for all of this we should be very grateful to Jack Davis and Shari Stocker.

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**Joanne M.A. Murphy and Jerolyn E. Morrison (eds) *Kleronomia: Legacy and Inheritance. Studies on the Aegean Bronze Age in Honor of Jeffrey S. Soles*. pp. 310. INSTAP: Academic Press, 2022. ISBN 978-1931534284, \$64.95 (hardcover).**

Auspiciously titled, *Kleronomiá* (heritage/legacy) is a *Festschrift* designed to mark the most extraordinary achievements in Aegean archaeology of Professor Jeffrey S. Soles, recently retired from the Department of Classical Studies at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Soles, who celebrated his eightieth birthday in 2022, is widely known as the co-director of the excavations on the island of Mochlos, located in Eastern Crete in the Mirabello Bay. For half a century (since the early 1970s), he has played a key role in advancing our understanding of early Cretan societies. All researchers exploring Minoan Crete will, at one time or another, come across Soles' fundamental work *The Prepalatial Cemeteries at Mochlos and Gournia and the House Tombs of Bronze Age Crete*, published by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens in 1992.

<sup>9</sup> See relevant comments in Dickinson *et al.* 2012: 185–86.