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INTRODUCTION: CURRENT RESEARCH AND PERSPECTIVES ON
THE LATE BRONZE AGE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN*

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This volume includes – exclusive of this introduction – fifteen papers from sixteen scholars who are actively engaged in research which focuses on various aspects of the Late Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean. Each was asked, in a somewhat vague manner, and with no specific restrictions or further guidelines, to contribute to this special issue a piece of writing on any of their academic interests provided that they fall into the aforementioned chronological period and geographical region. These contributions do not represent the result of a conference or the output of a workshop, but nevertheless reflect the current state of research in this particular field. The authors here present new research, new data, new scientific techniques, and new methodological strategies, frequently venturing beyond the limits of their particular regional academic pursuits. The result is a volume which covers the entire Eastern Mediterranean, from the Aegean, to Cyprus, Anatolia, the Syro-Palestinian coast and Egypt (see maps 1-4) and deals with topics as diverse as iconography, material culture, intercultural relations, linguistics, weaponry, music, production and consumption, and research methodology.

Within this selection, Christos Doumas approaches the etymology of the word ἄλις and the impact of the sea on the vocabulary of the Greek language. Kostas Georgakopoulos focuses on interconnections between Anatolia and Minoan Crete with reference to the Ahhiyawa debate. The presence of a ‘King of Ahhiyawa’ in

* Writing an introduction on a topic such as the archaeological research in the Late Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean is never an easy task. I would like to thank all the contributors for their comments and thoughts they shared with me over the past couple of years and all the colleagues who gave me food for thought as well as references and important updates. Special thanks should go to Assist. Prof. Andreas Vlachopoulos, Dr. Nikos Papadimitriou and Dr. Chrysanthi Papadopoulou for their most useful ideas and suggestions that really allowed me to structure this piece of work and for bringing to my attention certain publications. I am also indebted to Dr. David Smith who proof-read this text and corrected my English. I remain solely responsible for all the views expressed here.

the Hittite texts is discussed by Jorrit Kelder who analyses the political structures of Mycenaean palatial society and argues in favour of a political unity. Intercultural relations and the movement of goods over distance are discussed at length, with Nikolas Papadimitriou offering a study into the circulation of Mycenaean and Cypriot pottery in the Eastern Mediterranean during the Late Bronze Age and Ioannis Fappas, with the help of textual evidence, providing a broader discussion of the circulation of aromatic oils and their containers in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean littoral. Staying in this region, Katerina Kolotourou examines the mechanisms by which non-local musical elements and traditions are incorporated by, and adapted into, established socio-cultural environments and the potential for the creation of a musical *koine*. Sophia Vakirtzi presents her work on the decorated spindle-whorls from Akrotiri, Thera and, through a contextual and comparative approach, discusses certain cultural and technological issues of Aegean textile production. Annette Sørensen, in her analysis of a group of nine cups from Toumba tou Skourou in Cyprus, considers whether typological influences from Minoan Crete could have resulted in the production of new hybrid types. A more scientific approach is taken by Andreas Vlachopoulos and Sophia Sotiropoulou who utilise the relatively new technique of Visible-Induced Luminescence (VIL) in the infrared to comment on the use of Egyptian blue, glaucophane, and riebeckite by Thera artists. Tatiana Theodoropoulou presents an extensive overview of current research on the exploitation of marine resources in the Aegean, while Barry Molloy discusses the practicalities of armour use in the Bronze Age Aegean and Europe, with a focus on the 'Dendra Corslet'. New approaches to the study of commonly neglected material remains are addressed by Ian Shaw with reference to refuse and midden deposits of New Kingdom Egypt. Given the continued popularity of research into the iconography of the Eastern Mediterranean, it is perhaps unsurprising that several contributions chose to focus on this topic. Here, Assaf Yasur-Landau presents a study of the so-called 'feathered helmets' of the 12th century, comparing depictions with material remains from the contemporary Aegean, while Fritz Blakolmer suggests that careful analysis of Bronze Age iconography indicates the existence of an Aegean ethnic identity which becomes more marked when viewed alongside the pictorial repertoire of Near Eastern and Egyptian art. Finally, Angelos Papadopoulos questions the significance of hermeneutics in the context of the archaeological record, discussing issues of material exchange and the interpretive value of artefact densities in given contexts.

Current research ...

The current state of research on the prehistory of the Eastern Mediterranean demonstrates a growing increase in scholarly engagement with themes of connectivity, materiality, chronological synchronization, ideology, hybridization, interaction, and the technological *chaîne opératoire*. Research activities of note include numerous conferences, and the subsequent publication of their proceedings, major museum exhibitions, international collaborations, and, of course,

ongoing research projects¹. On rare occasions, such activities have been combined, with truly spectacular results. One example of such is the conference and exhibition *Sea Routes... From Sidon to Huelva* held at the Museum of Cycladic Art, Athens (4 June - 26 October 2003). These events were intended to present recent research into interactions across the entire Mediterranean basin and the publication of both the proceedings of this conference and a substantial exhibition catalogue, have served to illustrate clearly the incredibly complex nature of contacts between the peoples of the Mediterranean from the 16th to the 6th century BC (Stampolidis 2003; Stampolidis/Karageorghis 2003). A second, equally illuminating exhibition entitled *Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C.* was subsequently held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (18 November 2008 - 15 March 2009) and, as with *Sea Routes...*, has resulted in the publication of a catalogue which includes fascinating contributions from a number of scholars working in this field of research (Aruz *et alii* 2008).

Several conferences have taken place which focused on very specific themes within Eastern Mediterranean archaeology and attracted both established academics and younger researchers². These conferences were not restricted only to the U.S. and Europe, but were, significantly, held in a number of those countries under study, including Egypt and Lebanon³. Additional recent research has focused on the role and character of 'exotica' (Vianello 2011) and the materiality of connectivity (van Dommelen/Knapp 2010; Maran/Stockhammer 2012) and consumption (Steel 2013). The study of networks and social interaction at multiple scales in the Mediterranean⁴, and occasionally in Continental Europe (Alberti/Sabatini 2013), continues to grow in popularity, with scholars from a variety of regional backgrounds meeting frequently and, it seems, publishing equally quickly. Advances in analytical chemistry, including that of Optical Emission Spectroscopy, together with developments in petrographic study, continue to aid in our understanding of the circulation of goods and the provenance of pottery styles and vessel types⁵. Indeed, although slightly beyond the remit of this volume, several new studies illustrate well the complexity of, and the current interest in, networks and social interaction in the Mediterranean beyond the prehistoric period⁶.

¹ The bibliography for the prehistoric Eastern Mediterranean is immense, and particularly so the list of publications generated by conferences and excavation projects. As a result, this brief overview will focus on research conducted over the past ten years, from 2003 onwards. See Panagiotopoulos 2011 for an overview.

² Antoniadou/Pace 2007; Laffineur/Greco 2005; Bachhuber/Roberts 2009; Mynářová 2011.

³ See BAAL 2009 (for Beirut, Lebanon) and Duistermaat/Regulski 2011 (Cairo, Egypt).

⁴ Clarke 2005; Blake/Knapp 2005; Bell 2006; Monroe 2009; Parkinson/Galaty 2010; Wilkinson *et alii* 2011.

⁵ For example, Haskell *et alii* 2011 (although this volume has a strong focus in the Aegean).

⁶ See, for example, Malkin 2005; Harris 2005; Malkin *et alii* 2009.

The difficulties imposed by the ongoing financial crisis, of which limited funding is only one, albeit major, component, present an uncomfortable backdrop to current archaeological research. However, university departments remain as active as possible and several important studies are in progress. Noteworthy among them is the multileveled *Prehistoric Transculturality in the Eastern Mediterranean*⁷, organized by the University of Heidelberg to examine the circulation of material culture between the societies of 2nd millennium BC in parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa, with various sub-projects focused in greater detail on cultural hybridity, complex interactions, materiality, production and consumption, the ‘second life’ of objects, and ‘artefact biographies’.

The difficult nature of the extremely complex chronologies of the Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean have, naturally, attracted much attention, and have recently formed the focus of two major interdisciplinary projects involving researchers from a number of international institutions and generating several important publications. The first, *The Synchronization of Civilizations in the Eastern Mediterranean in the 2nd millennium BC* (SCIEM 2000) is a special research program of the Austrian Academy of Sciences⁸ focused on the Middle and Late Bronze Age, which has generated, to date, 17 conferences, 19 regional projects, and a substantial corpus of doctoral theses, research monographs, and proceedings.

The second is *Associated Regional Chronologies of the Ancient Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean* (ARCANE), a program of research aimed at “synchronising the third millennium BC regional assemblages of archaeological material in the Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean” through the creation of a reliable relative and absolute chronology⁹. This project subsumes a vast region from the Aegean to Eastern Iran, with members from 28 countries again contributing to a formidable research output of approximately 30 workshops and conferences and some 20 volumes to date.

... and future perspectives

In recent years the archaeology of the prehistoric Eastern Mediterranean has formed the subject of a number of international projects, conferences, and publications that have evolved our understanding of the ideological, technological, social, political, and economic trajectories responsible for shaping the cultures of the region. With Horden and Purcell’s *Corrupting Sea* (Horden/Purcell 2000) reigniting academic interest in Mediterranean cultural dynamics¹⁰, the subject continues to benefit from the interdisciplinary, and interregional, contributions of international scholars willing to conduct research beyond the boundaries of their

⁷ The program is part of the Cluster of Excellence: Asia and Europe in a Global Context, and is entitled D2 Materiality and Practice.

⁸ <http://www.oeaw.ac.at/sciem2000/index.html>.

⁹ <http://www.arcane.uni-tuebingen.de/index.html>.

¹⁰ See Knapp/Blake 2005, 12-13 for a detailed overview.

own primary research focus. The application of modern scientific techniques for provenance studies, technological knowledge, detailed contextual analysis, and, of course, some familiarity with the material culture and political economies of neighbouring lands are considered vital elements of modern scholarship. Indeed, some 74 years after Stanley Casson noted that “Aegean Bronze Age specialists have shut their eyes to everything other than the Aegean” (Casson 1939, 12), it seems that significant steps are being taken to rectify this alleged academic isolation, with archaeologists from various cultural and professional backgrounds meeting regularly and expanding their research activities to include unfamiliar datasets or geographical areas¹¹, allowing a more comprehensive understanding of the wider Eastern Mediterranean and providing opportunity for exciting new interregional studies.

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¹¹ For a discussion over the archaeological practices and their possible socio-political boundaries and limitations, see Papaconstantinou 2007, esp. 87-98.

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