

## THE MYCENAEAN FEAST

EDITED BY JAMES C. WRIGHT (HESPERIA 73.2). PP XIV + 217, FIGS. 62, TABLES 9, MAPS 1. AMERICAN SCHOOL OF CLASSICAL STUDIES AT ATHENS, PRINCETON 2004. \$75. ISBN 0-87661-951-0 (PAPER).

In recent years, the social and political meaning of eating and drinking has become a major topic of archaeological inquiry. Aegean prehistorians have started making important contributions in that respect. The present work is one of several edited volumes, doctoral dissertations, and symposia that have been produced or are currently being planned on the topic, not to mention several other shorter contributions. We may be witnessing the emergence of a significant research focus in Aegean prehistory. The best studies of this recent wave do not simply attempt to understand the specifics of consumption but endeavor to rethink long-standing questions and debates from the point of view of large-scale communal eating and drinking. Other attempts, such as *Minoans and Mycenaeans: Flavors of their Time* (National Museum of Athens [Autumn 1999]), rely on promising but still developing and often ambiguous methodologies, on the authoritative discourse of science, and on small and highly selective samples. They present results that still await scholarly scrutiny and review and should thus be treated with caution.

This volume belongs to the first category. It is the outcome of a session at the 2003 Annual Meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America and was inspired by another workshop on the same topic held in Sheffield, England, in 2001 (cf. P. Halstead and J.C. Barrett, eds., *Food, Cuisine and Society in Prehistoric Greece* [Sheffield 2004]). The volume consists of an introduction by the editor and seven chapters: a broad but thorough and systematic survey of the evidence on Mycenaean feasting (Wright); a masterful discussion of the recent evidence on the links between sacrifice and feasting at the "Palace of Nestor" at Pylos (Stocker and Davis) and of

the artifactual and zooarchaeological evidence for feasting at Tsoungiza, Nemea (Dabney, Halstead, and Thomas); a detailed analysis of the textual evidence (Linear B documents) (Palaima); a comparative discussion of the "Minoan" examples for feasting but with an emphasis on Mycenaean Phaistos (Borgna); a clear and interesting survey of Cypriot data starting as early as the Chalcolithic (Steel); and a critical and rich commentary on feasting in the Homeric epic (Sherratt). A minor point of correction: the faunal record from the Sanctuary of Agios Konstantinos at Methana does not indicate that "venison was a regular part of the feast," as Wright states (40); the main sacrificial animal was the juvenile pig, and together with sheep and goat, was the main species in the feasting ceremonies there (Y. Hamilakis and E. Konsolaki, "Pigs for the Gods," *OJA* 23 [2004] 135–51), while other animals such as cattle, fish, and seashells are present in selective rooms of the wider architectural complex (Y. Hamilakis et al. [forthcoming]).

Taken as a whole, this carefully edited and beautifully produced volume is an important contribution that offers a finely detailed picture of the phenomenon, elucidating aspects that were hitherto known only in their broad outlines. It is full of stimulating insights that are certain to inspire further research on the topic. Everyone will take something different from this rich volume, but to this reviewer, the most valuable insights have to do with the diversity of forms that Mycenaean feasting took. This includes the range of the number of people attending, from exclusive small-scale occasions to massive events with the participation of thousands; the theatricality of these events, from the regulation of the seating arrangements and the emphasis on gestures

to the accompanying music and recitals and the performance of auditing the events by palace authorities; and the attempt to leave in many occasions a mnemonic record, not only indirectly, through the memories accumulated in the participant's bodies, but also directly, through representations, the hoarding of the paraphernalia of eating and drinking and the careful, and in some cases structured, deposition of the material traces.

The thorough and thoughtful studies in this volume also offer the opportunity to reflect on the current state of the archaeology of feasting, both in the Aegean context and more broadly. To give just a couple of examples, an issue not addressed in this volume or in most other studies is what makes feasting, and eating and drinking in general, such powerful means for the negotiation of identity and for the enactment of political roles and processes of competition? Moreover, why is it that the embodied, sensuous, and mnemonic dimension of eating and drinking have received so little attention?

This volume is heavily influenced by the typology of feasting produced by Dietler and Hayden (*Feasts* [Washington, D.C. 2001]); indeed, the theoretical framework advanced by these two authors seems to be the guiding force in most chapters. Yet, as Sherratt comments with regard to the Homeric epic, how appropriate is it to attempt to classify feasts using labels such as "diacritical" and "entrepreneurial" given the fluidity of the phenomenon, its multiple roles and meanings, and its often unintended outcomes? I would go

one step further and argue that while feasting as a concept has inspired much recent research and has thus proven extremely useful, the anxiety to overemphasize its role may prove counterproductive, especially if a sharp dichotomy is created between feasting and other forms of consumption that are seen as routine, mundane, and thus without social significance. It is perhaps time to see all events of eating, drinking, and of consumption of substances in general as a continuum of sensuous, embodied phenomena and then try to understand their specific roles and effects, depending on the context, scale of participation, and material manifestations. Finally, it will be a pity if the rich material world of food and drink that Aegean prehistory offers becomes entangled with increasingly unattainable social evolutionist schemes (of the "chiefdom" and "state" variety). Like the typological classifications, these straightjackets may offer the illusion of consumption being linked to power and politics but inevitably will result in impoverished and homogenized narratives. This volume, however, offers plenty of evidence of the resistance of the material record to these narratives, and it is a tribute to its editor and contributors who have offered us such a rich and diverse glimpse into the Mycenaean world.

YANNIS HAMILAKIS

DEPARTMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGY  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON  
SOUTHAMPTON SO17 1BJ  
UNITED KINGDOM  
Y.HAMILAKIS@SOTON.AC.UK