Kingship in the Mycenaean World and its Reflections in the Oral Tradition [Review]

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Part 2 of volume 9 comprises individual studies that concern the Bronze Age agricultural features: terraces (Hope Simpson, Clark, and Goldberg); dams (Hope Simpson); threshing floors and extant Byzantine architecture (Hope Simpson and Harrison), and sites in the Megali Ammos cove (German, Betancourt, Hope Simpson, and Poulou-Papatriantita). Without excavation, the limited nature of settlement on the island would suggest the terraces are either prehistoric or Byzantine in date, and excavation confirmed Bronze Age phases for many of these agricultural terraces. The small and abundant sherds found behind these terraces, with few joint noted, suggest manuring of these fields. This occurred in the Neopalatial period, as a more intensified use of the landscape accompanied growth in the primary settlement.

A synopsis of the survey pottery and summary of the settlement evidence for each period are presented by Betancourt in the concluding chapter. In general, ceramics found on the island indicate strong ties within the Gulf of Mirabello region, particularly with Gournia and the Isthmus area. Lack of a land-based communications network and few imports, even from sites as close as Malia, suggest that Pseira was not a "gate-way community" but rather a way station for local shipping. The harbor settlement grew in size during the Neopalatial period, in response to an expanding horizon for trade and more contact with central Crete. This new organization and transformation of the Neopalatial landscape are also seen in mainland settlement systems in eastern Crete.

These volumes are excellent additions to the Pseira series and to the corpus of publications detailing recent work in the Mirabello area. A primary contribution of these carefully prepared and thorough publications concerns Bronze Age agricultural practices and features. The conclusions drawn regarding the nature and development of settlement on Pseira securely place this island within a historical framework that spans the broad Gulf of Mirabello.

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Shear undertakes a detailed comparison of archaeological evidence from Mycenaean Greece, the surviving Linear B tablets, and the Homeric epics with the aim of showing that, contrary to the reigning scholarly consensus, Homer preserves a detailed and accurate portrait of the age he purports to describe. Indeed, Shear believes that both epics and much of Greek myth took shape during this period and reflect actual historical events (hence the reference to "oral tradition" rather than "Homer" in the title). Thus, because Pelops is the eponym of the Peloponnesos, "he should logically belong to the early tradition that evolved soon after the arrival of... the Greeks" (70). And, since Pelops is grandfather to Agamemnon, Shear infers the loss of numerous intervening kings from the genealogical tradition. (A more direct inference, however, would be that myth has failed to preserve any sense of the chronological depth of Bronze Age civilization.) Belief in a historical kernel to myth also leads Shear to combine references from various sources in ways that most students of traditional narrative will find equally problematic (e.g., 71, 74).

Unsurprisingly, Shear's discussion of the archaeological material is more nuanced, even if many of her findings remain somewhat speculative. My principal objections concern her notions of Bronze Age cultural homogeneity and her underlying belief that panhellenic epic—which she rightly identifies Homeric epic as being—could only originate in the context of a panhellenic culture (82). She also introduces a false dichotomy when she argues that the authority of the _tanatos_ was based on economic rather than military or religious control (21) and when she distinguishes between palatial and private economic activity by, for example, the _laougetai_ (46). Even those who believe that oral tradition is able to preserve a detailed memory of a civilization that existed five centuries earlier will likely find it hard to accept the specificity that Shear assumes. For example, she uses the window placement in the Panagia House I at Mycenae to explain Penelope's awareness of the suitors' activities in the megaron while remaining in her _thalamos_ (58).

Shear is conscientious in her handling of the Linear B material, and her bibliography is both deep and up-to-date. Her argument that the tablets reveal important continuities between Homeric and Bronze Age society is unconvincing, however, for nothing in Homer would have ever led us to suspect the complex social hierarchies and palace bureaucracy revealed by the tablets, or the size and above all the nature of the palatial economy. Shear herself notes that the tablets document some 4,000 individuals, including 300 to 600 women engaged in textile production associated with the palace at Pylos (55, 61). Shear argues that Homer preserves four terms, _tanatos, basileus_, and, implausibly, _krotonas_ and _kotairos_ (te-to) and _hetairos_ (e-ga), used in the Bronze Age to designate persons of rank (51). One might reasonably expect some Bronze Age terms to crop up in the epics, given the ability of the tradition to preserve formulas extending not only to Bronze Age but even to Indo-European song. But, as Shear concedes, numerous other terms for officials and, notably, for types of land tenure are not found in Homer. For this absence Shear offers a variety of explanations, including an appeal to the unsettled conditions following the arrival of the Sea People (which essentially conceals a loss in the continuity for which she is arguing). I consider it diagnostic that when Odysseus returns to Ithaka in the _Odyssey_, the alliances he reestablishes are with three servants: his wet nurse and two herdsmen. It is not that Homer is uninterested in the palace personnel—a point Shear also argues—rather, numerous intervening layers of the Bronze Age palace hierarchy are conspicuously absent.

Such problems become more acute in the chapter on Homer; it is telling that Shear has to shift to the English term "king" to describe Odysseus' position on Ithaka, as Homer's use of _tanatos_ and _basileus_ does not support her interpretation...
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his shield enters Greek iconographic tradition from the Near
East in the Orientalizing period. The description of metal
inlay techniques is unfortunante, as the Gorgon depicted on
his shield centers Greek iconographic tradition from the Near
East in the Orientalizing period. The description of metal
inlay could be based on the physical survival of a Bronze Age
artifact or, more plausibly in my opinion, on contemporary
Near Eastern examples, either of which would explain why
Homer is able to describe the appearance of inlay but not
its manufacture. In the end, I suspect those who find her
arguments more persuasive than I do will conclude with
archaeologists such as Snodgrass or historical linguists such as
Katz that Homer's world is a pastiche rather than an accurate
and coherent representation of Mycenaean Greece.

Indeed, one of the chief shortcomings of this book is
Shear's routine neglect of alternative arguments and Dark
Age parallels to the Homeric evidence; in cases where she
does concede that such evidence exists, her arguments are
often forced. Conversely, she routinely ignores important
material that could not have belonged to Bronze Age epic.
For example, it is true that some members of the Olympian
pantheon are attested in the tablets, but it is also generally
accepted that important gods such as Apollo and Athene
died from the east in the early years of the Dark Age.
She also dismisses the idea that the lamp by which Athene
guides Odysseus and his son in Odyssey 1 reflects the cult
lamp from the Erechtheion, arguing instead that the lamp
made by Kallimachos is inspired by the Odyssey. On the latter
point I fully agree, but Shear neglects the seventh-century
evidence for Athene's lamp. Which points to a final problem
I had with this book: without a rigorous definition of what is
meant by "continuity," the project of correlating the epics
with the archaeological record remains somewhat nebulous.
Shear also does not explore the degree to which the continuities
dshe does find could also be paralleled in Iron Age
material culture.

In the end, however, such objections do not diminish the
book's contribution. When all is said and done, Kingship
in the Mycenaean World and Its Reflections in the Oral Tradition
is a highly learned and thought-provoking book and it is sure
to generate further productive discussion on a topic of cen­
tral importance to archaeologists, historians, and students
of archaic Greek literature. In the course of her long and
distinguished career, Shear was an important advocate of
the need to build bridges between bodies of evidence all too
often studied in isolation. This book is a fitting testament to
her efforts. I sincerely hope that her call for continued work
in the area will be heeded.

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SOTIRA KAMINOUDHIA: AN EARLY BRONZE AGE SITE
IN CYPRUS, edited by S. Sutty, G. (Rip) Rapp, and
E. Herscher (Cyprus American Archaeological
Research Institute Monograph Series 4). Pp. xxviii +
600, figs. 112, pls. 136, tables 17. American Schools
0-89757-064-2 (cloth).

The site of Sotira Kaminoudhia comprises an Early Bronze
I-II cemetery and a slightly later Early Bronze III settlement
in south-central Cyprus. The final publication of the excava­
tion is a major contribution to Cypriot archaeology, because
the Early and Middle Bronze Ages were poorly documented
until 10 years ago, when two more settlements were published,
Alambrak and Marki, which are in the center of the island.
Kaminoudhia is the only excavated Early Cypriot site in the
south, a fact of crucial importance for a period characterized
by a significant degree of regionalization.

The book is so clearly written and the descriptions of all
finds are so detailed that they can be frequently followed with-