

majority of the community's dead were buried, or what the criteria were for choosing which persons to bury in chamber tombs.

In fact, the Ayia Sotira evidence ties in with much from other sites where human remains have been studied with some care. Often, relatively small numbers of burials have been identified in chamber tombs that had apparently long periods of use, and at large settlements, where dozens or even hundreds of such tombs have been found, there is a glaring discrepancy between even the most generous estimates of numbers of burials and the likely numbers of dead over the Mycenaean civilisation's most flourishing period. In sum, the Ayia Sotira evidence focuses attention on important questions: should we continue to refer to these tombs as 'family tombs', do we have a clear idea what proportion of the population used them, and can this proportion be classified as an 'elite'? Given the relative insignificance of Tsoungiza, the last question can surely be answered 'No', but this does not mean that the use of such tombs could not have begun as an elite practice. There is much to be said for the argument put forward by Wright and Dabney that at Tsoungiza the locally more prominent members of the community were assimilating themselves to Mycenaean 'norms' by adopting customs established at more important centres like Mycenae, from which the community was probably governed (it is reachable through the Tretos pass in three hours' walk).

Overall, this is a study which provides considerable food for thought. It demonstrates how much knowledge can be gained through really careful excavation, but this carries with it a warning on the substantial resources that need to be committed to excavating even such essentially unimpressive tombs.

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Frederick W. Cooper and Diane Fortenberry (eds). *The Minnesota Pylos Project 1990-98 (British Archaeological Reports International Series 2856)*. pp. 426, 293 plates and figures (43 colour), 47 tables, maps and graphs, 33 state plans. 2017. Oxford: British Archaeological Reports. ISBN 9-781-40731-534-8. £79.00.

This is a somewhat delayed but extremely welcome volume. It contains a detailed account of the discoveries made in the field and study seasons of the Minnesota Pylos Project. This began with the decision of the Greek Ephoreia of Messenia that a state plan was needed of the remains of the Mycenaean palace excavated by C.W. Blegen on the site often called Ano (surely correctly Epano) Englianos, here most often simply Englianos, identifiable as the legendary Pylos, seat of king Nestor, from the Linear B archive found there. Once work had begun, it quickly became apparent that many widely accepted beliefs about the architectural history of the site were wrong, and a full study of the surviving remains was instituted, including those in various soundings beneath the palace and exploratory trenches in adjacent areas. This did not involve any new excavation, but investigation was taken to the level that Blegen and his team had reached, and the original excavators' notebooks and preliminary reports were carefully studied. A by-product of this work was the rediscovery in the Northwest Area, in 1994, of 'Blegen's backfill', an enormous mass of material (some 2.5 million items!) that had been produced in excavation and cleaned but discarded during preliminary study. Even a hasty overview of this material required extensive work, but the results included, rather unexpectedly, a few fragments of Linear B tablets, along with masses of pottery and fresco scraps, and a certain number of small finds.

The basic result of all this work has been not only to give a more accurate account of the extant palace, generally dated to Late Helladic (hereafter LH) III B, but to show that the earlier Mycenaean phases on the site had considerably more importance than the brief references to them in Blegen and Rawson 1966 and Blegen *et al.* 1973 might suggest, for there is clear evidence for a series of earlier major buildings and other structures that may stretch back as far as the beginning of the Mycenaean period. The picture of post-Mycenaean occupation has also been much clarified, including remains not merely of ordinary settlement (and possibly industrial activity), datable to what used to be called the Dark Age,

but evidence for a sequence of small but obviously significant buildings in the Northwest Area, dating to the Archaic period.

The volume is well presented, with copious illustrations in plans and figures of the architectural evidence, including a set of aerial photographs, and containing a wealth of information that can be used to update received ideas of Pylos very significantly. Few typographical errors have been noticed, but one on p. 56 – ‘Middle Helladic IIIB’ where LH is surely meant – should be noted. The content is divided into two parts. The first is made up of studies written at rather different dates, because some were submitted for publication well before the eventual publication date and not all have been revised since their submission. They are also of rather varying significance. The first is a general survey of results by Cooper, which sets out very clearly the sequence of phases identified in each of the trenches or regions investigated, and provides a general commentary on the finds, including publication of the few Linear B tablet fragments found and some detailed remarks on the fresco material (including an interesting suggestion, that there were wall-paintings in many rooms of the palace, not just the main ceremonial rooms and passages, p. 85). The second is a study by Cooper of the evidence for drainage systems on the site; this combines the evidence of these with that of the remains of early architecture to reconstruct in outline the building complexes that they served. It sets out a sequence of two palaces, A (dated Middle Helladic, hereafter MH) and B (dated LH I-II), underneath the extant palace, differing in orientation from it and from each other. This may seem rather a lot to deduce from very scattered finds whose actual dating is uncertain (see further below on the terminology); but it seems clear that there were several phases of major earlier structures in various places on the Englianos plateau, under the extant palace.

Of particular importance among the other sections are those concerned with the Post-Bronze Age material, especially that of ‘Dark Age’ or Archaic date. Most considerable is that of Brenningmeyer, which covers the stratigraphy and architecture. This makes the important point that the ‘black earth layer’ found in various places above the palace remains does not reflect specifically ‘Geometric’ activity on the site, as Blegen thought, but is probably a result of geological processes (pp. 225-226). In the evidence for structures, much the most important is the stratigraphic sequence in the Northwest Area, from a circular structure of Late Geometric date, through an early Archaic three-room building that had successive roofs of Corinthian and Lakonian

tiles and apparently some terracotta decorative attachments, to a later Archaic building with a roof of more advanced Corinthian tiles, all reasonably interpreted as cult buildings, although there is no votive material, since it is hard to imagine what else they could be at this early date. This could fit very well with the growth of interest in the early historical period in ‘heroic’ cult, which might reflect some local memory of the great past; it would also suggest that Englianos was within the territory of one of the perioecic communities in Messenia, subject to Sparta but able to run its internal affairs and thus maintain a local cult.

Ross covers the most diagnostic post-Bronze Age pottery recovered from the ‘Blegen backfill’, particularly pieces assignable to ‘Dark Age’ and immediately subsequent phases, but also later Greek, Roman and medieval material. Assignment to ‘Dark Age’ phases is tricky in the absence of stratigraphy, and may well be questioned in some cases (the reviewer is particularly uneasy about the description of 1A04610 as decorated with compass-drawn semicircles). Also, the absolute dates suggested for the ‘Dark Age’ phases derive from those suggested by Coulson for the sequence of Dark Age phases at Nichoria and in Messenia generally, which are open to serious criticism as too high.¹ But it may be conceded that the material could represent an extended period of occupation from at least the ninth century BC into the Archaic period. Downey deals with some strange ceramic items that seem to be post-Bronze Age industrial waste, including what may be remains of bronze-casting moulds.

Otherwise, the most interesting section is Distler’s account of the search for the possible sources of the relatively vast quantities of poros limestone used in the building, with some consideration of how it might have been brought to the site, a facet of architecture not often explored. Brenningmeyer offers a study of movement and use patterns in the palace so generalised that it barely refers to the strong role that ceremonial activity is likely to have played; Nelson gives a clear summary of circulation patterns in his discussion of the LH IIIB palace (pp. 284-286). Hollond suggests that Courts 42 and 47, late additions to the palace, were enclosed gardens, an interesting idea but lacking really convincing evidence. Konstantinidi-Syvridi covers the relatively few small finds of metal and most other materials, which are of standard types, while Marquardt considers the 100+ items of chipped stone, which included sickle elements, blades and

¹ Cf. Dickinson 2006: 18, citing Snodgrass and Morgan.

projectile points but a large proportion of waste pieces from working a wide variety of stones and also obsidian.

The second part of the volume contains Michael Nelson's work on the architecture, covering building materials, methods and history, with considerable discussion of parallels at other mainland and also Cretan sites. The history section sets out the sequence of building styles that he has identified, which provides much of the evidence for the relation of widely separated structures and stretches of walling to each other. At its end, after three appendices on specialised matters and the bibliography, come the thirty-three state plans created during the course of the work. Some of the conclusions are really startling in their overturning of widely held beliefs. Nelson offers a completely new (and to the reviewer convincing) interpretation of the building method used for the extant palace, named 'pier-wall', into which ashlar walls from an earlier structure were incorporated in some important parts, but which did not itself make much use of stone or timber, but was rather based on 'piers' of rubble bound by a strong mud mortar and separated from each other by narrow vertical spaces filled with a mixture of mud and pebbles. He argues for a sequence of four successive styles of stone working used in monumental building, original cut ashlar, pseudo-ashlar, orthostate, and ashlar. The first is represented not by any structure but by some square-cut ashlar blocks (so not the classic shape, which tapered back from a rectangular face to allow perfect jointing at the front) that were reused in later walls, themselves dated no later than the beginning of the Mycenaean period. What is dated to early LH I includes the group of walls under Courtyard 63 that is often compared with the West Magazines at Knossos, a stretch of façade walling south of that, and an entrance from the Northwest Area (p. 354, fig. 4.1), while Building X and various scattered walls are dated to a LH I-II phase (p. 355, fig. 4.2). Something more like a coherent plan appears in LH IIIA, focusing on a Minoan-style central court with separate blocks flanking its long sides, faced in ashlar style, that later formed much of the Southwestern Building and eastern parts of the Main Building (p. 358, fig. 4.4). In considering structures elsewhere on the site, Nelson accepts the early date for the Northeast Gateway, but casts doubt on some of the evidence used by Blegen to argue for an early circuit wall, and points out that the 'Aqueduct' is misnamed, since its function was to remove water from the palace area, not bring it in. Nelson's account seems generally authoritative not merely on Pylos but on Mycenaean architecture in general, but two questionable comments should be

noted: p. 350, it is very unlikely that the Tomb of the Genii and the Treasury of Atreus at Mycenae date as late as LH IIIB; p. 353, the date of MH traditionally given to Malthi has long been questioned and has been reportedly disproved by a recent survey.

There are significant differences in the approaches of Cooper and Nelson to distinguishing a sequence of palaces, essentially because their concerns are varied: Cooper concentrates on the drainage systems, Nelson on the sequence of building styles. Neither is able to call on any pottery evidence for dating, apart from what was found in exploratory soundings in the original excavations and of which some photographs, variable in quality, are all that are published in Blegen *et al.* 1973. Often enough, as in the case of the pottery found with the very substantial walls attributed to MH (p. 35) at the north-west edge of the site, nothing was published at all. This is symptomatic of Blegen's surprising lack of interest in the early phases of significant building on the site, and also an example of his effective refusal throughout his career to distinguish phases within MH, although some 300 years were allocated to the period in his day. At one point, Cooper defines Palace A as 'late MH' (p. 139), but otherwise he and Nelson follow Blegen's lead in this and in making no further distinctions than between LH I, LH II, LH IIIA and LH IIIB.

As Cooper comments (p. 49) there is little reference to chronologically datable material in the excavators' notebooks; he publishes in Table 1.1 (pp. 50-51) the notations made by Kittredge in his excavation in the Northwest Area, which include references to particular pieces or types, but this only adds a little information, which has to be qualified in any case. For in their adherence to Blegen's terminology Cooper and Nelson have to ignore the much more sophisticated sequence of Mycenaean pottery that has been built up since the publication of Furumark² and means that Blegen's few comments on the pottery from earlier layers need reconsideration. Much of what he called LH I would now be classified as LH IIA, for instance, and it has been recognised that what is MH in style can still be early Mycenaean in date, contemporary with decorated pottery that can be classified as LH I and II. Thus, many of the walls and strata considered MH originally and presented as such here may in fact be early Mycenaean.

This creates difficulties in trying to make close comparisons between the early phases of monumental building at Pylos and those at

² Furumark 1941.

other Mycenaean centres, especially in the south Peloponnese where the number of sites with comparable evidence has been increased by the discoveries at Ayios Vasileios in Laconia and Iklaina near Pylos itself. But this need not obscure the main point, that there is striking evidence at Pylos for early monumental buildings and for quite substantial Cretan influence, to be seen in the use of the various styles of stone masonry, the construction of drainage systems on a scale unparalleled at other Mycenaean centres, and architectural features like the use of pillared halls; fragments of a ‘horns of consecration’ have even been found, that must have surmounted an early structure (pp. 36, 38). If the palace immediately preceding the extant one really did have a plan centring on a court and can be dated to LH IIIA (probably early³), this would be a notably late example of Cretan influence, which might be connected with the influence that brought Linear B to Messenia no later than early LH IIIA2.⁴

To sum up, this volume is to be thoroughly welcomed for its major contribution to our information and ideas about Pylos. It provides a salutary reminder that the development of Mycenaean civilisation was a complex process, which did not involve the simple extension of influence and spreading of a package of material features and way of life from the Argolid to other regions of the mainland, but rather a series of independent if related developments in different leading regions of the Greek mainland, under a variety of external influences, that in time coalesced into something closer to a homogeneous culture.⁵

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- Blegen, C.W., Rawson, M., Taylour, Lord William, and Donovan, W.P. 1973. *The Palace of Nestor at Pylos in Western Messenia Vol. III*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Cosmopoulos, M.B. 2019. State formation in Greece: Iklaina and the unification of Mycenaean Pylos. *American Journal of Archaeology* 123:3: 349-380.

³ Characteristic LH IIIA2 late is hard to spot in the photographs of material thought to be LH IIIA in Blegen *et al.* 1973.

⁴ Cosmopoulos 2019: 358.

⁵ The reviewer feels bound to mention the very serious criticisms of various interpretations in this book, notably the supposed Archaic building sequence, made in the reviews by J. Davis (*Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 2017.10.23) and J. Hruby (*American Journal of Archaeology* 122: 2 [2018]), of which he was ignorant when writing this review.

Dickinson, O. 2006. *The Aegean from Bronze Age to Iron Age. Continuity and Change Between the Twelfth and Eighth Centuries BC*. Routledge: Abingdon and New York.

Furumark, A. 1941 (reprinted 1972). *Mycenaean Pottery. Analysis and Classification*. Stockholm: Skrifter utgivna av Svenska Institutet i Athen.

Susan Sherratt and John Bennet (eds). *Archaeology and the Homeric Epic*. (Sheffield Studies in Aegean Archaeology 11). pp. 176, b/w illustrations. 2017. Oxbow Books: Oxford and Philadelphia. ISBN 978-1-78570-295-2 paperback £36.00

The title, *Archaeology and the Homeric Epics*, does not do justice to the variety of papers published in this edited volume, that cover much more than the relation between the Homeric epics and archaeology. In the introduction, the editors (Susan Sherratt and John Bennett) highlight the need to move ‘beyond the old dichotomies between historicity and irrelevance and to bring a multi-disciplinary approach’ to the study of the epics (introduction, p. viii). Indeed, the introductory chapter summarises the diversity of such approaches and argues that the relationship of the epics and archaeology is intermingled without any of them having ‘the monopoly of power to shed light on the other’ (introduction, p. xv). The introductory chapter offers a valuable review of current debates and approaches to the study of epic poetry, as well as a summary of the contributions in the volume.

The debate of dating the epics has been the focus of past and current scholarship. The more recent consensus is that a date in the seventh century BC is more acceptable than that of the eighth. Antony Snodgrass in Chapter 1 follows the evolutionary model, as argued by Nagy,¹ for the creation and recreation of the epics during a long period. Snodgrass summarises the main debates considering the date of the Homeric epics, and revisits some of the themes of his comprehensive survey, *Homer and the Artists*, published in 1998.² However, one of the main arguments, as in his earlier work, is that there are no chronological correlates between the poems and the archaeological record. To give an example, Snodgrass returns to the endeavour to

¹ Nagy 1995.

² Snodgrass 1998.