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SYLVIANE DÉDÉRIX

UNIVERSITÉ CATHOLIQUE DE LOUVAIN

sylviane.dederix@gmail.com

Corien Wiersma. *Building the Bronze Age: architectural and social change on the Greek mainland during Early Helladic III, Middle Helladic and Late Helladic I*. pp. xxii+561, 125 b/w illustrations, 1 colour illustration, 58 tables, 12 catalogues, 1 addendum. 2014. Oxford: Archaeopress. ISBN 978-1-90573-986-8 paperback £60.00/\$85.00; e-publication £19.

This book, a revised doctoral dissertation undertaken at the University of Groningen, is a welcome study on the neglected topic of domestic architecture in the eras preceding the palatial civilization of the Greek Mainland (in particular the EH III-LH I span). It is structured very much as a dissertation: an introduction setting out the goals, justification and spatiotemporal framework of the study; a survey of prior research on the topic of Mainland domestic architecture (Chapter 1); a theory of domestic architecture, the household and the overall context within which it is nested (community, nearby settlements, regional), and the methodology used for the data underpinning the study (from selection and collection to processing and analysis; Chapter 2); an analytical presentation of architectural remains by region (Thessaly, Phocis and Phthiotis, Boeotia, Euboea, Attica, Corinthia, the Argolid, Laconia, Messenia, Elis, Arcadia and Achaia; Chapter 3); a synthesis of the architectural data by era (EH III, MH I-II, MH III-LH I; Chapter 4); an interpretative discussion of emerging patterns (on the regional, neighboring settlement, local community, individual household levels; Chapter

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5); and a brief section presenting the conclusions (Chapter 6).

The book is accompanied by 12 comprehensive catalogues containing the raw data upon which the study is based in print form organized by region: the sample across all studied eras varies by region (based on a cursory count, Thessaly: 65 houses; Phocis and Phthiotis: 20; Boeotia: 31, of which 5 from Thebes; Euboea: 4; Attica: 34; Corinthia: 9; Argolid: 76; Laconia: 6; Messenia: 7; Elis: 7; Arcadia: 8; Achaia: 5). The sample is more even along the temporal dimension (EH III: 79 houses, MH I-II: 92 [though the number 77 is also showing oddly in table 4.2.2], MH III-LH I: 80, pp. 191, 202, 212). Descriptive information on individual houses is included in a catalogue as an array of fields printed from a database (preservation state, evidence of desertion, orientation, layout type, surviving footprint dimensions, wall thickness, floor type, fixed furnishings, evidence for modification/phase, a note on the nature of activities attested, date, and bibliographical information). Each entry is accompanied by a printed version of the published plan of the building in question, digitized and enhanced with annotations and graphical representations of associated features (these images are in addition to the chapter illustrations and are not captioned or numbered). Finally, there is an addendum on Lerna, which takes into account a recent study of EH III architectural remains at that site (E.C. Banks, *Lerna VI*, 2013); the new data are not reflected in the analysis and synthesis in *Building the Bronze Age* because of publication timing issues. The structure and exposition style of the book is a bit cumbersome, although this is primarily due to the purpose of the original work. It is generally well written, with the occasional Teutonic slip or woolly sentence ('the reasons that substantiate the execution of this research', p. xx; 'the social change seems to have been of a competitive nature', p. 13; 'little brevity of habitation took place', p. 220). The catalogues of printed database entries occupy more than half of the volume (pp. 249–535) and perhaps should have been published digitally, along with associated metadata and enhanced digital site plans in line with current data publication standards.

Methodological thinking is dispersed in several parts of the book. It would have been useful to bring these together in a separate chapter. First, there is a brief methodology section at the end of Chapter 2 (pp. 22–25). This describes the process of data collection from primary sources, stating the usual difficulties (i.e. poor preservation and/or publication detail). There is an explanation of why a subset of excavated domestic units (those with published plans and at least a partially measurable footprint) was included in the study. A more ambiguous and unexplained

criterion for data selection is 'the relevancy of the remains within the context of the settlement, region or period', allowing 'a degree of flexibility in the selection of the data'. While poor representation of certain regions is fully and repeatedly acknowledged by the author (pp. 25, 192, 225), the claim that this is compensated by the size of the total area covered (the Mainland) is spurious since tentative interpretations are made on the basis of the different datasets in the concluding section of each region in Chapter 3 and these feed into Chapters 5 and 6. Each concluding section of Chapter 3 includes the regional data broken down by era in tabular form (e.g. pp. 52, 64, 78 etc.). Chapter 4, on the other hand, includes tabular overviews of the study sample (number of houses) by era and location (inland vs coastal, p. 192, 203, 213). A breakdown of the total sample by region earlier in the book (e.g. in a dedicated methodology chapter) would have allowed the reader to quickly evaluate the relative weight of resulting regional observations and their effect on Mainland-wide chronological patterns detected. The latter are seen as more reliable (pp. 25, 192), although they are based upon and tinted by the regional data subsets. The stated reason for not presenting the regional data graphically (charts would give a false impression of emerging patterns as certain regions are represented by just a couple of sites) does not eliminate the need for an explicit sampling strategy to address the biases inherent in the record. Likewise, not presenting poor data in percentage form and opting for raw numbers instead (p. 191) does not sidestep these difficulties. The catalogue introduction (p. 249) contains an important note on how 'finds' and 'activities' are interpreted in the study; this too could have been explored in more detail in a methodology chapter.

Chapter 1 begins with definitions of domestic architecture and 'the household'. Although, as the author notes (p. 1) the relationship between 'the household' and domestic architecture ought to be problematized rather than assumed and assemblages need to be taken into account (p. 6), the remaining chapter is a survey of prior work on EH III-LH I architecture per se and an account of different explanations of social change in Aegean archaeology. Chapter 2 is an illuminating theoretical discussion of domestic architecture, economy and the household, as well as of broader perspectives on human settlement (e.g. mobility, organization, location, demarcation). This chapter is relevant and thought-provoking, but certain lines of thought merit additional explanation. For example, cooperation requires solidarity, 'homogenizing forms of sociality' (like architectural choices) construct solidarity, therefore architectural homogeneity suggests dependency, whereas variety suggests household independence (p. 20). Inversely, however, 'the dependency asked for a certain

solidarity, which could be expressed in consensual cultural behavior such as architectural homogeneity' (p. 238). At any rate, we might ask, does architectural variety necessarily reflect lack of solidarity within a community or across several communities? Did people articulate their identities and solidarity or difference primarily through architectural choices? Is homogeneity/variety the instrumental means for engineering solidarity or the lack thereof, or inversely its outcome? Chapter 3 is useful and well-researched, combining general information about each region (including geography, chronology, history of research, settlement pattern), overviews of sites and their development over time, and digitally enhanced site plans. While the excessive length of this chapter (pp. 26–190) is justified by the significance of the compiled material, it could have been avoided by breaking down the information into individual, regional chapters.

In terms of synthesis, chapter 4 presents the data chronologically. It is suggested that simplicity, homogeneity and lack of organization (determined on the basis of a priori, etic criteria of 'organization', at least) seems to be the prevailing trend in EH III (p. 202); MH I-II houses, simple and departing from EH III architecture to a minor degree, 'remained freestanding, communicating isolation', but 'were homogeneous in appearance, communicating communal unity' (p. 212). MH III-LH I houses, in turn, are seen to represent an intensification of previous trends with labor increasingly invested in building both houses and communities. The chapter concludes that in neither era is it possible to assess the functional uses of spaces based on finds/furnishings and whether they were used for specialized activities (pp. 199, 209, 219). Problematically, however, it is 'tentatively suggested that, compared to EH III, during MH I-II [...] domestic space was increasingly segmented and used for specialized activities' (p. 209; the same leap is asserted in Chapter 5, p. 241). That changes in the domestic economy are indirectly suggested by changing building practices in regards to earlier structures (internal modifications and additions rather than rebuilding, p. 220) also seems a stretch.

Chapter 5 elaborates on the possible causes of patterns observed in the preceding chapter, and is arguably the most stimulating part of the book. Inter alia, it is argued that some changes may be due to foreign influences, while others are due to internal developments. The Mainland is regarded as fundamentally homogeneous, despite some differences in the material culture and the timing, intensity and rate of change (p. 226). The household is seen as the most important social unit in EH III-LH I, although 'it was submerged in [subsumed by] the wider community' (p. 240). It is suggested that from the end of EH III there is 'more organized household or

communal economic cooperation' culminating in MH II (p. 236). Certain claims do not really follow from the preceding analysis: for instance, that defensive and circumference walls in MH III-LH I, by contrast with earlier eras, reveal an increasing preoccupation with 'property' per se (p. 232, as opposed to other possible explanations, such as controlling access, ensuring safety, or symbolically demarcating the community); that open space around houses indicates interaction between households (p. 233); the characterization of 'social groups of some settlements' as endogamous solely on the basis of architectural design (p. 236–7). Caution is sometimes thrown in the wind: 'although contextual data are usually lacking, I can put forward a possible explanation for the architectural homogeneity and increasing architectural variation' (p. 237); 'it has been repeatedly emphasized that the data on the household economy, cooperation, and activities are problematic for various reasons. Nonetheless, several patterns and developments were suggested, as well as an interpretation of them and possible causes of change' (p. 238). Sometimes a cyclical rationale is used, pointing back to earlier chapters: 'however, these weak patterns and their interpretation are supported by the previously discussed architectural patterns and their interpretation' (p. 239). The dearth of actual evidence on the functional use of spaces of individual households, putting aside the occasional in situ pithos or bothros pit, unfortunately undermines the effort to study the domestic economy and specialization: 'it is not possible to pinpoint the exact activities [...] however, based on furnishings [installations like kilns], increasing house size and increasing segmentation of space, it is tentatively suggested that some households were specializing in some activities from MH II onwards' (p. 241). Chapter 6 is a brief overall summary of the dissertation.

Objectives are stated in different parts of the book and have a processual flavor: reconstructing 'patterns of homogeneity and variety' in multiscale space (household to region) and across time (EH III to LH I) (Introduction, p. xx); exploring other dimensions of spatial variation, i.e. differences between north and south, coastal or inland areas (p. xxii); formulating alternative models of change besides invasion (associated with 'images of ravaging barbarians', p. 224), migration and climate conditions (p. 13); relating emerging patterns to social organization and change (pp. xx, 14; house architecture and domestic assemblages are seen as a step towards 'fully solving the problem of material and social change', Chapter 1, p. 13); entertaining the role of symbolic or functional factors in the formation of domestic architecture (p. xx; later elaborated upon: whether rebuilding is caused by functional or symbolic considerations, Chapter 4, p. 221); casting light on a relatively neglected aspect of Mainland material culture, such as domestic architecture; considering the

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importance of the household in understanding broader processes of social change and the emergence of civilization (p. xxi).

The main research questions are posed more clearly at the end of Chapter 1 (pp. 13–14): how domestic architecture and settlement changes during EH III-LH I; how architectural changes relate to social change ('how domestic architecture becomes more complex over time'—what features are tracked is clarified in Chapter 4, p. 194: construction quality, shape, size, number of rooms etc.); whether architectural changes are 'caused by corresponding changes in the domestic economy, and settlement size, density, interdependency of households and settlements, and patterns of interaction' (p. 221); how homogeneous or varied domestic architecture is within the geographic and chronological framework of the study. Additional questions posed in Chapter 1 are to do with the general heuristic value of domestic architecture as material proxy for 'the household' (in particular, the household economy): the degree to which households were self-sufficient and specialized (especially in terms of storage), the development of the domestic economy over time, and the economic and social interrelationship of households and the communities of which they were a part. In tandem, it is asked whether the spatial organization of houses and settlements can reveal shifting patterns of mobility/permanence or illuminate the nature of people's relationship with place ('property, ownership or inheritance', p. 14).

The volume succeeds in terms of some of these goals, by compiling information about domestic architecture from a wide variety of primary resources and making them more accessible to scholarship. The raw data and Chapter 3, in particular, are valuable contributions and a step towards viewing the Middle Helladic era, in particular, from a non-funerary perspective. It does showcase design similarities and differences in the architectural record across EH III-LH I. The presentation of the data in terms of coastal versus inland locations is also thought-provoking, as is the more general discussion of settlement patterns and the economy as a whole. Other goals, however, remain unattainable due to data limitations or inquiry directions. Constructing alternative narratives of social change need not focus on deconstructing the concept of invading barbarians any longer. Since domestic assemblages are so poorly preserved and/or reported, it becomes very difficult to reconstruct household economy on the basis of a few permanent installations (which at any rate need not belong to individual houses), architectural plans per se, or settlement patterns, let alone solving the problem of material and social change and the emergence of civilization. Some lines of inquiry are simply underexplored. The very limited understanding of household symbolism (reduced to

the unanswered question of the meaning of burials among abandoned houses, p. 239) is probably due to the secondary importance attributed to the symbolic in general. The latter is construed as a by-product of other societal phenomena: social change is associated 'with functional, economic and social developments; the symbolical aspects of architectural change seem to arise from these developments' (p. 222). Because the most promising direction in the book is to do with human habitation in the landscape as a whole (rather than the molecular study of individual households) it is a pity that the nature of people's connection and relationship with 'place' (i.e. humanized, cognized, remembered landscape) is reduced to questions of property or inheritance.

ANASTASIA DAKOURI-HILD
MCINTIRE DEPARTMENT OF ART
UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA
ad9h@eservices.virginia.edu