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Cynthia W. Shelmerdine, *The Cambridge Companion to The Aegean Bronze Age*. Cambridge University Press, 2008. Pp. 524, 95 b/w illustrations, 11 maps. £17.99. ISBN 978-0-521-89127-1 (Pbk).

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On first glance it seemed impossible that a book containing 524 pages would be able to cover such a vast topic but, as the introduction asserts this is 'a comprehensive, up-to-date survey of the Aegean Bronze age, from its beginnings to the period following the collapse of the Mycenaean palace system' (p. i). The book comprises of eighteen essays by leading authorities contributing on a range of subjects; the history and material culture of Crete, Greece and the Aegean Islands, trade, religion and economic administration. The book is organised chronologically and geographically allowing for each culture to be compared within both material culture and social history. From reading the book four obvious divisions are made: The background to the topic, the Early Bronze Age, the Minoans and the Mycenaeans. It is clear from the outset that this book is primarily an introduction to the Aegean Bronze Age for students or the interested public; due to the size limitations, not every aspect of the Aegean Bronze Age can be covered to the depth that more advanced readers would expect. To compensate for this introductory nature, each essay offers a list of suggestions for further reading allowing the reader to take the topic further if they wish to.

The first essay by Sheldermine gives a good background to the sources and methods used within Aegean Bronze Age studies. The important aspects of relative and absolute chronology are touched upon very briefly but for such a short introduction the basics are there for the reader to see. The chapter provides a good foundation for new students to understand the techniques that are used within Aegean archaeology, both archaeological and scientific.

The next few chapters focus on the early Bronze Age of Greece, the Cyclades and Crete as these are all periods that are relatively contemporary with each other in the Early Bronze Age period. The Greece section, by Pullen, is split into chronological

divisions from the Final Neolithic to the beginning of the Middle Helladic Period. Each section gives a brief overview of the period with the key finds and significant events highlighted. In some cases a topic mentioned may be covered in slightly more detail in another chapter; if this is the case the reader is referred to the relevant chapter (this also happens throughout the book). Broodbank writes the Cyclades chapter and gives an excellent outline of the Islands in the Early Bronze Age. The aspects covered include the way people lived on the islands, the treatment of the dead, the material culture and the way the islanders traded. The chapter on Prepalatial Crete is written by Wilson and is formed in a very similar way to the Greece chapter. It is also split into chronological divisions with an overview of each period and again, the most important aspects of the culture are revealed.

The themes of the chapters now focus on the Minoans. Protopalatial Crete is discussed in relation to the formation of the palaces and the material culture of the period; the chapter has been separated into two sub-chapters to allow the distinction between the formation of the palaces and the material culture. 'The archaeology of prehistoric Crete is dominated by the Minoan "palaces" ' (p.105) and a chapter devoted to their formation is invaluable to new students in this area. The development of the Palatial system is outlined chronologically by Manning and he offers explanations as to how the palaces began. The material culture of this period is discussed by Knappett and he makes sure that the reader understands that these objects must be seen as 'fully involved in the life of Protopalatial Crete, not just standing for or representing it' (p.122). In doing this, Knappett discusses the material culture in terms of individual lives, comparing communities and looking at the contact people had beyond Crete. The material culture of Neopalatial Crete is also discussed by Younger and Rehak and this chapter is split into the sites and architecture, the pottery and other crafts and foreign influence. Younger and Rehak also discuss the Minoan culture, with regards to religion, burial customs and administration. This is a very brief chapter but the main themes and important artefacts are noted within it. The relationship between Minoan Crete and the Aegean Islands is considered in the next chapter by Davis; he discusses each site with the significant aspects of the archaeology being highlighted and an excellent section on the explanation of the cultural exchange between Crete and the Islands. Next, Betancourt gives a brief

outline of the trade that occurred from the Neolithic to the Late Minoan III in the Minoan trade chapter.

Now the theme shifts to the Mycenaeans. Early Mycenaean Greece is summarised during the Middle Bronze with reference to the subdivisions of pottery, settlement organisation and architecture and the social structure of the communities. Architecture is discussed in more detail in the art and architecture chapter; here Crowley introduces the key elements of art and architecture in the Mycenaean world. She splits the architecture content into habitual areas, graves (more specifically tholoi), roads and drainage. The art is discussed in terms of sculptures and frescoes, pottery, seals and the use of different materials i.e. stone, metal, ivory etc. The economy and administration of the Mycenaean state is evaluated by Shelmerdine and Bennet. They give a good overview of the use of Linear B in the palatial centres and how we can use this evidence to interpret the economic activities taking place at these centres. Late Minoan Crete is also discussed here by Preston. She argues that in chronological overviews, after Neopalatial Crete has been discussed, with the exception of Knossos, 'the focus of interest often shifts to the incipient palacestates of the Greek mainland' (p.310). So here, in a separate sub-chapter, we have an overview of the culture and archaeology of Crete from LM II to LM IIIB.

The topic of burial customs and religion now comes under discussion by Cavanagh and Palaima. This is certainly one of those subjects where a brief overview really does no justice to the vast topic, so to try and avoid this injustice the authors have split the chapter to encompass more detail. Cavanagh deals with Mycenaeans and death; he describes the different types of burial we find in the Mycenaean world and he examines the social structure we can create by looking at these burials. He also looks at the evidence we have for funerary ritual and ancestor worship. Palaima then delves into the religion of the Mycenaeans and begins the topic perfectly; 'Reconstructing the religion of an ancient culture is hard work. Religious beliefs and practices consist of things thought, said, shown and done' (p.342). This is one of the hardest things about Aegean archaeology, we do not have much of an idea about what was thought or said; we have more of an idea about what was shown and done from the archaeology but we really only have half the picture. Palaima describes the sources we can use to attempt a reconstruction of Mycenaean religion and looks at

the iconographical images we can use too. He also uses Homer for parallels and comparisons as well as looking at historical Greek religion. While some scholars may still see this as a superficial attempt, I think the both Cavanagh and Palaima do an excellent job of managing to concisely cover this topic.

The penultimate chapter is Mee's analysis of the network of trade contacts the Mycenaeans had. Mee manages to cover the type of goods traded and who the Mycenaeans were trading with both locally and internationally. Although this is another vast topic squeezed into a few pages, it gives a solid outline to the subject and Mee has some excellent references that can be followed up by the avid reader.

The final chapter investigates the destruction and aftermath of the Mycenaean world. Deger-Jalkotzy explores this hotly debated topic and the material culture and society of the people left in the aftermath. Within this topic he evaluates the burial customs, arts, pottery, metalwork, religion, social organisation and economy. Again, this is a huge topic that is summarised extremely well.

Most of the chapters in this book only give a more advanced researcher in this area a tantalising peek at the subjects discussed, but this book is not meant to be an in depth study of the Aegean Bronze Age. The purpose of this book is clear, as Shelmerdine explains: 'It is our hope that students will be able to use it in courses, and that colleagues and other interested readers will find it a helpful introduction to the current state of knowledge in this field' (p.15). The book certainly meets the target set by its authors: it is a clear, concise introduction to the Aegean Bronze Age and it offers a basis for anyone who wishes to engage in further research in any of the topics examined. Currently it is the most up to date overview of the Aegean Bronze Age, with specialists from many different fields offering excellent contributions; I would recommend it to anyone in the early stages of research within this discipline.