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**Wijngaarden, Gert Jan van**

**From:** Bryn Mawr Classical Review [bmcreview@gmail.com@mcsv148.net] on behalf of Bryn Mawr Classical Review [bmcreview@gmail.com]

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## Bryn Mawr Classical Review

Bryn Mawr Classical Review 2011.05.04

**Eric H. Cline (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Bronze Age Aegean*.  
Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. Pp. xxxiii, 930.  
ISBN 978019536550. \$175.00.**

**Reviewed by Gert Jan van Wijngaarden, University of Amsterdam  
(G.J.M.vanWijngaarden@uva.nl)**

[Authors and titles are listed at the end of the review.]

This volume has made me wonder what exactly the definition of a handbook is. According to the Oxford Advanced Dictionary, it is a small book, giving useful facts. The book under review here certainly does not fit the first part of this definition. It is big, comprising more than 900 pages, with 66 chapters by 61 contributors. I traveled abroad with the book several times and it definitely is not a comfortable companion in economy class airplane seats or on Greek KTEL buses. Fortunately, the book does provide many useful facts, and much more. All of the contributors are renowned scholars and together they treat an impressive range of topics.

The Aegean Bronze Age covers roughly the period from 3100-1050 BC. Research in this field began in 1870, when Heinrich Schliemann went to Hisarlik, now in Turkey, to excavate the site of Troy. In the 140 years which have passed since his pioneering excavations, the Bronze Age has been one of the most active fields within Greek archaeology, itself a discipline of intensive academic research. Bronze Age research has covered all parts of Greece and western Turkey and even beyond the Aegean in the eastern and Central Mediterranean. It is clear that such a rich field of study cannot easily be summarized in one book, not even if it has more than 900 pages. In order to structure the information, the book is subdivided in four parts: Background and Definitions, Chronology and Geography, Thematic Topics and Specific Sites and Regions. These parts are subdivided in sections, each containing a number of individual chapters of roughly equal length (8-13 pages). This structure has resulted in a very versatile book, since the contributors approach the subjects in their own ways and many of them rely heavily on personal experience and conviction. Because of its structure, this book is entirely different from a book with a similar title, the *Cambridge Companion to the Aegean Bronze Age*, which is more thematically organized (C. W. Shelmerdine,

read this book cover to cover and, as stated above, the repetitions in the book, often from a somewhat different perspective, ensure completeness.

The most serious shortcoming of the book is its paucity of figures and maps. Aegean art has produced many impressive objects worthy of reproduction in color. The text by A. P. Chapin (chapter 17) on Aegean frescoes, for which color is crucial for appreciation and understanding, has only two small black-and-white figures of low quality. The chapters on Minoan and Mycenaean pottery (chapters 30, 31), which describe typological sequences of pot shapes and decorations have no pictures at all! Had I not had some knowledge of Aegean pottery, I doubt whether the text would have made much sense to me. The people of the Aegean Bronze Age have produced monumental architecture in addition to a range of more modest structures. They are described in the sections on architecture (chapters 14, 15), but, unfortunately, there are no pictures and plans. Even several descriptions of individual sites, such as Kato Zakro on Crete (chapter 38) and Pylos in Messenia (chapter 51), do not have site plans. A map of the Aegean indicating the location of sites is lacking altogether. The decision by the editor (or the publisher?) to include so few figures, and only in black and white, severely limits the accessibility of the information and diminishes the quality of the book.

Judging from the critical remarks above, one could have the impression that I have a negative opinion on the book. However, the opposite is the case. The majority of the contributions is of excellent quality and I have learned many things. An example is the chapter on "Materials and Industries" by D. Evelyn (chapter 29) who gives a good overview of the development of metalworking and ceramic production. Also of note is Chapter 18 on "State and Society" by D. Nakassis, M. L. Galaty and W. A. Parkinson. They show very clearly the difference between Minoan and Mycenaean palaces in terms of statehood and organization and are able to point to the limitations and possibilities of these palaces as political centers. The real treasure troves of the book are the bibliographies. With a few exceptions, the individual chapters provide ample literature, in some cases covering 5 or 6 pages (in small font). Most of the bibliographies are up to date and will provide the readers with the tools to explore in detail many of the issues raised in this volume.

In short, this handbook is big, but very useful. There are some serious omissions and shortcomings, notably the paucity of good pictures and maps. However, the quality of the contributions and the accompanying bibliographies is such that it will be of great help to anyone interested in the Aegean Bronze Age.

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