SETTLEMENT PATTERNS AND LANDSCAPES

The archaeology of settlements has grown progressively in its scope and methodology over the long history of the discipline, so that the modern study possesses a wide range of topics and approaches. The general public is still naturally fascinated by images and reconstructions of monumental, non-domestic sites, such as burial mounds, temples, and fortified centers, which were the main focus of pioneer research into archaeological landscapes during the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries A.D. Even in those times, however, more everyday insight into the landscapes and settlements of ordinary people came with unusual archaeological discoveries, such as the wonderfully preserved, volcanically sealed small Roman town of Pompeii or similarly preserved, but water-sealed Swiss prehistoric lake villages.

Indeed, most modern research into past communities and their surroundings is focused on the farms, villages, and even field systems of ordinary people in the past, who were, for the most part, agriculturalists and herders. This aspect of settlement archaeology really took off in the first half of the twentieth century in Europe, as in many other regions of the world, and for interesting reasons is still relevant today. On the one hand, there has been wider public education, the increased involvement of amateurs in archaeology from all social classes, and the influence of trends in the study of history toward a greater concern with the everyday life of people of all social classes. This trend has been coupled, on the other hand, with the wide impact of such technical developments as aerial photography. (In this respect, both world wars were major stimuli for European landscape archaeology.) Together, these factors all have contributed to making contemporary settlement archaeology a very “democratic” field of the discipline.

Typically, investigations into where and how people lived in the past begin with the intensive study of the layout of domestic residential sites. This is followed by the plotting of systems of settlements across the countryside, with special emphasis on their relationship to the natural environment and land use and the combination of the two in social and economic terms. In parallel, environmental archaeology (the study of animal bones, plant remains, and the physical environment of the past) provides a direct link between the debris found on settlements or in palaeosols (fossil soil horizons) connected to other monuments and contemporaneous landscapes, and the type and degree of human impact.

Some researchers turn to settlement archaeology in the search for cross-cultural regularities—preferably with a very exact or even mathematical form, in the light of a global science of human settlements. The internal form of domestic settlements (intrasisite study) should express in constructed space the workings of the social group it housed. The analysis of settlement systems across the landscape (intersite study) should reveal strong, regular settlement patterning correlated with quantifiable environmental variables and with the attempt to define rather abstract laws of human motion in space (e.g., site catchment analysis, discussed below) and a pat-
tering of a geometric kind reflecting a very ordered spatial patterning of human settlements at the regional scale (locational analysis inspired by developments in human geography).

These aims are part of modern approaches to past societies, but for many archaeologists they seem too mathematical and deterministic as a way to view human behavior. In fact, they developed and became most popular in the 1960s, when many social scientists were attracted to searching for laws of human society that might parallel the laws of natural science and mathematics and that could be found through applying the new science of computing. A similar fascination with the “geometry” of settlement forms a strand in archaeology’s cousin discipline of geography, a topic that was at its most popular in the 1960s in a field of study that was termed the “new geography.”

Modern scientific analysis of human behavior in space, as it applies to archaeological studies, has even more powerful computerized applications to test for patterns within and between settlements or in relationship to different aspects of the natural environment. These are largely scientific spatial techniques adopted from geography since the 1990s, primarily a method of rapidly evolving computerized mapping called GIS (Geographic Information Systems).

A different approach within contemporary settlement archaeology begins with a contrasting perspective. Rather than using modern technology to detect abstract patterns in ancient settlement systems, which may not have been apparent to these past communities, this alternative method tries to reconstruct how past peoples built their settlements and lived in their landscapes, following ancient ways of seeing the world that doubtless diverged significantly from our own. This equally important type of study can be linked to a shift of interest within the humanities since the 1970s. This view has moved away from the modernists’ hard scientific approaches and reliance on mathematics and computing toward more “humanistic” or “human cultural” insights, often termed the “postmodern movement” in the social sciences. How does this approach work in practice? At the individual site level, house and settlement plans are studied as reflections of ancient ways of seeing or categorizing the social world. At the landscape and regional level, an attempt is made in the study of settlements and other monuments to recover the “mental maps” or “sacred geographies” portraying the wider landscape in peoples’ minds that were part of a past peoples’ shared culture.

Although at times the enthusiasts for scientific, computerized settlement archaeology and those who favor a more anthropological and cultural form of investigation seem to be pursuing incompatible approaches, there is actually no reason why the two cannot work alongside each other. One could use GIS not only to compare the location of ancient farms with varying soil types, exposure to sunlight, and dominant winds but also to pursue human visual or aural experiences of the countryside (the ways past people imagined, visualized, and even heard the world around them).

**INTRASETTLEMENT ARCHAEOLOGY**

Analysis of past settlement sites generally relies on combining various methodologies. Very rarely are such sites totally excavated, especially if they are larger than single farmsteads. Thus, inferences are made by linking windows of detailed information from dug sectors (if available) with wider site coverage, utilizing surface artifact survey, aerial photos, and a battery of geophysical and geochemical techniques. The primary aim is to define the boundaries of domestic activity and its varying character across the site and in each period of occupation. A secondary aim is to define the forms of economic activity carried out at the site. Third, and usually most difficult, is the attempt to reconstruct the social organization and mentalities or worldviews of the site’s residents.

A significant theoretical and methodological stimulus has been research into the social logic of space with “access analysis,” pioneered by Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson. The ways in which individuals navigate around a settlement or within a house can tell much about public versus private spheres of life, the physical separation of people of different social or political classes, and the attitudes to gender in a society. Often, the preserved plans of structures and communities form maps that reveal the fossilized traces of these past social norms. Examples from the study of early-farming periods in the Near East and later prehistoric Sicily illustrate the increasingly sophisticated approaches being developed to push our interpretative frontiers in these more chal-
lenging directions. In these cases growing family privacy and household economic specialization can be followed through the careful analysis of the dynamics of settlement plans.

INTERSETTLEMENT ARCHAEOLOGY

We can make a useful distinction in most cases between the relationship of a settlement to its immediate landscape and its relationships with neighboring and more distant settlements. By the 1930s, and increasingly in later decades, archaeologists and geographers investigated the location of domestic and other sites with respect to the qualities of their surrounding physical landscapes. The focus was on geology and soils, with the aim of testing whether past peoples selected habitation places because of the proximity of certain types of cultivable or grazing land and mineral or other resources. By the later 1960s a series of studies by human geographers and anthropologists had suggested that the characteristics of landscape exploitation by humans around settlements were similar to those of the territorial behavior of many animal species. Moreover, such exploitation was constrained by the economics of daily travel to fields or pastures remote from home.

During the course of the twentieth century, geographers found that clusters of rural farming and stockbreeding settlements in medieval and early modern times were serviced by regularly spaced “central places” that provided administrative and commercial functions. In some elaborate state societies these service centers might be ordered in hierarchies, each level with its own spatial logic. The fundamental idea behind the study of the extent of territory exploited from individual farming settlements without service roles, that travel time is a major consideration for daily work in the fields (the “friction of distance”), is also important for focal communities. Take the examples of market towns and Roman forts. In the former case it can be shown that peasants prefer markets that are accessible within a day’s return to their homes, a two- to three-hour journey each way, thus producing rural towns at intervals of 20–30 kilometers or less. The same intervals might be reproduced in military control centers, allowing a fort under attack to be reached by a relieving force from adjacent bases that lay within a day’s march.

The study of an individual site’s “territory,” in cases where the main daily activity was agricultural and pastoral exploitation of the immediate hinterland, took off in the 1970s as “catchment analysis.” (The term derives from the area of land draining into a particular river and hence reminds us that rural settlements usually live by bringing in products from a defined block of surrounding countryside.) When the method was invented, its originators were keen to demonstrate that past peoples were practicing a very rational form of economics in deciding where to place their settlements. Criticisms rightfully were raised from the 1980s onward that we should not ignore alternative social and symbolic explanations for settlement location, but we can surely combine these approaches without sacrificing the usefulness of one type of territorial analysis of a past settlement in its landscape.

Catchment analysis seeks to determine the types of resources accessible at increasing distances from the domestic habitats of communities that are thought to have obtained their livelihood mainly through exploiting the site’s hinterland. This method may reveal that a group of sites in a particular region and period all lay in a highly rational location to maximize efficient use of particular types of land or landscape. Equally, the same locations may be revealed to have been chosen with defensive, religious, or other noneconomic factors as the primary concerns and thus perhaps were less than desirable in terms of quick access to arable fields or meadows for grazing flocks.

Anyone who has worked for years among farming communities of varied cultures will be struck by the farmers’ intimate and detailed knowledge of the properties of every field and hillside in their landscape. These communities have a keen sense of the advantages and disadvantages of the local terrain for bringing in a successful subsistence crop or salable product from their cultivated plants and domestic animals. Yet settlement archaeologists today are also correctly aware that they must balance the rather easier task of reconstructing the daily toil of past farmers and herders, and its effects on the form and placement of settlements, against the ways in which religious and social ideologies may have been marked in the landscape. As previously noted, with the assistance of GIS there now exists a more adaptable form of catchment analysis. Basic parameters,
such as environmental and climatic conditions or prevalent technology, can be enriched through considering the interplay of neighboring settlements, relations to strategic or religious monuments or landscape features with symbolic value, and such factors as intervisibility of domestic, religious, and strategic places and related forms of landscape perception. In this context intervisibility refers to the ways in which ancient people could observe and thus visually participate in events, ceremonies, and symbolic links to different parts of their spatial world, and be observed themselves by other people.

A great deal still can be achieved through the continuing study of the systematic patterning of basic rural communities of the hamlet or village class across past landscapes. When we observe, for example, how a region fills up with settlements in the long term, the size of communities and distances between them form patterns that often are the same in widely differing cultures and from very different time periods. A significant threshold is crossed again and again when we note the crystallization, out of networks of such primary nucleations (concentrated groups of people in a single settlement node), of so-called corporate communities of the village-state or proto-city-state type. These seem to mark a common giant step from small rural settlements with similar political standing to the emergence of the “state.”

This neatly brings us to the “central place” theories in archaeological settlement studies. Developed in the first half of the twentieth century by geographers, this concept goes well beyond the simple observations that most rural settlements cluster around market towns where various important services are available and that such foci tend to be within easy reach of most rural dwellers. Some geographic theorists, inspired by the desire to find a set of human behavioral laws and mathematical patterning comparable to the laws of physics and the geometry of many aspects of the natural world, have suggested that there is a detectable tendency toward highly elaborate and overlapping regular designs in the layout and spacing of district and regional foci of political and economic control. It has become apparent, however, that the extremely complex geometry that illustrates the theoretical schemes for central places by such human geographers as Christaller, Loesch, and others rarely agrees with geographical reality. It is therefore not very surprising that although settlement archaeologists have tried to find parallels in premodern societies, they have found that archaeological central places are spread in a regular pattern over past landscapes only in very simple terms.

For example, administrative centers in the European Iron Age can be classed into giant, medium, and small-scale foci; each part of Europe had different combinations of these foci, and the patterns often changed by phase. Strong uniformity can be identified in the scale of territory focused on each distinct level of a center, and in some regions where all types are present, they seem to be nested within each other like Russian dolls. Quite basic methods can highlight such structures. One method involves drawing Thiessen polygons. In a particular region, sites considered to be administrative or market centers of equivalent status, each with surrounding rural communities for which they provide varied services, are taken as a set of spatial points, the aim being to suggest the likely boundaries of the regions they dominated. Lines are drawn between all adjacent centers, and at the midpoints a putative boundary is sketched in at right angles to the communicating line. Connecting all these midpoint boundaries leads to the creation of polygons around each center, taken to be a reasonable approximation of the division of control over rural settlements. The advent of GIS has refined such spatial tools, since this computer technology can replace a simple distance boundary between two centers with a more realistic one based on the calculated walking times, allowing for the variable terrain being crossed.

TOTAL LANDSCAPE HISTORY

So far we have examined the internal plans of settlements, the way their occupants moved out to exploit a site’s environment, and the dependency relationships between central places and the lesser rural communities they serviced. But also, how does one find, map, date, and interpret the vestiges of past settlements? It might seem relatively simple. Particularly in western Europe, beginning with the antiquarians of the Renaissance and continuing for some five hundred years, scholars and amateur enthusiasts have been traveling the countryside, noting evidence of ancient humans. By the nineteenth century, registers of ancient sites were being made
on a national and parish basis, together with the first legislation to explore and protect them. Today these records contain not only the localized observations of many generations of skilled observers and the locations of finds reported to museums but also more recent evidence such as thousands of sites revealed through aerial photographs. Moreover, through re-development in town and country, accidental discoveries have been made. With such a history of research, the uninitiated might think that we would have a fairly complete picture of all the premodern settlements and other monuments.

Nothing could be further from the truth. In the 1960s a new form of settlement archaeology developed in the United States, which was to be transported and elaborated in most countries of Europe in the 1970s and 1980s—the regional surface field survey. In its more rigorous form, such a study involves teams of field walkers stretched out in close parallel lines, scouring a landscape field by field. They look not only for the obvious surface evidence (often recorded by previous survey), such as barrows, banks, and architectural debris, but also more particularly for the minutiae of everyday past life, such as potsherds, stone tools, fragments of glass, and coins. Normally, the most common surface artifacts are pots and lithics. Where such intensive surface studies have been carried out, the results generally have been to increase the density of known sites many times over. Because people living in ancient settlements deposited artifacts across the landscape as they exploited the hinterland of their homes, these painstaking methods also began to document the “offsite archaeology” resulting from such behavior. Such items include household rubbish spread across fields through fertilizing and flint tools discarded during hunting trips.

Regional surface survey has rapidly filled in the countryside with a density of sites, especially domestic settlements—an entirely unexpected result. Furthermore, the scientific plotting of finds across these sites and their laboratory study enables the archaeologist to date the periods in which people were active at these sites. Through rigorous analysis it is even possible to distinguish times when only a part of the settlement was in use or when the site was merely a temporary habitation or a nonresidential focus of rural activity.

Additionally, such surface techniques have proved invaluable in the intensive study of previously known sites, especially large ones. As archaeological techniques have become more painstaking and deliberate, the time frame required for total excavation of an ancient urban site, even a village, has grown beyond an archaeologist’s lifetime. Increasingly, sites are being dug only if they are otherwise about to be destroyed through land development, and larger sites often can be protected from such a fate. The result is that for most nucleated settlements, there is no real prospect of total excavation. In this case, surface and nondestructive sub-surface prospection or geoprospection can come into play (i.e., ways to probe for information below the soil without digging). In a few short seasons of work, a city 1–2 square kilometers in extent can be grided and a detailed collection made of its surface finds and architectural remains. Often this can allow for a general overview of the main phases of activity and their localization over different parts of the settlement. Sub-surface geoprospection (e.g., resistivity, magnetometry, and radar) can reveal such details as street or house plans, public buildings, defense walls, and industrial zones. With resistivity, electrical currents passed through the soil outline walls as strong resistance features and ditches as weak while magnetometry heavily magnetized patches of soil are detected as areas where hearths, kilns, or other industrial activities may have taken place. Finally, with georadar, sound waves passed into the soil can show at different depths the presence of archaeological layers, walls, and other solid divisions.

Excavation and total surface and sub-surface prospection, together with the reassessment and renewal of anthropological and historical models for intrasettlement analysis (social and economic, symbolic, and religious activities) continue to enrich understanding of the nature of life within past settlements. This encourages cross-cultural comparisons and contrasts, with reliable empirical and theoretical foundations, for human settlement behavior.

Despite the increasing intensity of surface survey, the resultant filling in of the landscape with past activity traces does not seem to be reaching the point of decreasing returns. This prompts the realization that even in Europe we are still at an early stage of understanding the degree of detail that is retrievable in reconstructing settlement and land.
use history at the microlevel (parish or commune). In just a handful of tiny landscapes within Europe have truly exhaustive investigations of individual parishes been undertaken, with the perhaps predictable result that yet another level of detail has become visible for landscape research, beyond that of intensive survey.

One example is the complete survey of the parish of Shapwick in southwestern England undertaken by Michael Aston and Christopher Gerrard. There, every field was walked for surface traces, shallow test pits (shovel testing) were widely deployed in areas where surfaces were obscured by vegetation, the gardens of village residents were sampled by test excavation, all parish toponyms from maps and villagers' memories were studied down to the intrafield level, and major excavations were carried out at the locations of the most significant settlement traces. An immensely detailed prehistory and history of the parish represents the outcome, from hunter-gatherer vestiges up to the long and complicated development of the modern village settlement (fig. 1). Another excellent example involves massive clearance by rescue excavation of large parts of the district of Oss in the Netherlands, where generational changes in household numbers and their domestic location can be followed through meticulous excavation by Harry Fokkens and his project team (figs. 2, 3). Until such studies are replicated in all the major landscape types across...
Europe, one cannot begin to imagine that we have correctly determined even the main lines of settlement and land-use evolution.

MAJOR THEMES IN THE EVOLUTION OF EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT SYSTEMS AND LANDSCAPE USE

One can highlight several themes in the development of settlement analysis, at the present time, some of which show the influence of abundant results from intensive field survey and the rise of micro-analysis of the landscape. In terms of intrasettlement studies, attention is being drawn to the material evidence that might help us recognize certain forms of internal social organization of a particular settlement. The relative importance of nuclear or extended families and wider real or fictitious social divisions (clans, moieties, and so forth), together with linked issues having to do with public and private space, feature prominently in current research. They stand alongside older, established types of analysis that looked at the physical segregation of elite groups or craftspeople and the evidence of communal planning (streets, defenses, public spaces, and communal buildings). Techniques such as access analysis are providing insights into the social behavior of past societies and the way it can be traced in the built environment. Patterning in the distribution of artifacts or ecofacts (animal bones, seeds, and the like) across settlements is used to indicate where different tasks were performed and whether different social classes had varying diets. It is also possible to trace links to other communities (through the exchange or importation of food or industrial products and access to prestige items). In line with a heightened interest in the symbolic
world of past communities, the deep penetration of settlements by ritual activities has been much researched, with a growing consensus that many aspects of everyday life in rural communities did not respect our own division between functional and symbolic forms of behavior.

In the long term, there remains strong evidence at the most general level, from settlements and from other contexts, notably burials, that increasing levels of social stratification in Europe developed over time, with perhaps limited social distinctions for most communities in Mesolithic and earlier Neolithic times. This was followed by growing social inequality in the later Neolithic and especially into the Bronze Age. By the Iron Age social hierarchies commonly were associated with elaborate settlement hierarchies and large-scale political units.

Research at the intersettlement level has given rise to various intriguing models that, in many ways, mesh well with the broad trends in social organization just outlined. In most, but not all, parts of Europe, hunter-gatherer settlement systems emphasized mobility and flexibility of exploitation of the landscape. The Neolithic and Early Bronze Age frequently seem to be represented by small and short-lived rural sites, relocated again and again in relatively small areas of countryside without fixed land boundaries. Some scholars see this pattern as having more in common with preceding hunter-gatherer attitudes to settlement and landscape exploitation than with subsequent ways of using the land. In many regions the later Bronze Age and the Iron Age are associated with more permanent and often larger domestic sites, which are associated with the rise of increasingly elaborate land divisions. These
trends toward greater fixity of settlement and property divisions (both within settlements and in the countryside) are compatible with more rigid, hierarchical forms of sociopolitical organization.

The potential interactions between modifications to the form of human settlements, formally structured landscapes and social and economic power, offer exciting opportunities to comprehend fundamental processes within European history and protohistory. For those who object to this kind of social evolutionary approach as harking back to the way in which the scholars of the Victorian era saw themselves as standing at the top of a pyramid of such social development, one can point out that this cycle of elaboration very probably is reversed in the post-Roman centuries, followed by the commencement of a new evolutionary cycle. Indeed, many parts of Europe seemed to evidence shifting settlement patterns in the Early Middle Ages, before the High Middle Ages reinvented fixed nucleated settlements and firm land divisions once again.

In line with earlier comments on the preoccupation of archaeological research with symbolic representations in the past, the landscape around settlements and the relationships between settlements are being investigated in ways that extend well beyond purely economic and social factors. To what extent are settlements and monuments placed to achieve a visual effect to impress outsiders or to mark sacred points or routes in the landscape? Through the tool “Viewsheds,” GIS computer methods allow us to map what could be seen from a certain ancient site and how visible the site was to others. What activities in the hinterlands of settlements were related primarily or significantly to symbolic goals instead of or in addition to the functional needs of food, industry, and defense? Much research is being carried out on these new aspects of the landscape, but some caution is required to ensure a proper balance is maintained in our urge to find new perspectives.

Historical ethnography warns that in the vast majority of recorded historical societies, the great majority of the population are primarily concerned with ensuring a secure food supply and the economic stability of their families and with fostering positive social relations within their communities. Much less time and attention were paid to ritual behavior and symbolic representations, although they were never overlooked entirely. Naturally, the lifetime quest for a good income and social success often called on supernatural assistance through rituals and frequently achieved symbolic expression.

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JOHN BINTLIFF
Evidence for the hunter-gatherer population of Greece has been scanty, but intensive research in Epirus (northwestern Greece) and Argolid (Peloponnese, southern Greece) suggests that long-lived successful adaptations probably were widespread on the mainland by the end of the last Ice Age and in the first few millennia of the current warm era (the Holocene, after 8500 B.C.). Nonetheless, the spread of farming and the associated appearance of domestic animals, such as sheep, goats, cattle, and pigs, around 7000 B.C. are understood as marking the colonization of the Balkans, including Greece, by early farming groups migrating out of the zones where these innovations were invented, in southwestern Asia.

These first European farming settlements are best known from their closely packed artificial settlement mounds, or “tells,” which mark the great plains of central and northern mainland Greece (notably, Thessaly). In contrast, the equivalent villages or farms on the southern mainland and the Aegean Islands more often are widely scattered and less substantial. Such a distribution encourages the view that this early settled farming era in Greece (the Neolithic) was a time when the centers of population and socioeconomic development lay well north of those regions of Greece that would become the focus of the succeeding Bronze Age and classical civilizations. This view, very much influenced by the comparative ease with which the prominent tells have been identified by archaeologists from early in the twentieth century, may need to be altered slightly as a result of the recent intensive study of the southern Greek landscape, where greater densities of “flat” sites are being recognized.

It may be that tell villages were more stable communities, lasting in one place for hundreds and even thousands of years, while the typical settlement in southern Greece and the islands was smaller and shifted position every few generations. Until late in the Neolithic era (c. 7000–3500 B.C.), however, both types of Greek agropastoral societies sought out well-watered light soils for their hoe- and hand-based farming. In Late Neolithic times, the diffusion—once more from the Near East—of simple plows and animal traction allowed an explosion of settlement across the expanses of fertile hill and plain country of Greece. Here, rainfall was the essential source for plant growth, rather than the lakes, streams, and springs of the preceding era. Since the areas with high water tables are concentrated in the plains of central and northern Greece, it may be that the earlier Neolithic did indeed see a greater population density. Later Neolithic technological changes might have encouraged the south and larger islands to catch up, since their potential for dry farming is much more on a par with that farther north.

Despite claims that the more elaborate village plans on tells in Thessaly suggest the presence of distinct sectors where an elite might have resided, it is not evident that Neolithic society had progressed beyond a social organization of kin groups, clans, and temporary leading families (sometimes called a “Big Man” society), into a more hierarchical stage of chiefdoms dominating one or more vil-
lages. Yet finds from a few settlements suggest that populations were well over the two hundred considered by some anthropologists as the maximum feasible for community cohesion, based on a relatively egalitarian type of (face-to-face) organization. In these cases, either some village subdivisions based on real or fictitious kinship (horizontal segmentation) or a power structure grounded in one or more leading families (vertical segmentation) must be suspected. One of the rare settlements that expanded well beyond this threshold population was the great Neolithic village that underlies the later Bronze Age palace at Knossos in Crete. Many researchers have argued that during the three millennia before the inception of the Bronze Age, Knossos grew from a small and simple hamlet of farming colonists into a precociously socially stratified small town.

As for economic development during the course of the Neolithic, there is evidence for a growing range of cultigens and more effective use of domestic animal products. In contrast, the exchange of exotic raw materials or finished artifacts generally tended to become less wide ranging, largely owing to the increasing use of regional rather than imported products.

THE EARLY BRONZE AGE

The main phases and dates for the Aegean region are as follows.

Neolithic: c. 7000–3500 B.C.
Early Bronze Age: c. 3500–2100 B.C.
Middle Bronze Age: c. 2100–1700 B.C.
Late Bronze Age: c. 1700–1050 B.C.

The Bronze Age periods are given regional names for the Greek Mainland (Early, Middle, and Late Helladic), the Cyclades Islands (Early Cycladic, etc.), and the island of Crete (Early Minoan, etc.). These regional phases are very broadly contemporaneous.

With the inception of the Early Bronze Age, there are further indications of population growth and more intense colonization of the Greek landscape and clearer, if still localized, signs that in some areas a socially stratified society had begun to take shape. To the continuing impact of plow agriculture in stimulating denser population growth can be added evidence for the cultivation of the olive and the vine. There is some debate as to how firm the limited data are for such cultivation at this time, however. Much clearer evidence for large-scale reliance on these cultigens for food, drink, and storable trade items derives from the Late Bronze Age two millennia later.

Seafaring boats become more sophisticated, which probably reflects the supplementation of coastal diets with marine food as much as it does the growth of regional and interregional trade. The diffusion of copper and bronze metallurgy into the Aegean, as well as trade in its raw materials and products, added to existing commercial and gift exchange in agricultural surpluses and stone for tools and mills, to create an early “koine,” or interaction zone, on the southern mainland and the islands. There is, however, no indication of any political aspect to this exchange. Notably, there is much less evidence for complementary zones of economic and cultural exchange to be found in other parts of mainland Greece, such as the northeast and northwest; however, the eastern Aegean islands and the adjacent town of Troy (northwestern Turkey) did develop a significant alternative interaction sphere.

By the third millennium B.C. on the southern mainland, a series of relatively elaborate structures, standing isolated or amid less pretentious houses, have been taken as a group to mark the creation of an elite-focused district power structure. The class was first recognized at Lerna with the House of the Tiles, where associated seal-impressions for stored containers suggest the levying of some kind of tax and its redistribution by a district authority based at the small, walled center. By the latter part of the same millennium, on the Cycladic islands in the south and on some northern islands of the Aegean, there also arose large villages or small towns with well-planned internal layouts and defensive walls, seeming to indicate the central management of local populations by emergent elite groups. Some of these centers, for example, Phylakopi on Melos, seem to be large enough to represent a class of proto-urban community that we can define as the “village-state.” Here, largely endogamous marriage created a “corporate community,” but one whose size would have required elaborate political management.

On the other hand, throughout this first part of the Bronze Age most of Greece retained a settle-
ment pattern little changed from later Neolithic times. There were two interpenetrating lifestyles: more permanent villages (that is, tells or extensive flat settlements) and short-lived farms and hamlets, without any clear evidence for political stratification. The expansion of trade and population and the limited number of complex communities nonetheless give the impression that in southern Greece and the northeastern Aegean the social and economic bases had been laid for the rise of the first Aegean civilization at the start of the Middle Bronze Age, in about 2000 B.C.

MINOAN CIVILIZATION
That first civilization arose on the island of Crete, and it is typically referred to as the Minoan civilization, after Minos—the mythical king of Knossos, where the most spectacular center of this new culture was located. On the Greek mainland the promising high culture of the Early Bronze Age suffered a severe decline associated with violent destruction at many key sites. Some researchers take the signs of destruction to mark invasion; others link it to a climatic fluctuation, which is seen on a wider front in the eastern Mediterranean. On the islands, however, the small defended townships continued into the new era. It is perhaps less important to explain the delay in reaching civilization on the mainland than to account for why civilization on Crete emerged at all at this time.

First, let us describe the Minoan civilization in its initial phase of florescence—the age of the First Palaces, c. 2000–1800 B.C. The most striking feature is a series of palatial centers of regional administration, the apex of a settlement hierarchy that extended through small towns (which may have had mini-palatial foci) to villages and dispersed hamlets or farms. Few parts of Crete seemed to lie outside the putative control of one of the palaces, but it remains unclear whether the latter formed autonomous princedoms within a unitary culture or were subordinate to the largest and most central example at Knossos in northern Crete. Great similarities in palace design, the use of a common script (Linear A) for recording the economic production of Crete, and vigorous exchange of products clearly indicate that all the palaces were in close and presumably peaceful interaction (fortifications are rare), probably reflecting political alliances sealed by elite intermarriage.

The palaces themselves appear to have been the residences of ruling elites as well as foci for communal celebration and ritual (in the paved courts on their outer faces and the great court at their centers). Major expanses of storage would have served the needs of this elite (consumption, trading capital) and its retinue and servants; and its reserves of oil, wine, grain, and textiles would have been kept full from the tax income of the peasantry. The palaces also acted as manufacturing centers, largely for the upper class (luxury products for rituals, prestigious feasts, and so on). Around most centers, there seem to have developed extensive towns populated by a wealthy middle class (perhaps merchants, administrators, and estate owners) and a farming or servant lower class.

This First Palace period came to a violent end with a catastrophic earthquake c. 1800 B.C. The palaces and lesser centers were rebuilt almost immediately in a very similar or even more elaborate form during the Second Palace period, which lasted until another series of cataclysms c. 1400 B.C., probably caused by invading Mycenaeans (see below). One notable change in this period was the appearance of rural elite residences (perhaps also acting as dispersed administrative centers) in the form of villas across the Cretan landscape.

Although legend tells of a marine empire, or "thalassocracy," associated with Minoan Crete, the available evidence downscales this political structure to a series of zones of decreasing influence radiating out from the island. Islands nearest Crete were transformed into highly "Minoanized" townships, with one or two perhaps receiving actual colonists. Farther away, in the southern Aegean islands and on the adjacent mainlands of Greece and Turkey, Minoan influence is less pervasive, with pottery imports and imitations and the adoption of other cultural features into a predominantly local culture. More distant regions of the Aegean and some parts of the eastern Mediterranean and Italy evidence limited mutual trade with Minoan Crete. Only at the recently excavated Nile Delta palace of Tell el-Dab'a is a stronger form of Minoan influence present, in the shape of frescoes of a highly Minoan character, interpreted as perhaps the result of dynastic intermarriage between Crete and Egypt.

Only for the innermost of the three radii of Minoan influence is political control abroad a possibili-
The Minoans required both everyday and precious metals from outside Crete and other materials for elite prestige items. It is difficult, however, to envisage Minoan Crete as a major merchant power rather than as an island flourishing primarily on the income and redistribution of regional production in foodstuffs and textiles. Nonetheless, there are mentions of the Minoans in contemporary state archives in the eastern Mediterranean, suggesting both minor flows of trade and political alliances. Even though the Minoan palaces incorporate elements of traditional Cretan architecture, their design also surely reflects firsthand acquaintance with the very similar, but older, tradition of royal palaces of the city-states of the Levant and parts of Turkey.

Although the clay palace archive tablets are written in Linear A, a hitherto untranslated language, there are close parallels in their form and accounting conventions to the derivative Linear B tablets used by later Mycenaean palaces (which are in readable archaic Greek). Comparison suggests that their content largely focused on monitoring the regional production and distribution of foodstuffs, raw materials, and finished artisan products, as well as equipment for the palace’s officials and armed forces. This has reinforced the general view that Minoan (as Mycenaean) palace-focused polities arose and functioned primarily through controlling the people and products of their own territory. Caution is required in this interpretation, because Minoan records remain essentially unread, while the Mycenaean archives almost certainly represent regional management records. We have yet to recover the foreign correspondence that contemporary Near Eastern states of similar scale lead us to expect once existed.

Although the Aegean Islands, especially the Cyclades, were strongly influenced by the Minoans and experienced similarly varying degrees of core-periphery interaction with the following civilization—that of the mainland Mycenaean civilization—they continued to show signs of a vigorous regional culture. This is evident in the typical nucleo-island townships that lasted from the later Early Bronze Age into and beyond the Middle Bronze Age. Some would elevate this culture to a distinct Cycladic civilization, even if statehood was confined to small island polities of a thousand or so people at most.

**THE RISE OF MYCENAEAN CIVILIZATION**

During the peak of the Minoan First Palace civilization in the centuries around 2000 B.C., mainland Greece showed little evidence of complexity above the level of village life in what is termed the Middle Helladic period (regional Middle Bronze Age). As the Minoan Second Palace period developed during the first third of the second millennium B.C., however, there were striking signs of the renewal of regional power structures across the southern mainland. In the western Peloponnese there arose across the landscape, in connection with villages and groups of small settlements, monumental earth burial tumuli with stone “beehive” chambers (tholoi), amalgamating older Cretan communal burial traditions with those of the western Balkans, to mark the emergence of district chiefdoms. In the eastern Peloponnese an alternative elite burial mode, using deep shafts, appeared. This is most notable at the site of Mycenae, where the successive shaft grave circles A and B contain fabulously rich gifts for what can be considered a powerful warrior elite. In the following centuries their descendants developed the associated settlement into a massively fortified palatial center. More subtle changes revealed by settlement archaeology also occurred across this important transformational Middle Helladic era, with the decline across mainland southern Greece of dispersed, short-lived rural sites and a focus on nuclear village and town sites associated with the crystallization of district and regional dynastic elites.

In the following era, the Late Helladic (mainland Late Bronze Age), out of this large network of greater and lesser chiefdoms arose a series of major kingdoms, covering most of southern mainland Greece and centered on palaces with surrounding towns. This relatively uniform civilization (fig. 1) is named Mycenaean after the state center with the highest status in later Greek legends, which are believed to have originated in this period. Still, Mycenae does not have the same archaeological claim to preeminence as Knossos for the Minoan civilization, being neither the largest nor the most magnificent palatial center. On the other hand, Greek myths, such as the siege of Troy, portray the king of Mycenae as merely “first among equals” amid the warrior princes representing the several states of Bronze Age Greece. This view agrees with the archaeologi-
Several centuries elapsed (c. 1700–1350 B.C.) between the proliferation of chiefly burials in the later Middle Helladic and the construction of the first regional palatial centers, during which we can envisage the emergence of paramount chiefs or kings from competitive networks of district elites. Elite mansions may have appeared first, followed by full-scale palaces with close parallels to obvious older models on Minoan Crete (fig. 2). Distinctive features of the mature Mycenaean major and minor centers were the provision of stone fortifications and a general preference for defensive locations. This militaristic facet was matched by a taste for scenes of warfare in Mycenaean art, which, significantly, was not seen in the more social and ritual art of the Minoans; although it seems too romantic to follow Sir Arthur Evans in imagining a Minoan society lacking internal or external violence. It is reasonable to see the small number of Mycenaean mainland states as developing in an atmosphere of endemic warfare. To judge by the increasing number and expanding scale of fortifications over time, the threat or practice of major conflicts remained until the end of this civilization, when all the key sites experienced violent destruction (c. 1250–1200 B.C.). During this period of swift decline to disappearance of Mycenaean civilization in the later thirteenth and twelfth centuries B.C., all signs of state-level authority, complex craft skills, and literacy faded away across Greece. This eclipse has led archaeologists to term the following era, up to the beginnings of historic classical Greek civilization in the eighth century B.C., a “dark age.”

Despite this emphasis on militarism, which accords with later Greek legends of internal and external conflict, the climax of Mycenaean civilization c. 1450–1250 B.C. vies with the greatest period of the preceding Minoan civilization, which is certainly no
coincidence. It has been argued that Mycenaean art, architecture, and settlement organization, as well as political and economic systems, were critically stimulated through increasing contacts with its Cretan predecessor at its height. This contact came mainly through trade but presumably was accompanied by political and perhaps matrimonial alliances. The spectacular prestige objects found in the final Middle Bronze Age and the early Late Bronze Age chieftains’ burials of the emergent Mycenaean culture show strong Minoan inspiration, perhaps the employment of Minoan craftsmen, and the likely obtaining of exotic materials via widespread Minoan exchange systems.

Like other core-periphery systems studied globally, the undeveloped margin grew, in turn, into a core in its own right. With many parallels, the process of role inversion may well have been a violent one. The precise historical scenario has been the subject of debate since the early twentieth century. Among the controversies have been the Mycenaean takeover at Knossos, the dating and impact of the volcanic eruption on the island of Thera (Santorini), and the date of the final destruction of the Knossos palace.

At present it seems that the Thera eruption may have occurred in the mid-seventeenth century B.C., destroying a flourishing island township that was a major player in eastern Mediterranean trade with the Aegean world. Probably it did not affect either the emerging mainland Mycenaean chiefdoms or the Second Palace states of Minoan Crete. Not long afterward, however, Mycenaean warriors invaded Crete and destroyed most of its palaces. They assumed control of the island from Knossos and several other former centers, such as Khania, adopting Minoan modes of surplus extraction and adapting Linear A into a script for their own Greek tongue, Linear B. It is probable that these rump Cretan palace centers later were burned down at the same time as the mainland Mycenaean palaces, during the thirteenth century B.C. It is unclear, however, if by then it was Mycenaeans or a resurgent Minoan elite who were in control of Crete.
Thus, through peaceful and forceful means, out of numerous petty chiefdoms arose some half dozen major Mycenaean kingdoms (mainland and Cretan), in the period 2000–1400 B.C., centered on palace towns with a corps of scribes, specialist workers in fine arts, and large, well-equipped armed forces. Mycenaean trade clearly developed beyond that of Minoan and Cycladic trade, both in scale and geographic scope. Existing exchanges with the eastern Mediterranean deepened, and there were stronger links to Italy and sporadic trade with the western Mediterranean islands and Iberia. The needs of the Aegean for working metal (copper and tin) and, equally important, the elite's appetite for raw materials and finished artifacts for prestigious display seem to have been the major stimuli. The Mycenaean palatial economy, like the Minoan, however, appeared to focus primarily on extraction of surplus foodstuffs, perishable and imperishable products (such as textiles), ceramic and metal artifacts, and labor from dependent populations within state boundaries. This allowed elite families and their retinues in major and minor centers to live in luxury and obtain limited imports.

EXPLANATIONS FOR THE ORIGINS OF AEGEAN BRONZE AGE CIVILIZATIONS

The origins of the Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations have been sought in varied factors. Perhaps proximity to older civilizations, such as Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the world of the city-states of the Levant and Anatolia, provided political and economic stimulus and organizational models lacking in more remote areas, such as the central and western Mediterranean and other parts of continental Europe. The undeniable contacts in terms of trade and political interactions offer some support for this "secondary civilization" model for the Aegean. On the other hand, the scale of economic and political exchanges appears to many scholars to be too limited to provide an adequate basis for the complexity of Minoan-Mycenaean society.

An alternative reading emphasizes the head start given to the Aegean through early colonization in the seventh millennium B.C. by incoming village farmers from the Near East. Yet this might lead to the prediction that similar civilizations would arise at appropriately spaced intervals of time farther west and north. In Spain and Portugal this model might be justified, since widespread village farming was delayed until c. 5000 B.C., and complex cultures of a distinctive local character appeared two to three thousand years later. Moreover, on Malta, the famous Temple societies developed idiosyncratically after some two thousand years of settled farming. With regions of intense farming in the south by the fifth millennium B.C., Italy did not have more than well-planned villages until the final stages of the Bronze Age in the early first millennium B.C. All these examples are complex state societies, whereas this form of complex civilization was achieved early in the course of Minoan civilization.

The concept of "environmental circumscription" might shed additional light. The idea here is that certain cultures are encouraged to adapt into more elaborate social and economic forms through being confined within geographical boundaries or struggling under constraining ecological conditions. Early Iberian complex society and the Malta Temple culture, for example, arose in the context of surprisingly stressful farming ecologies. There is a parallel in the Aegean when we consider that northern and central Greek tell societies failed to achieve state formation (where climatic and soil conditions were generally good), while southern Greece saw the evolution of the Cretan Minoan and the mainland Mycenaean and related Cycladic island civilizations (in environments with a stressful climate and low-resilience soils).

Many scholars tend to combine these elements into a complex interplay of causation: proximity to the Near East gave rise to precocious settled village farming and, later, economic and political stimulation to the development of a stratified and urban society in the Aegean. The concepts of "core-periphery" and "world system" help us model how mobilization of exchange goods, related to political alliances and the flow of prestige goods between elites, could have created, or perhaps enhanced, tendencies in the Aegean toward the elaboration of class societies and administrative central places. A more stressful environment in the southern Aegean and greater access to the Near East would differentiate its path from other regions of the Aegean, with the exception of some northern Aegean islands and the city-state of Troy on the northwest coast of Turkey. Colin Renfrew argued in the early 1970s that olive cultivation, which could have flourished in the
south but not over most of the northern Aegean, was a potent element in economic growth in the Bronze Age. Although the scale and timing of large-scale olive cultivation still are disputed, such cultivation seems to have played a major role in sustaining the Mycenaean civilization of the Late Bronze Age. When better palaeobotanical evidence becomes available, it may turn out that this factor acted as a significant new force in the rise of small centers of power in the southern Aegean Early Bronze Age and the emergence of the Minoan civilization of the Middle Bronze Age.

What held the Aegean Bronze Age civilizations together as regional state societies? Diverse elements can be suggested. For Cycladic island towns the village-state model may be critical—a centripetal social force (that is, one that turns a community’s life intensely in upon itself), which might have been behind numerous cross-cultural small-scale polities of the city-state variety. On Minoan Crete a special emphasis on religious ritual has been offered as a kind of unifying ideology binding different classes together, although one can be somewhat skeptical of a utopian reading for such a highly stratified society. In contrast, the relatively short life and militaristic flavor of Mycenaean society encourage the view that later Homeric descriptions of unstable, aggressive, and competitive warrior elites at the head of these states may reflect actual historical memories. This variety in itself reminds us that history and prehistory are the result of interactions between partially predictable possibilities and unpredictable contingency.

See also The Minoan World (vol. 2, part 5); Dark Age Greece (vol. 2, part 6).

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JOHN BINTLIFF
In the late thirteenth and early twelfth centuries B.C. the Bronze Age palace civilization of Aegean Greece went down in flames. Strongly fortified though they were, the urban centers of a series of small Mycenaean states in southern mainland Greece, together with associated regional centers on Crete and lesser Aegean islands, suffered violent destruction, putting an end to their power and unraveling complex political and economic structures. Although the precise origin of the attackers is unknown and other factors may have played a role, at least locally, in some cases (e.g., earthquakes and climatic downturns), it is significant that the fall of Late Bronze Age civilization in the Aegean occurred during a time of equal unrest throughout the eastern Mediterranean. The Hittite civilization in Anatolia suffered a similar fate, and in the Levant and Egypt armies of seaborne raiders and colonists of apparently diverse backgrounds (the "Sea Peoples") sacked towns and threatened the great power of Pharaonic Egypt, leaving a more permanent mark as founders of Philistine city-states in coastal Palestine.

Scholarship nonetheless is inclined, less at present than in the past, to envisage waves of invaders penetrating Greece from outside the Aegean to perpetrate the assassination of the Mycenaean palace kingdoms. However, alternative scenarios of internal civil wars between individual states, or a peasants’ uprising, remain mere hypotheses, with only later Greek legend to suggest internal wars. The succeeding archaeological assemblages of the penultimate Bronze Age and Early Iron Age (fig. 1) seem firmly rooted in Mycenaean and, on Crete, Minoan Bronze Age traditions; so if invaders were a critical element, they must have moved on or been absorbed rapidly into local cultures. In any case, the disruption associated with the violent end to the Mycenaean world was awesome enough to plunge the Aegean into a Dark Age that was to last from c. 1200 to 800 B.C.

Although this Dark Age was perhaps more a half-light than utter blackness, no one would dispute that history leaves us with the extinction of literacy throughout these four centuries. As Anthony Snodgrass pointed out a generation ago, many other striking signs of "de-skilling" characterize this period: the disappearance of elaborate architectural complexes; highly impoverished assemblages of metal; the virtual absence of human representations; a dramatic decline in the number of dated occupation sites; very reduced evidence for foreign exchange compared with the preceding period; and no sign of political centers of regional control. Whatever the reason(s) for the end of the palace states, the reduction in social, economic, and artistic complexity was severe and persisted for many generations.

It seems reasonable to ask why recovery took so long and to link this question to a striking feature of the Dark Age, the evidence for large-scale population movements around the Aegean. Although evidence mainly has been reconstructed from the study of the different ancient Greek dialects, later legends, and a little recorded history, along with certain archaeological support, it appears that during this long, disturbed era few parts of the former
Bronze Age Aegean world did not become involved in folk movements on a significant scale. Some scholars, such as the British historian Robin Osborne, have suggested a link between these migrations and the much better historically attested colonization movements by Aegean Greeks throughout the Mediterranean and Black Sea in the centuries immediately after the Dark Age and in the Archaic and early Classical centuries (the Archaic era is c. 700–500 B.C.; the Classical era is c. 500–323 B.C.; the early Classical era is the fifth century B.C.). The latter generally occurred, however, in times of denser homeland populations and elaborate state organization, so that it seems more appropriate to try to account for the Dark Age migrations in their own unique period context.

Why would whole communities abandon their homelands and risk all to settle far away, especially in an era when organized political authority had collapsed in great violence and insecurity must have been endemic? Violence may indeed have been a central reason. It is true even today that one of the main precipitating factors around the world for the displacement of entire communities, after food starvation and drought, is to escape the arbitrary violence associated with the breakdown of law and order. Generally, this is in the context of civil war or the absence of any centralized control over the use of force. Although there have been attempts to argue that the palace societies were struck by famine or drought, and there is some related evidence from Egypt that could introduce this as one element behind the crisis, no convincing case for prolonged climatic disaster can be found for the Aegean. Other factors must have been critical, even if this is allowed as a potentially secondary contributor. Summarizing a plausible scenario on what remains circumstantial evidence, one might suggest that violent attacks on the Mycenaean state centers by internal forces—with or without assistance from maritime armies of raiders such as the Sea Peoples—caused their definitive removal. This state of affairs ushered in a long period of insecurity that effectively blocked the reconstitution of regional states and the rule of law for centuries to follow.

**SHEDDING LIGHT ON THE DARK AGES**

One of the seemingly curious aspects of accounts by later, Classical Greek historians of events between the Age of the Heroes (a legendary era essentially rooted in memories of the Minoan-Mycenaean Bronze Age) and their own historic era is that they did not envisage this Dark Age at all. The world of the legendary leaders, associated with major palace centers, such as Thebes or Mycenae, certainly is portrayed in its final phase as riven by warfare, assassination, and internal migrations. It also is conceived as directly giving rise to the elite-dominated world of early historic Greece, from c. 700 B.C. (the Archaic era), with its kings or aristocrats (*basileis*) claiming heroic progenitors for their dynasties. This connection is difficult to accommodate with the archaeological picture just described, with three to five hundred years of an apparent reversion of political and economic organization to a thin scatter of short-lived rural hamlets with narrow horizons and little evidence for any sort of specialization or social stratification. Snodgrass’s use of the statistics of Dark Age
Age cemeteries—their number and size—seemed convincing hard data to argue for tiny, dispersed communities appropriate to such limited achievements.

The first sign that the Dark Ages were merely “dim” came with the spectacular discovery on a small peninsula called Lefkandi jutting out on the mainland-facing shore of the island of Euboea, not far from Athens in southern Greece, of a cemetery that had grown up around a monumental funerary mound. Under the mound an impressive apsidal building was found in 1980 (fig. 2), with a male and female elite burial together with horse graves. The burial has been dated surprisingly early, to about 1000 B.C.—the supposed nadir of Greek culture. Current opinion holds that the great house represents the dwelling of a chieftain’s family, namely the elite male and his partner. The gifts and finds from the later community cemetery that grew up beside it indicate exchange with the more advanced Early Iron Age city-states of the eastern Mediterranean, perhaps brought by Phoenician traders to the Aegean. (Their presence is known also at the port of Kommos on the southern coast of Crete at this time.) Nonetheless, Snodgrass had calculated from the size and date range of the Lefkandi cemetery that the population at any one time was only that of a small hamlet—difficult to see as a viable basis for a regional chieftain.

The key to these accumulating discrepancies would be discovered in the late 1980s by one of Snodgrass’s brightest students, Ian Morris. In a book that rewrote at a stroke our understanding of the Dark Age, Burial and Ancient Society, Morris showed that the key evidence from cemeteries (settlements being rarely excavated or studied in detail) was, in fact, completely misleading. Through analysis of the structure of the cemeteries and their age, sex, and wealth patterning, he argued that the transitional time between the Mycenaean era and the Dark Age proper—that of the sub-Mycenaean period—saw everyone in a community buried together in cemeteries. With the inception of the full Dark Age or Early Iron Age (proto-Geometric period, c. 1050–900 B.C.), however, formal cemetery burial became reserved exclusively for a social elite. This privileging remained in force in the subsequent Early to Middle Geometric period, but then, in a critical transformational century leading into the first historic era—the Late Geometric (eighth century B.C.)—there was a dramatic return to social inclusiveness in cemeteries.

The obvious effect of this cycle is to mimic an apparent collapse of populations for the central main era of the Dark Age, bracketed by much higher populations. If one now reconstitutes a significant “invisible” population, this reduces the previous image of extraordinary depopulation. Moreover, and equally important, the evidence of such elite power over burial privileges is predicated on the survival of at least a district elite society throughout the whole Dark Age period. Here the Lefkandi house and subsequent discoveries of similar structures in other parts of Greece fall exactly into place. The Lefkandi chief would have been associated with a much larger support population than the communal cemetery indicates, and one can see the impressive type of residence from which the community was kept under elite sway. One further hint fits well into this new scenario: the term used in our first historic sources from about 700 B.C. for the controlling elite is the basileis—princes or lords. The word is used to mean a “minor official” in the preceding Mycenaean state archives. It might be reasonable to suggest that during the catastrophic collapse of palace civilizations around 1200 B.C., regional kingship disappeared, and power fragmented into myriad district chiefdoms. The Lefkandi-type residence would suit this picture very well, as does the survival of the term basileis into the earliest historic period.

One other feature of several of the well-studied Dark Age settlements deserves highlighting—their relative impermanence. Important sites, such as Lefkandi or Zagora on the island of Andros, were abandoned by the end of the period. It is important to point out that Morris’s corrections to Dark Age population estimates fall well short of bringing them up to Mycenaean or Archaic era levels. Even when one boosts observable cemetery populations by a factor of two, their size and number remain modest and rare across the Greek landscape. The restrictions on architectural complexity and artistic production or trade remain in place, and one must still see a countryside with generally low population numbers and vast empty and uncultivated spaces, later to be filled and exploited to crisis proportions in the historic centuries of Archaic, through Classical, and into Early Hellenistic times (c. 700–300 B.C.).
B.C.; the Hellenistic era is 323 B.C. to 31 B.C. in Greece). In such a landscape, land would not have been of great value, and aspiring chieftains drew their power from controlling a more valuable scarce resource—manpower. In ways still not entirely clear, the Dark Age elite families attached the peasantry to their households. As chiefly power fluctuated from family to family across the landscape or a new elite generation chose to displace the seat of dynastic power from its ancestors, so elite and peasants migrated around the relatively thinly settled countryside. The power clearly was generalized and binding enough to suppress formal burial rights for the lesser folk.

Various theories can be raised to account for the nature of this grip on the working peasantry. A popular model for such a comparatively undeveloped and fragmented society, not far from expanding commercial powers such as the contemporary Phoenicians, would be a core-periphery system. Such a system emphasizes the inflow of eastern Mediterranean prestige goods for the local Greek elite in return for trading out raw materials and surplus foodstuffs that would have been channeled into the local chieftain’s trading capital, as a kind of tax from the peasants. As often with this kind of application, the model fails to account for the ways in which elite-peasant dependency arises and is kept from being severed. The brilliant analysis by Hans van Wees of changing fashions in clothing, as portrayed in figured vases from Late Geometric to earliest Classical times (c. 800–480 B.C.), gets much closer to the answer.

A WARRIOR SOCIETY AND ITS LIFESTYLE
Although the main part of the Dark Age shows almost no hint of the representation of people on ceramics, the situation changes dramatically in the critical renaissance of the eighth century B.C. In almost all aspects of life there were major positive changes toward a more populous, politically complex society in most parts of Greece, artistically and architecturally experimental and ambitious. A striking series of large vases of this Late Geometric period give us scenes of everyday life, with a gloss of extra and anachronistic details that come from the popular legendary tales of Troy and the Bronze Age heroic world, clearly underlining claims to heroic ancestry for the living elite. It is notable that these scenes portray the elite and their male retinue as heavily armed at all times. In the first part of the following period, the Archaic (seventh century B.C.), this remains the typical dress for the elite household. In the final Archaic century (sixth century B.C.), however, the sword and spear and open dress, allowing rapid deployment of these weapons, yield to a tight-fitting male dress copied from the Near East and the disappearance of the sword. By the end of that century, the spear is replaced by a walking stick, still potentially available to fend off vagrants but no longer a serious weapon. At the same time, scenes of the elite dining in Archaic times with series of armor and weapons suspended above them shift by early Classical times to representations of the elite and middle class with a single set of military equipment. This symbolizes the economic and political status of the head of the family as a member of the middle or upper citizen class (the hoplite, who had sufficient income to own the heavy equipment required of the citizen foot soldier in a typical Greek city-state).

What do these transformations in dress reveal about the organization of Dark Age society? Almost certainly, it was one where force was law; mere claim to preeminence was inadequate. Just as the chief and the retinue he sustained always were armed so as to be ready to take on rival families or intruders from neighboring districts, a similar threat of instant violence may have kept the dependent peasantry in their place. They were, after all, the essential foundation for the daily rations, banquets, gifts, and supply of metal that the elite superstructure required for its maintenance. The clashing clans of Romeo and Juliet’s Verona come to mind, but closer to this time the return of Odysseus in Homer’s epic is a vivid illustration of the period’s ethos. In Odysseus’s absence during the Trojan War and then on his wanderings around the Mediterranean, a group of other nobles insolently encamp in his palace, hoping to marry the abandoned wife, perhaps already a widow, and squandering Odysseus’s resources. Upon their return, Odysseus and his son first remove all the weaponry and armor hanging in the dining-hall—doubtless originally placed there for his own followers—and then massacre the defenseless suitors, rounding that off by hanging the servant girls who had fraternized with the unwelcome guests.
The claims of Dark Age elites to have descended from the royal families of the Mycenaean Late Bronze Age are probably, with some exceptions, as unlikely as they were strongly emphasized by these local chiefly families. With much mobility around the landscape and the limited scope of district warrior-leaders, continuity of actual power and bloodlines is implausible. The aristocrats, who were rather more reliant on a gang of armed followers and their own aggressiveness to claim power over a dependent peasantry, nonetheless were keen to bolster supposed ties to legendary Mycenaean heroes. Hence the later Classical Greek conception that there was no Dark Age was born. This myth allowed Theseus to be both an early Mycenaean Athenian prince who destroyed the Cretan Minotaur (plausibly a memory of the Mycenaean takeover of the Minoan palace at Knossos) and the founder of a unified Attic state focused on Athens in the middle era of the Dark Age, some five hundred years later.

One way to convince people that one’s family was in direct descent from Bronze Age heroes would be to identify an elite burial of that era and commence to make offerings to one’s supposed ancestors in its precincts. Thus one sees the widespread emergence of hero cults at Mycenaean tholos tombs (a massive stone chamber built like a cone-shaped beehive) during the later Dark Age. Another way was to surround oneself with tales and images of the heroic age with which one wanted to be identified. This has two observable facets. First, when in Late Geometric times figural art reappears on a significant scale, with scenes of elite funerals and warfare, the mode of burial and some of the painted accoutrements either deliberately revive customs hitherto kept alive from the Bronze Age only in oral poetry or are pure illustrations to the tales of the Iliad and Odyssey and related epics and did not actually exist in contemporary society (e.g., giant body shields). Second, when the elite held their regular banquets to entertain and impress their neighbors and reward their retinue, oral poetry would be performed and doubtless continually modified to emphasize the claimed links of the audience to particular heroic figures from their own areas of Greece. By the time Homer wrote down a particular version of the two great cycles linked to the Trojan War (c. 700 B.C., at the emergence of written history), many generations of accretions and deletions are known to have occurred.

The feasting that is so central to Homeric elite gatherings seems to have been equally important to the warrior elite society of the Dark Age. One can suppose that large buildings, such as the Early Dark Age Lefkandi house (or its original, since some scholars suggest that the structure was not necessarily the actual chief’s house but a replica built to be destroyed with the chief), were the focus of elite banqueting. These buildings also were repositories of prestigious items obtained by the elite through trade, gift exchange, or dowry as a way to emphasize their relative wealth and status to the impoverished dependent peasants who were their clients. The cult activity of the community almost certainly also was based in the chief’s house and under his supervision—a further source of power to reinforce armed might and stores of food and valuables.

The multifunctional community focus represented by the chief’s house—symbolic monument, ritual core, storehouse of wealth—and its physical plan are of far more than period interest. In its roles and design elements, this house is directly ancestral to the Archaic and Classical Greek temple. (One common version of the earliest Greek temple plans of the eighth through seventh centuries B.C. is in place at Lefkandi, c. 1000 B.C.—an elongated rectangle to which an apse is added at one end, with internal divisions denoting separate functions.) When the community focus of worship developed apart from the elite dwelling, something seen in several cases in the critical transformational Late Geometric eighth century B.C., it retained the traditional form of a rectangular subdivided building, often with the innermost part ending in an apse. Three key elements can be traced back to the Dark Age elite house—an entry porch, a main room with a focus (originally a hearth and later the cult statue), and an innermost chamber serving as private apartment and treasury.

One other element that is more specific to the Dark Ages and becomes less significant in Archaic to Classical times, as a more democratic society emerges, is the popularity of prestigious feasting vessels, or tripods. For much of the Dark Age, however, the general low level of bronze in society makes large containers too expensive. It is mainly in the final Late Geometric era that growing access to trade and a rising population can be associated with elite investment in great display pieces to show off...
at the traditional banquets in their households. The tripods, often showpieces at museums today, were large cooking and warming cauldrons for communal eating, highly ornamented and sometimes decorated with appropriate symbols of the warrior elite (e.g., a hero with raised spear, a gesture that is the most common one associated with Homeric warriors). Tripods were suitable gifts between elites and later became a common reward for victors in competitions at the international festivals in pan-Hellenic sanctuaries, such as Olympia.

THE RISE OF THE GREEK CITY-STATE

Classical Greece was divided politically between those regions mostly in the north, where power remained with an elite or even a king, and those largely in the south, where power was vested in the middle or “hoplite” class, only rarely and discontinuously reaching down to the poorest free citizens. Very broadly, the northern regions were dominated by a kind of tribal organization, the ethnos, with the south and its more democratic constitutions associated with the city-state, or polis kind of organization. The transformation in Greece, so pregnant for European and later global history, from a common kind of elite politics, found cross-culturally around the world, to a unique experimentation with moderate democracy took place essentially within the Archaic era, but it began in later Dark Age times.

First, the tight control exercised over their peasant clients by the warrior elite seems to have loosened in Late Geometric times with the relaxation of the ban on formal burial. In the following Early Archaic period, military reform occurred widely in Greece: the cavalry and chariots of the rich became subordinated on the battlefield to massed ranks of heavily armed foot soldiers drawn mostly from the wealthier or “yeoman” peasantry. Although Morris, in his pioneering cemetery analysis, suggested that the excluded poor of the Dark Age first won formal burial and soon after became the mainstay of military force in the rising states of Greece, his own statistics tell a different story. He estimated that roughly half the population suffered burial exclusion in the Dark Age, but in the Classical army about half the free population was made up of the aristocrats and middle (hoplite) class, and the other half were lightly armed poorer folk. Effectively, this indicates that the Dark Age elite was a large upper class in a very broad sense, later to form the upper and middle class of Classical times. The Dark Age serf class, even in Classical city-states, normally remained a less privileged class (Athens excepted, and that for a relatively limited part of the general Classical era). This seems to argue that the rise of more democratic institutions in Archaic to Classical times reflects a shift in power from the dominant elite families to lesser, originally dependent elite families, rather than the rise of a hitherto entirely suppressed serf class.

This article has portrayed typical Dark Age landscapes as thinly settled and has concentrated on often rather short-lived chieftain-focused villages. Equally significant is a smaller class of Dark Age settlements of a very different character, usually retaining their uniqueness into the subsequent early historic era. Many key Mycenaean centers shrank to small towns or villages and never recovered greater status or even remained unoccupied (Mycenae and Pylos). A few, however, appear not only to have remained occupied through the Dark Ages and into Classical times but also to have been large clusters of closely spaced hamlets forming a discontinuous town. Athens, Argos, Thebes, and Knossos are four striking examples. This “town in patches” appearance that is seen in the mapped archaeology of Dark Age settlement and cemetery traces at such sites was identified by the Classical historian Thucydides as the “traditional archaic” type of town. It was preserved to his time in the curious amalgamation of close villages that constituted the plan of Classical Sparta. The most likely explanation for this multifacality is that a number of chiefs, with their retinues and serfs, settled in one another’s vicinity yet kept a perceptible distance and their own cemetery zones.

In landscapes with mostly smaller communities, the existence of such towns at all times must have exerted a gravitational attraction in their immediate region, with trade opportunities and social possibilities unobtainable elsewhere. Moreover, a warlike elite society sees a virtue in aggression and feuding to enhance status and control over land and people, so that an imbalance of military capability in their favor would have tended to stimulate these larger polities to undertake territorial expansion over less-
er politics in their vicinity. Certainly, Athens is remarkable in its feat of taking control of the large region of Attica well before recorded history begins c. 700 B.C., perhaps as early as 900 B.C., and Thebes, Argos, and Knossos all rose to become the most powerful city-states in their regions, though at later dates.

See also The Minoan World (vol. 2, part 5); Mycenaean Greece (vol. 2, part 5).

BIBLIOGRAPHY


