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Soles, J, with contributions by T. Carter, J. Cutler, G. Doudalis, D. Faulmann, J. M. Flood, A.R. Giumlia-Mair, A. M. Hussein, L. Kaiser, O. Krzyszkowska, E. Margaritis, J. Morrison, D. Mylona, M. Ntinou, K. Papayianni, Z. Stos-Gale, P. Westlake, J.S. Soles, C. Davaras, *Mochlos IVA. Period III. The House of the Metal Merchant and Other Buildings in the Neopalatial Town* (Prehistory Monographs 68). 2 volumes (1. Text; 2. Concordance tables, figures, and plates). pp. 568, colour frontispiece, 185 B/W figures; 118 B/W plates, 89 tables. Philadelphia: INSTAP Academic Press, 2022. ISBN 978-1-931534-33-8, hardback $150.00.

In 1908, Richard Seager commenced excavations on the prehistoric promontory of Mochlos (now an islet off Crete's northeast coast) which was inhabited between at least the Early Bronze Age (Early Minoan I/II) and the Late Minoan IIIB period - i.e. *c.* 2900-1200 BC, with Hellenistic and Roman re-settlement. This volume mainly addresses the results of further, systematic investigations, using more modern methodologies, of up to fifteen Middle Minoan IIIA-Late Minoan IB (c. 1750-1500 BC) domestic and ceremonial buildings partially excavated by Seager (some houses being multi-storey by their final use, with ashlar masonry construction, colour-plastered walls and floors; stone staircases; roof and street drains; kitchens with cooking holes/platforms and stone processing basins; storage and living rooms) located on the south coast of the present-day islet. Occupation was already present on the Cretan coast immediately south of the promontory by the LM IB period, and both areas had continued settlement and cemetery use into LM III.

Excavations were restarted in the zone at notable scale and length from the late 1980s under the direction of J. Soles and C. Davaras. Excavation is still ongoing while the project aims to issue complete data from past investigations in an ordered fashion: this is the latest, admirable instalment. Soles, surviving Davaras, has built close involvement between the project, its staff, INSTAP funding and the facilities of the INSTAP Study Center for East Crete. This connection has trained and supported specialists in the fields of artefacts, materials, technology, and palaeoenvironmental remains, and has involved highly engaged conservators and illustrators (D. Faulmann, producing all drawn and many of the photographic illustrations as well as related interpretation from work on site, is rightly included as an author here). This setup has enabled excellent recovery and presentation of data on metal artefact types, composition and provenance, including XRF and lead isotope analyses (Soles; Giumlia-Mair; Gale); archaeobotany (Margaritis); charcoal remains (Ntinou) and animal bone (Mylona). Pottery remains to be published in a separate volume, with findings summarised here by Soles in conjunction with Doudalis, Kaiser and Morrison. All other artefact items are presented here, with typically high-quality work by Carter with Flood (chipped and ground stone tools and other stone objects, including weights); Westlake (plaster) and Krzyszkowska (seals) forming reliable sources of reference and interpretation; Soles and Hussein study bone implements. Interesting additional types of specialist contribution appear, segmenting off textile tools as a distinct arena (a practice in my view not entirely justified, though ably done by Cutler) and microvertebrate remains (Papyianni) as another (perhaps worth doing for the high levels of detail it brings). Excellent sets of tables and charts illustrate specialist analyses and interpretations.

Regarding the broader history of Mochlos, the volume contains a very useful introductory summary of the settlement's history, drawing on previous publication of the LM IB 'Artisan's Quarter' south of the promontory (Soles, pp. 1-10). This is followed by two large chapters ('House C.3: The House of the Metal Merchant' and 'The House of the Theran Refugee and Other Buildings in the Neopalatial Town') on the architecture and stratigraphy of the excavated buildings: these are jointly written by the majority of authors and include finds lists for each architectural unit (pp.11-223). A reflective essay on the nature of life at the LM IB settlement by Soles (pp. 495-117) concludes the volume. In all this, there are mixed readings of exactly how the LM IB use of the promontory settlement ended. The significance of burning in different areas of the site is treated variably, although burning is found to have occurred regularly enough at the end of the LM IB phase to have preserved many vulnerable remains of the period, explaining why this phase is the focus of

the volume. LM III architecture here was spaced in a different fashion. Was the site destroyed by fire? The consecutive MM IIIA, LM IA and LM IB building phases in similar formats are all interpreted as the consequences of earthquake destructions: the (re) construction in LM IB is suggested to relate in part to external settlers, partly due to evidence for the first building activity in a zone previously left open.

The specialists' individual accounts are informed by interpretations of archaeological contexts provided by the excavators on the one hand, and by the specialists' own familiarity with assemblages from Crete and the wider Aegean/East Mediterranean on the other. This enables authoritatively economical conclusions, which are variously built on and marginalised in Soles' general interpretation. Mylona notes a surprising absence of evidence for extensive cattle exploitation and a thoroughly mixed model for sheep-goat use, along with some likely socially-based inequality in the last documented food consumption practice before abandonment, which included meals of large and varied fish species in several locations (B.4 Room 3; C.3 Rooms 1.6; 1.7). She uses her knowledge of specialised wool- and cloth-dyeing sites of the same period elsewhere in Crete to observe that murex shell deposits of small volume found in houses across this part of the settlement are most likely to pertain to food, not dyeing. Ntinou shows how standard types of past and present exploited ecozones around Mochlos map onto the carbonised wood taxa found (mainly as waste or cooking fuel in her view) while also noting some differences from the expected Late Bronze Age pattern (species most characteristic of permanent watercourse vegetations, and pine/cypress forest: both these ecotypes are not prominent in the local region today). Carter and Flood note particular types of practice in stone artefact production - regular use of large stone basins in rooms identified as kitchens; household-level production of blades from obsidian cores; use of Giali obsidian to make stone vessels in the LM IB or earlier periods. The star of the show is intendedly the complex, large, three-storey LM IB House C.3 with its two metal hoards. The presentation of the building alongside its peers, including streets leading through the settlement, and structures identified as having specialised cultic use, including an enclosed precinct termed the 'Temenos', provides vital contextual information, indicating that C.3 had no highly differentiated size, format, general content or organisation: it is noted that earlier excavations and damage may have removed metal deposits from other houses which were similar to the hoards found here.

The hoard contexts were as follows: in the northwest part of ground-floor Room 2.2 of C.3 (which had MMIIIA and LMIA phases) a LM IB plaster floor was dug into within its use period to produce a pit in which a hoard was inserted. The hoard's lack of recovery in antiquity suggests the abandonment and effective inaccessibility of the site after at least a partial and disruptive destruction. Sixty fragments of oxhide and other ingot types were found in the hoard, which was covered by half of an oxhide ingot. It also included large, heavy objects of value, including a bronze sistrum instrument, vessels, tongs, balance pans, an axe and mixed other items, all in near-new condition and wrapped in now-mineralised textiles – the latter offering fascinating insight and testing of the hypothesis proposed by Cutler, of a limited range of textile types produced at this site. The profile of the hoard suggests a value-focused accumulation which could be used in multiple systems of goods exchange/commissioning. That a weights system based on divisions of 60 and 12 was used at the site is indicated by Soles' study of the weights from the wider excavation. Confusingly, layers dated to LM IA in this exact location, into which the pit's excavation is said to penetrate, contain further ingot fragments, a piece of casting residue and a tuyère. Soles later interprets all of these as LM IA in date, thereby arguing that secondary metalworking only took place on the islet before the establishment of the LM IB Artisan's Quarter. The circumstances do suggest at least some doubt about this. The same building also contains a very different type of hoard, termed a 'foundry hoard' because it includes numerous scrap pieces, fragments and blanks, mostly broken and worn. This was found dug into the floor of a basement storage room (1.1) containing 11 pithoi, being hidden among the pithoi and covered with large ingot pieces. We are told about a shallow pit housing the hoard, but with few further details of the deposit into which the pit was cut or how it was constructed. While Room 2.2's hoard contained customer-focused products, the contents of 1.1's hoard could presumably only be worked by, or negotiated in exchange or commission with, specialist metalworkers. The householding 'merchant' could in fact have been one of these, working between the residence and a location as yet unknown. Though most crafts were apparently carried out at household level, metallurgy, like potting, favours specialised locations, and we cannot be sure that all participants needed to live 'over the shop' as some did in the Artisan's Quarter. An interesting element from this hoard, supporting the notion of its practical function in metalworking and the knowledgeable, involved status of the building's

resident(s) in this sphere is a chunk of arsenopyrite, almost certainly used for copper alloying in a process now identified as occurring in Crete from the Early Bronze Age onward. In a directly adjacent wall niche at the same level, and classified here as an earlier foundation deposit, is a unique further metal deposit comprising two axes and an arsenic- and tin-rich copper sheet. Again, lacking exact stratigraphic context description, the relation of the deposit to the pit is very unclear: could it in fact be either an origin point for or an extension of the main hoard, with the latter eventually extending onto to the adjacent floor area? In either case the evidence indicates a long-term association of metalworking and metals trading with the building.

Analysis of the metal objects' character and technology is highly detailed and revealing, since few large settlement assemblages have yet been studied from Bronze or Iron Age Crete. Compositions show the well-established use of low to medium tin for some important or prominent personal items, but most items are either of unalloyed copper or arsenical-copper alloys. The vast majority of the metal in isotope terms matches Cypriot provenances, though other areas (Lavrion, Taurus) are represented. 103 ingots and 180kg of metal overall are represented in the building. The oxhide ingot fragments (one engraved post-manufacture with a ship-like trader's mark) support the Cypriot connection in their quantity and form as well as their composition: plano-convex ingots are also present.

Shrines and ceremonial locations are identified in several areas of the settlement on the basis of some well-recognised features such as kernos/cupule stones and figurines (e.g. Figs. 135-7), including the striking large human foot model, paralleling examples at Malia and Anemospilia. The nature of ceremonial is difficult to throw light on, though Soles spends some time on a thought -provoking reconstruction of processions through the avenues of the town to the *temenos* building away from the shore, which he reconstructs as planted with olive trees, based on parallels with ritual scenes on contemporary seals and the finds of burnt olive leaves (which could alternatively represent a fuel source preserved in quantity here). An LM III shrine discovered in the area is important as part of the settlement on the islet and prefigures the town shrines of the LM IIIC period in Crete, though the single human figurine found here is of the typical small solid LM III type unlikely to have been used in anything like the same way as the LMIIC forms. The limited preservation and obscure end of use circumstances here are once again important to stress, and the stratigraphy crucial to describe and assess in detail, since secondary studies of cult often rely on counting the frequencies and types of cultic objects or sets without due attention to the completeness or preservation of the context or assemblage.

Soles makes the volume attractive through the building of strong, sometimes overconfident inferences (ritual consumption of almond milk and olive trees in the temenos based on finds of almond wood and shells, and olive leaves; a bordello or hostel in the town, based on a building with multiple rooms and only one kitchen, with numerous lamps; no metalworking in this part of the settlement, as a result of the establishment of the Artisans' Quarter; settlement by newcomers in LM IB, based on the colonisation of previously and henceforth unbuilt-on areas; weaving as women's work and the present of migrant women on the basis of loomweights which are argued on a macroscopic basis to be of nonlocal production: weaving as being located mainly or exclusively on rooftops due to the definition of some deposits with loomweights as exclusively upper floor collapse; the use of olive-pressing machinery based on parts of a burnt beam in a basement room. While interesting, not all of these hypotheses seem fully borne out by the presented evidence or specialist discussion. The intensity of external contacts and trade at this always-connected site is ably and convincingly explored by Soles – citing, for example, the intersupply of goods with the region of Gournia in the isthmus of Ierapetra to the west, based on granodiorite fabrics, stone items and fabrics from that region; related practices in connection with the southeast Aegean are somewhat superficially suggested by macroscopically identified glassy inclusions in other fabrics (the pottery volume will throw more light on this); obsidian sourcing from both the Melos and Giali regions for different (practical; ornamental) purposes: metals sourcing across the east Mediterranean at a large and diverse scale; prestige consumption influenced by close acquaintance with Egyptian and east Mediterranean manufacturing and use traditions in metal and other materials, as in the case of the Egyptianising sistrum. Strong similarities with the architecture of LM IA Thera (as well as with architecture portrayed on Cretan seals) are highlighted. The 'House of the Theran Refugee' terminology for building C.1 refers to the unusual recessed façade of this house, and use of some construction techniques: no direct claim is made for a Thera resident building here after fleeing the effects of the eruption on that island at the end of LM IA, but the idea of external settlers in LM IB is pervasive. The stratigraphic study shows

the Mochlos promontory settlement to preserve excellent strata of airborne tephra marking the Theran eruption event in the Cretan record.

Some issues nonetheless surround stratigraphy here: the excellent illustrations here only partly make up for the lack of detailed, easily findable stratigraphic descriptions in standard formats for prehistoric research globally, in which all deposits, structures, features and their perceived or apparent relationships are reported exactly as found, including in a final report. It is usually within a separate analysis, and in conjunction with analysis of the finds, that the constructional/use/abandonment history of a particular space is reconstructed. Awkwardnesses arise first here from the over-elaboration of recording (trench, locus, sublayer) in buildings up to 200 sq m in area, excavated using a series of trenches rather than an open-area excavation. The short text sections headed 'Stratigraphy' supplied for each named architectural unit, clearly seen as needing to be condensed in form, are fully developed interpretations of the order in which things are thought to have happened, each with its own selections and emphases, rather than observational narratives. Much more effort is expended in the longer following summary sections for each unit, subheaded 'Architecture and finds'. Unwieldy lists of *all* anthropogenic contents are appended to these under unit subheadings and numbers often indicating a series of excavation layers, artificial or otherwise. Equivalences and relationships between stratigraphic units are not diagrammised or made otherwise explicit for easy reference: perhaps this could be done in the pottery volume. Deposits, soils and features are often minimally described verbally in terms of texture, extent, height/thickness and standard inclusions – e.g. stones, charcoal flecks, hearth or building material, and so on: some of this information can be laboriously reconstructed from sections and plans. There seems very little room at all for discussion of ambiguous features, notwithstanding that they appear on nearly all excavations: the process of making sense of such features could usefully be reflected in the final text, allowing readers to evaluate the evidence as found. The method seems linked to the use on site of skilled 'diggers' without recording responsibilities or training in archaeological analysis. The results force the reader to take many interpretations on trust (including *post hoc* stratigraphic distinctions wholly on the basis of very brief pottery dating summaries). An example is the designation of some deposits as floor collapses from upper storeys, on which related inferences about activities within the site are later built. In regard to the nature and causes of the end of LMIB occupation it is similarly difficult to independently obtain a feeling of what deposits represent. Finally, the contents page and text format (2-column throughout, with many subheadings not given in the Contents) offer no easy page-based access to the stratigraphic units or even to the houses/rooms being discussed by page. In the cases of major excavation reports, this format could be improved on.

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Philippa M. Steele, *Exploring writing systems and practices in the Late Bronze Age Aegean.* pp. xxi + 169, figs 17, tables 3. Oxford & Philadelphia: Oxbow Books, 2024. ISBN 978-1-78925-901-8, hardcover £50.

This book represents the work conducted by the author as principal investigator of the project Contexts of and Relations between Early Writing Systems (CREWS), funded by the European Research Council, and is the culmination of a series of CREWS open access volumes published with Oxbow Books. As the title and Introduction make clear, it is concerned with the Aegean Bronze Age scripts, and particularly with the interrelated problems of the relationship between Linear A and Linear B, and the failure of Linear B to survive the downfall of the palatial societies, whereas a script developed in Cyprus from Linear A during the Late Bronze Age survived in use into at least Late Classical times.

The short Introduction summarises current information on the Aegean scripts and their Cypriot derivatives, with up-to-date comments on the chronology, and the theoretical issues involved, and also explains the special terminology that will be used. This last is particularly important, because this is very specialised work that requires a good deal of background knowledge to appreciate, and will probably be best understood by specialists in this particular research area; even other Aegean specialists may find themselves in difficulty sometimes.

Three chapters cover, in turn, the development of Linear B from Linear A, the way in which logograms (what used to be called ideograms) are developed in the scripts and used in texts, and the ability of