

The Oxford Handbook of the Bronze Age Aegean

Edited by Eric H. Cline. Pp. xxxvi + 930, figs. 48, tables 10, plans 18, maps 9. Oxford University Press, New York 2010. \$175. ISBN 978-0-19-536550-4 (cloth).

This timely volume in the *Oxford Handbook* series presents the current state of scholarship over the broad spectrum of Aegean Bronze Age studies. Editor Eric Cline states that the intent is to provide a “comprehensive overview of our current understanding of the Bronze Age Aegean,” and as such it certainly succeeds (xxxi).

With respect to the target audience, Cline states that it is for those teaching and taking undergraduate and graduate courses on the Bronze Age Aegean, as well as scholars in related fields (xxxiii). The handbook enables professors using standard textbooks in their classes to assign specific chapters to update various topics. One might add that even Aegean Bronze Age scholars will find this compendium useful to refresh one’s memory and keep abreast of developments outside one’s own subfield.

The volume is divided into four main sections. Within each section, articles are loosely grouped by period, geography, or general theme. Part 1 (“Background and Definitions”) contains chapters that place the discipline within its physical and academic context. Part 2 (“Chronology and Geography”) contains chapters concerned with specific subperiods and areas. Part 3 (“Thematic Topics”) incorporates chapters that span chronological or geographical divides. Finally, Part 4 (“Specific Sites and Regions”) has chapters that present excavation histories, important discoveries, and the broader significance of particular places. The authors are well chosen. All are leading experts and are well positioned to synthesize, summarize, and update their topics. The articles are well crafted, balanced, brief, and to the point. Each lacks the sort of polemical twist one often sees in stand-alone contributions.

There is a broad range of authors and topics. While this handbook necessarily lacks, therefore, the overall uniformity seen in the surveys published in *Aegean Prehistory: A Review* (T. Cullen, ed. [Boston 2001]) in terms of style, organization, and format, there still is remarkable consistency, a tribute to editor Cline and his contributors. Each article generally begins with a survey of scholarship and list of definitions and then turns to a synthesis of the current state of thinking. The author provides updates not only in terms of excavation and publication but also in interpretation (e.g., Dickinson’s “general loss of faith in ‘invasion theories’” [484]).

Another implication of the broad range of authors and topics is the inevitable, but ultimately complementary, overlaps. Troy, for example, is treated by Bryce (Trojan War), Jablonka (archaeology), and Greaves (western Anatolia survey). Each addresses archaeology and mythology, but from somewhat different perspectives.

Overall, the authors present material that is up-to-date and often not easily accessible because of lack of timely primary publication or because it is published in journals and volumes difficult to access for scholars save those blessed with first-class research libraries. Some contributions treat areas and topics not well known to many Aegean scholars—for example, western Anatolia (Greaves), the northern Aegean (Andreou), or the central Mediterranean (Vagnetti).

Given that there is a total of 66 articles, it is not possible to present a précis of each. I note here just some of the many high points. La Rosa’s survey of the sequence at Ayia Triada presents the site’s extremely complicated but important architectural history in a

comprehensible manner. Thebes, as well, has a confusing architectural history but is summarized effectively by Dakouri-Hild.

Other contributions are remarkable in their ability to provide brief syntheses of complex or diverse subjects as well. B. Hallager, for example, manages to present an excellent and useful summary of Minoan pottery from the Neolithic through Late Minoan periods in less than 10 pages of text; Rutter does the same with Mycenaean pottery. E. Hallager presents an extremely useful and balanced discussion of the sometimes incendiary issue of Minoan chronology and chronological/historical terms. Hitchcock undertakes most successfully the seemingly impossible task of summarizing and synthesizing Minoan architecture (with some Cycladic tucked in), followed by a similarly excellent treatment of mainland architecture (Neolithic through Mycenaean, domestic and funerary). Lupack pulls together evidence for Mycenaean religion, including material from lesser-known sites such as Methana. Barber's contribution on Cycladic archaeology and chronology (focusing on Late Cycladic) gathers quite nicely an area of scholarly concern generally hampered by uneven excavation and publication.

The contribution on state and society by Nakassis, Galaty, and Parkinson is an excel-

lent primer for theoretical archaeology. Burns provides a convenient synopsis of the various theoretical approaches to the study of trade. A good understanding of a site's excavation history is necessary for a full appreciation of the site itself. In particular, French (for Mycenae) and Davis (for Pylos) provide excellent summaries of long and complex excavation histories.

Palaima's treatment of Linear B is a model of clarity and organization. He articulates the place of Linear B within its broad Mediterranean context, summarizes the circumstances of discovery and decipherment, and provides extremely useful sections on the structure of the script and tools of research. Hirschfeld contributes a similarly well organized, and therefore equally valuable, essay on the Cypro-Minoan script.

This handbook is entirely suitable for any undergraduate and graduate library and would be a valuable addition to the bookshelf of any eastern Mediterranean historian or archaeologist.

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