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BOOK REVIEW

Materiality and Consumption in the Bronze Age Mediterranean

By Louise Steel (Routledge Studies in Archaeology 7). Pp. xviii + 263, figs. 52, tables 10. Routledge, New York 2013. \$125. ISBN 978-0-415-53734-6 (cloth).

Jorrit M. Kelder

The book under review aims to explore how people in the Bronze Age Mediterranean "interacted within and beyond their communities and how through these interactions they crafted, exchanged, and manipulated objects to create their social and material world" (xv). It does so by focusing on the nature of contact among various selected communities (e.g., ch. 1, esp. ch. 2) and how such contacts affected their behavior and material culture (chs. 3–7). The main points of these chapters are reviewed and compared in chapter 8. Before discussing the various case studies, it is perhaps appropriate to flag briefly a discrepancy between the book's title (which suggests a Mediterranean-wide study) and its actual contents. Steel's study is not about the Mediterranean—it is not even about the eastern Mediterranean. Instead, it targets what could arguably be called the "Greek Horizon": virtually all the case studies concern sites on Cyprus, in the Aegean, and, to a lesser extent, in the Levant. Egypt is mentioned sporadically, whereas Anatolia—where textual evidence from the Karūm period could shed additional light on "international" contacts during the Bronze Age—is largely omitted. The central and western areas of the Mediterranean hardly figure at all.

Despite the somewhat narrow focus, the various studies presented in the book offer a stimulating read concerning the interactions among various communities on Cyprus and in the Aegean. The division of the book into chapters that focus on specific aspects of these interactions greatly adds to the clarity of the arguments. For example, one type of interaction Steel discusses is population

movement in the ancient world (ch. 2), a concept that has been deeply unpopular with archaeologists and historians over the past few decades. While the more recent tendency has been to see even major changes in material culture and/or settlement patterns as changes in indigenous societies, rather than the result of an influx of newcomers, Steel points out that from as early as the Early Bronze Age, larger groups of peoples migrated to new lands to settle in areas that were often surrounded by population groups of a distinctly different cultural background. Ayia Photia in northern Crete, where there is evidence for settlers from the Cyclades in Early Cycladic (EC) I (ca. 2900–2800 B.C.E.), serves as a case study, as does the perhaps better-known Minoan "colony" of Kastri on Kythera. In the latter case, there is clear evidence for interaction between Minoan settlers and the indigenous population. Steel argues that the site may have started out as a port of trade in Early Minoan (EM) I, with far greater exchange between native peoples and Minoans than hitherto thought: rather than simply ousting the local population, the Minoan settlers may in fact have been welcomed by (and married into) local communities (21–2). Regardless of the precise degree and nature of interaction among population groups, it is clear that Minoan culture was dominant from an early stage (EM II) onward. This is particularly apparent when it comes to pottery traditions (both the ways in which pots were made and the ways in which they were used) and religious activity at the nearby Late Minoan (LM) peak sanctuary at Ayios Georgios (although Steel suggests that the small "idiosyncrasies," such as the preference for bronze vs. clay figurines that prevailed on Crete, and fine wares at Ayios Georgios, point to local adaptations or reinvention of Minoan traditions [25–6], the overwhelming impression is that of a thoroughly Minoan cult place).

Although this reviewer was particularly interested in the return of the concept of migrations to archaeological debate, it is clear that the larger part of "international" exchange and contacts between communities did not involve the movement of large groups of people. As Steel notes, "there is clear archaeological and textual evidence for the development of complex maritime (and indeed, overland) trade networks in the East Mediterranean during the Late Bronze Age" (29). Archaeologically, these networks are reflected by the masses of foreign objects found throughout the eastern Mediterranean. Mycenaean pottery is especially notable (both because of its characteristic appearance and because of the quantities in which it is found). While these exports have been the object of much study, the precise mechanisms behind the wide distribution of Mycenaean pottery remain debated, with some taking the view that Cypriot middlemen were primarily responsible for the distribution of Mykenaiika, whereas others argue for a more active involvement of the Mycenaean themselves. Steel notes that, in some cases, it can be reasonably assumed that Mycenaean traders settled abroad. She argues that this may have been the case at Ugarit, where other objects, such as a concentration of Mycenaean figurines, might lend credibility to this idea. Nevertheless, Steel herself notes that these same figurines may also have been "bartered in exchange for other supplies" (145) or exchanged as tokens of friendship between merchants frequenting the port of Ugarit. At other sites, for example on Late Bronze Age Cyprus, Steel argues that there is no reason to suspect actual Mycenaean presence and that the presence of Mycenaean objects may best be interpreted in terms of regular trading contacts and a generalized elite culture (similar to how the spread of the symposium connected the various elites of the first-millennium B.C.E. Mediterranean) (34). The precise role of the exports may also have varied from region to region and through time. There are clear indications that some Mycenaean pots—such as the amphoroid kraters found on Cyprus and the Levant—may have been made specifically for these foreign "markets," suggesting that these vases were seen as commodities, that is, objects of an economic value, rather than exotic objects of great social value.

It is impossible to dwell on each of the numerous case studies presented by Steel in this interesting book. Some studies were, in this reader's opinion, more convincing than others, and a number of them seem less suitable for this particular type of book. For example, the "Mycenaeanization" of Minoan Crete (ch. 3) is still so complex and poorly understood that the (necessarily) brief treatment in this book can hardly do it justice. Similarly, centers such as Enkomi on Cyprus are presented as more or less independent trading centers (13–14), while there is in fact very little clarity or consensus as to the political structure of Late Bronze Age Cyprus. The focus on the Aegean and Cyprus (and, to a lesser extent, the Levant) means that the picture that is presented is almost exclusively based on archaeological data, whereas contemporary sources relevant to the book's subject—such as the Karūm texts mentioned above or Egyptian "tribute" lists—are scarcely mentioned.

This book, in sum, is an interesting read that covers a vast chronological and geographical range (although not as vast as the title suggests) of studies on the interaction of the various peoples of the Bronze Age Aegean, Cyprus, and the Levant. It is well written and clearly structured and—aside from a few less-convincing case studies—succeeds in its aim to show the versatility of early connections

between various regions in the eastern Mediterranean and the ways in which these connections shaped the material and immaterial world of its inhabitants.

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