

the Mochlos promontory settlement to preserve excellent strata of airborne tephra marking the Thera 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

the various scripts to survive. It is evident that the simplistic chronological sequence once accepted, Hieroglyphic – Linear A – Linear B, does not fit the facts as we now have them: Hieroglyphic and Linear A were both in use in Crete simultaneously at one time, and there is some evidence that Linear A survived past the collapse of Minoan civilisation. Indeed, it is plausibly argued by the author, following other specialists, that Linear B began as an attempt to write Greek in a particular form of Linear A that had developed in north Crete. We still do not have a clear picture of how this happened, let alone of how Linear B was transferred to some major centres of the Greek mainland, where there was no earlier tradition of writing, let alone of its use for administration, whereas Linear A and associated administrative practices seem to have been familiar on some Cycladic islands, especially Thera (Santorini).

The development of the Linear B script was accompanied by various changes in administrative practices in Crete, especially in the types of document shaped in clay that might be written on for administrative purposes, and all these changes must clearly have been spearheaded by administrators trained in the Cretan tradition at the demand of the new ruling elite, which used the Greek language, and surely reflect what the administrators considered to be useful changes, since there is no evidence that any such items were in use on the mainland before. That this was a basically administrative decision is underlined by the fact that Linear B was very rarely used for any other purpose than administrative (which includes the inscriptions on storage stirrup jars, that always seem to relate in some way to the contents). There are a few pottery inscriptions that may be something like casual graffiti, but there is nothing like the Hieroglyphic and Linear A inscriptions on various items, most often found in clearly ritual contexts, that are very likely to be prayers or dedications of various kinds, like those well known in Bronze Age Near Eastern contexts and in Greek historical contexts much later.

Here, in a nutshell, is the explanation for the disappearance of Linear B: it was essentially an administrative script, and when the administrations that it served disappeared, so did any need for the script, and, in time, any memory of it. In Cyprus, in contrast, as shown in Chapter 3, the local script was developed and continued in use for many purposes, becoming something of a symbol of Cypriot distinctiveness. Perhaps this reflects the close involvement of Cyprus with the Near Eastern civilisations, in all of which writing was used for many purposes; but in the Aegean the potential

value of writing for a whole range of different purposes was not perceived until the adaptation of an essentially Near Eastern writing system to form the Greek alphabets in near-historical times.

An enormous amount of valuable information and discussion is included in the text, and this may well have contributed to the failure to provide an index, which would have been helpful in trying to trace references to particular sites, texts, ideas, etc. The figures and tables are a great help in providing the most up-to-date views of the different scripts. The reviewer has not noticed any major areas where he would disagree strongly with the account, although more information is now available on the quite substantial Linear B archive found at Ayios Vasileios south of Sparta, in a destruction deposit now dated to LH IIIB1 (see Karadimas, Vasilogamvrou and Kardamaki 2022; pp. 83–84 comment on the archive). But it must be pointed out that it is incorrect to refer to the inscribed vessel from Ayia Irini discussed on p. 102, fig. 3.1, and also mentioned on p. 59, as a conical cup, a term which will instantly conjure up a mental picture in any Aegean Bronze Age specialist's mind of a tediously common Minoan and Minoanising type; it looks like a coarsish version of a Vapheio cup (the reviewer has no access to original sources showing it). However, this is a minor criticism; this book contains much of lasting value on the complexities of the Aegean Bronze Age writing systems, and deserves study by all serious students of the Aegean Bronze Age civilisations.

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Karadimas, N., Vasilogamvrou, A. and Kardamaki, E. 2022. Preliminary remarks on the stratigraphy of the West Stoa from the new Mycenaean palace at Ayios Vasileios, Laconia, in Wiersma, C. and Tsouli M.P. (eds) *Middle and Late Helladic Laconia. Competing Principalities?* 75–85. Publications of the Netherlands Institute at Athens VII, Leiden: Sidestone Press.