The 'Mycenaeans' in the south-eastern Aegean revisited

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Chapter 2

Social theory, archaeology and ethnicity

The Mycenaean archaeological evidence from the south-eastern Aegean has been interpreted in different ways. In Chapter 1, the two major interpretive perspectives were discussed: the “colonialist” and the “social constructivist perspective”. It was argued that there is a tendency to think of the population of the south-eastern Aegean in the Late Bronze Age in terms of two opposing social blocs – Mycenaeans on one side and natives or local groups on the other. As noted, this clear-cut distinction is not reflected in the surviving archaeological evidence. In order to transcend this apparent dichotomy and develop new insights about the south-eastern Aegean in the Late Bronze Age in this chapter a different approach based on the production of group identities in tombs will be proposed. The theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this approach, which is referred to as “neo-culture history”, are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 2 is divided into two parts. In part one (sections 2.1 and 2.2), the focus is on the theoretical background of the neo-culture historical approach. Attention will be paid to the complex relationship between group identity and material culture. In the archaeological literature, this connection has often been framed in terms of ethnic descent.\(^1\) Hence, in this part of the chapter, a concise overview of how ethnic identity has been used in archaeology over the years will be given. I will, however, first address the conceptualization of ethnicity in the social sciences, which have had a strong influence on archaeology from the 1960’s onwards.\(^2\) The second part of this chapter (section 2.3) discusses the methodology used in this PhD study. The focus will be on tomb assemblages and how they can be used to study the construction and manipulation of group identities.

2.1.1 Ethnicity: Primordialism and Circumstantialism

\(^1\) Mac Sweeney 2009, 102-4.

\(^2\) It has to be emphasized that there is no consensus regarding the definition of ethnicity (for a recent overview, see Brubaker 2009).
There are two main perspectives on ethnicity in social theory, namely primordialism and circumstantialism, of which the latter is also known as instrumentalism. Scholars working from a primordialist perspective may be characterized as “analysts of naturalizers”. They concentrate on the subjective feelings and ideas of a people, the members of which conceive of ethnicity as an innate (i.e. universal) quality of man, stemming from “the [naturalized] ‘givens’ – or, more precisely, as culture is inevitable involved in such matters, the assumed ‘givens’ – of social existence”. Ethnicity manifests itself in such assumed ‘givens’ as shared descent and (material) culture, of which the latter can relate to something general like a common way of life (see example Fur/Baggara tribes below) or more specific as a shared language or religion. In the academic literature, these cultural similarities are sometimes referred to as ‘cultural stuff’ (cf. archaeological culture in section 2.2.1).

The other conceptualization of ethnicity in social theory is circumstantialism. Rather than as manifested in a variety of inalienable group-specific ‘possessions’ (cf. ‘cultural stuff’), ethnicity is seen as essentially relational in nature. The circumstantialist approach is principally based on F. Barth’s (1969) highly influential introductory essay to the volume “Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: the Social Organization of Culture Difference”. Instead of concentrating on real and/or imaginary intra-group similarities (cf. primordialism and ‘cultural stuff’ above), ethnicity is conceptualized as a social boundary between two or more ethnic groups that marks the differences, which are considered socially relevant by their respective members. There is, however, no simple one-to-one relationship between the markers used to signal an ethnic boundary and the ‘cultural stuff’, which it encloses (see above). The markers are essentially relational in nature, which means that they are established in relation to any contextually present ethnic ‘others’ – and the boundary markers employed by these ‘others’ for similar differentiating purposes. As a consequence, the members of one ethnic group may take different ‘guises’ when confronted with persons from various other ethnic groups. An illustrative citation in this respect is the following by A.P. Cohen (1982):

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5 Geertz 1973, 259-60.
8 Barth 1969, 15.
10 Barth 1969, 14.
People become aware of their culture when they stand at its boundaries: when they encounter other cultures, or when they become aware of other ways of doing things, or merely of contradictions to their own culture.\(^\text{11}\)

Thus, ethnicity is not seen as a self-manifesting cultural property, but rather as a contextually-embedded relational process.\(^\text{12}\) Its essentially social nature means that the conditions for in and/or exclusion are not fixed, but, at least in principle, negotiable. Consider the following example. The western Sudanese Fur and Baggara tribes see themselves as two separate ethnic groups.\(^\text{13}\) Fur can become Baggara by adopting their nomadic way of life. This is what separates Fur from Baggara in everyday life.\(^\text{14}\)

The two perspectives thus emphasize two different aspects of ethnic identity. Primordialism stresses the emotional link between group members. It provides an emic or insider’s view of ethnicity.\(^\text{15}\) Instrumentalism, on the other hand, focuses on the different ways ethnicity is used in everyday life (praxis). The Fur/Baggara example discussed above demonstrates that it may be possible for people to change their ethnic identity, thereby denying its primordial or immutable character. However, despite the social nature of ethnicity, in practice not all markers or conditions of inclusion may be negotiable.\(^\text{16}\) While a lifestyle can be changed (see Fur/Baggara example above), a person’s skin color or age obviously cannot. Instrumentalism also stresses the situational nature of ethnicity. Belongingness to a specific group may only be or become relevant in a limited number of situations. This is called situational ethnicity.\(^\text{17}\) Instrumentalism provides an etic or outsider’s view of ethnicity.\(^\text{18}\)

The two perspectives discussed above are not mutually exclusive, but can be combined. The sociologist R. Brubaker investigates how ethnicity operates in everyday life. He addresses issues such as when and how it becomes relevant to people as a category of identification and how they are influenced by it when ‘inactive’. His work is discussed in the next section.

\(^{11}\) Cohen 1985, 69.
\(^{12}\) Eriksen 2001, 263.
\(^{13}\) Ibidem, 263.
\(^{14}\) Haaland 1969 (see, also, Eriksen 2001, 263).
\(^{15}\) Eriksen 2001, 36-7.
\(^{16}\) Díaz-Andreou/Lucy 2005, 8.
\(^{17}\) Eriksen 2001, 266-7.
\(^{18}\) Ibidem, 36-7.
2.1.2 R. Brubaker and “Beyond Groupism”

Ethnicity can be understood as a group identity. As noted above, it is usually expressed in terms of shared putative descent and (material) culture. In the literature on the subject, ethnicity is often talked about in terms of “ethnic groups”.\(^{19}\) According to R. Brubaker, there is a tendency in the social sciences to take “groups” for granted\(^{20}\) and treat them as self-evident units of social analysis, “to which agency and interests can be attributed”.\(^{21}\) He believes that the frequent use of the term “group” gives the false impression that “groups”, in the sense of discrete collective units, are simply out there. According to Brubaker, however, “groups” have to be invoked through what he calls “group-making projects”.\(^{22}\) The aim of these projects is to transform (ethnic, national, racial) categories into groups by increasing the level of awareness,\(^{23}\) which occurs through the activation of relevant knowledge structures.\(^{24}\) Ethnicity should, therefore, not be seen as a fixed property or entity in the world (cf. primordialism, see section 2.1.2 above), but as a constructed cognitive perspective on the world.\(^{25}\) It enables people to categorize “persons, actions, threats, problems, opportunities, loyalties, interests and so one . . . in ethnic . . . terms”.\(^{26}\) In other words, they do not only represent (passive) but also process information (active).\(^{27}\) This is congruent with P. Bourdieu’s (1969) famous habitus principle,\(^{28}\) which is defined as a system “of durable, transposable dispositions [(a way of being, a habitual state . . . and, in particular, a predisposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination)]”.\(^{29}\) This system represents knowledge and is a generative of action.\(^{30}\)

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\(^{19}\) The same is true for other “groups”, such as nations and races (Brubaker 2002, 164). The relevance or general appeal of ethnic identity (or any other group identity for that matter) in everyday life is ultimately context-dependent and historically-situated.

\(^{20}\) For a criticism on Brubaker, see Jenkins 2008, 9-12.

\(^{21}\) Brubaker 2002, 164.

\(^{22}\) Ibidem, 170-1.

\(^{23}\) Ibidem, 171.


\(^{25}\) Brubaker 2004, 14.

\(^{26}\) Brubaker/Loveman/Stamatov 2004, 36-7.

\(^{27}\) Brubaker/Loveman/Stamatov 2004, 41 (see, also, Wimmer 2008, 975).

\(^{28}\) Brubaker/Loveman/Stamatov 2004, 42.

\(^{29}\) Bourdieu 1977, 214, fn. 1.

\(^{30}\) Ibidem, 72.

\(^{31}\) Ibidem, 78.
Groups may crystallize, for example, in conjunction with violence and other dramatic events (see below). Since “groups” do not constitute a permanent state of being, unless sustained, levels of ethnic awareness decline, causing the “forces of everyday routine” to reassert themselves.

In order to illustrate the process of group-formation, I will briefly pay attention to a case study discussed by Brubaker. In the second half of the 1990’s, he conducted fieldwork in the city of Cluj, which is the main administrative center of the Transylvanian region of Romania. There is a substantial minority – between 14 to 23% of the population – of Hungarians. An incident which temporarily led to heightened levels of groupness – among the Hungarian minority – was an attempt by the mayor of the city, who is of Romanian descent, to prohibit the carrying out of an important ‘Hungarian’ annual celebration. Another example is when the mayor ordered a new plaque installed on the base of a monumental statue of Matthias Corvinus, celebrated king of Hungary during the late 15th century. The new plaque denied his Hungarian roots by emphasizing his (partial) Romanian origin.

The work of Brubaker is mainly based on the study of cases from 19th and 20th Europe and the United States. Nevertheless, I believe that his conception of (ethnic) groups, as temporary manifestations of heightened awareness, can also be helpful when thinking about groups in the past. This will be further discussed in the next two sections.

2.2 Archaeology and ethnicity: an overview

In what follows, a diachronic overview of how archaeologists have approached ethnicity over the years is given. In general, two main approaches can be distinguished. The first one, which is hereafter referred to as the passive mode (see section 2.2.1), may be connected to two prominent schools of thought in archaeology: traditional culture-history (first half of 20th century) and New Archaeology (1950’s and 60’s). The second approach, which is hereafter

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32 A recent example is represented by the so-called 2004 Redfern riots in Sydney, Australia. A 17-year-old Aboriginal boy died under suspicious circumstances. The family claims he was killed in a police pursuit. The police speak of a tragic accident. In any case, the death of the boy led to the gathering of Aboriginal youths from across Sydney to the Redfern area. The situation escalated into a full-scale riot (see, for example, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3491299.stm).
33 Brubaker 2002, 177.
34 Ibidem, 178.
referred to as the *active mode* (see section 2.2.2), can be associated with today’s interpretive archaeology.

### 2.2.1 Passive conceptions of ethnicity in archaeology

In culture-historical archaeology and New Archaeology the relationship between ethnicity and material culture is perceived as unproblematic.\(^{38}\) Ethnic identity, it is assumed, is a social given (cf. primordialism in section 2.1 above) which is passively reflected in the archaeological record. This is clearly illustrated by culture-history’s culture-concept.\(^{39}\) The following definition is derived from V.G. Childe’s 1929 monograph “The Danube in Prehistory”, which is generally considered as an important work in the establishment of the culture-history paradigm in (European) archaeology.\(^{40}\)

“We find certain types of remains – pots, implements, ornaments, burial rites, and house forms – constantly recurring together. Such a complex of associated traits we shall term a ‘cultural group’ or just a ‘culture’. We assume that such a complex is the material expression of what today would be called a ‘people’.”\(^{41}\)

In a later article Childe (1935) stated that “[i]f ethnic be the adjective for people, we may say that prehistoric archaeology has a good hope of establishing an ethnic history of Europe, while a racial one seems hopelessly remote”.\(^{42}\) In other words, archaeological cultures are seen as passive reflections of the behaviors of ethnic groups in the past.\(^{43}\) This idea of culture has been called *normative*. It implies that the people making up an ethnic group have shared beliefs and ideas. These ‘norms’ manifest themselves in a homogenous material culture.\(^{44}\)

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\(^{38}\) Díaz-Andreu/Lucy 2005, 2, 4.

\(^{39}\) Johnson 1999, 16-7.

\(^{40}\) There were other archaeologists before Childe who had been using a similar concept of culture (Jones 1997, 16). In relation to this, mention should be made of the (infamous) German prehistorian G. Kossinna (1911), whose work played an important role in ‘legitimizing’ the expansion politics of the Nazi’s during World War II (Trigger 1980, 25; Jones 2008, 323).

\(^{41}\) Childe 1929, v-vi.

\(^{42}\) Childe 1935, 198-9.

\(^{43}\) Díaz-Andreu/Lucy 2005, 2.

\(^{44}\) Johnson 1999, 16-7 (see, also, Jones 1997, 24; Jones 2008, 325).
An illustration of the use of the concept of the archaeological culture is provided by the work of C. Hawkes (1931) on Iron Age Britain.\footnote{Hawkes 1931 (see, also, Jones 1999, 29-39).} He identified three archaeological cultures which succeeded each other in the material record: Iron Age A, Iron Age B and Iron Age C. The definition of Iron Age A was, for example, based on Halstatt-style material culture and Iron Age B on La Tène-style material culture. According to Hawkes, the succession of archaeological cultures showed that there had been three waves of migrations from the European continent: Celts (Iron Age A) (6\textsuperscript{th} century BC), the La Tène-people from Spain (Iron Age B) (early 4\textsuperscript{th} century BC) and Belgic tribesmen from northern Gaul (Iron Age C) (late 1\textsuperscript{st} century BC). It was commonplace in culture-historical archaeology to explain cultural change as the result of external influences, either through the movement of peoples (migration) or contact with other groups (diffusion of ideas).\footnote{Johnson 1999, 17-8.} Thus, Hawkes believed that the Iron Age A people (Celts) were absorbed and/or driven out by the Iron Age B people (La Tène-people), who superseded their settlements.\footnote{Hawkes 1931, 77.}

From the middle of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the culture-historical paradigm was gradually replaced by the New Archaeology or processual archaeology.\footnote{Johnson 1999, 20; Díaz-Andreu/Lucy 2005, 4.} This research tradition, which was developed in the Anglo-Saxon world, wanted to turn archaeology from a non-explanatory field of study, based on the description of archaeological cultures (see above), into a ‘real’ science with its own research agenda and scientific tools.\footnote{Johnson 1999, 24-5.} One of the paradigm’s most important methodological instruments is its definition of society, which was conceived of as an integrated socio-cultural system in balance with the external environment.\footnote{Johnson 1999, 24; Díaz-Andreu/Lucy 2005, 4.} A society had a number of inter-related sub-subsystems, such as economy, technology and social organization. These parts interacted with each other in response to external stimuli. One of the advantages of system’s theory is that it allowed for the development of more complex ideas to account for cultural change. In the culture-historical tradition, it was commonplace to explain change by referring to external influences, either through the migration of peoples or the diffusion of new ideas through contact with other groups.\footnote{Johnson 1999, 17-8.} A similar explanation (movement
of peoples) was proposed by Hawkes to account for the spread of the Iron Age material culture traditions of continental Europe to Britain (see above).\(^\text{52}\)

A good example to illustrate the use of system’s theory in archaeology is provided by the explanation offered by archaeologists to account for a number of developments which took place at Chaco Canyon in the north-west of New Mexico in the period of 700-800 AD.\(^\text{53}\) During this period, there is an upsurge in the construction of ceremonial monuments. Parallel to this, a transition from pit-houses to stone pueblos (large masonry buildings) has been observed. Archaeologists believe that these developments are indicative of an increasing level of social complexity. At the time of these the climate at Chaco was getting drier (external stimulus). As a consequence of this, the region’s economy was transformed from a system based on rainfall into one that relied on crop irrigation (change in economic sub-system). A social élite was developed in order to coordinate the work force which was needed to keep these systems running (change in social organization).\(^\text{54}\)

In processual archaeology, material culture is interpreted in relation to the socio-cultural system. The functions of artifacts are defined on the basis of their functional roles in maintaining the equilibrium with the external environment (see above). Material culture is seen as man’s extra-somatic means of adaptation.\(^\text{55}\) According to L.R. Binford, who was one of the leading figures in New Archaeology, artifacts can be subdivided into three functional classes: technomic, socio-technic and ideo-technic.\(^\text{56}\) Cross-cutting these formal classes are what Binford describes as “formal characteristics which can be termed stylistic”.\(^\text{57}\) He believes that style can best be understood in relation to ethnic origin. The role of these formal stylistic attributes within the socio-cultural system is to promote group cohesion and solidarity.\(^\text{58}\) A different view on style was developed by J.R. Sackett. According to him, artifacts can be regarded from two contrasting, but fully complementary, points of view. The first one is functionality. Questions addressed include how is an object used, what ends does it serve and “how [does] it behave as an integral part of the cultural system”.\(^\text{59}\) The second point of view is style, which relates to an object’s design and form. Sackett regards style as the product of a series of specific choices made by a people from an enormous broad spectrum of

\(^{52}\) Jones 1997, 29-30.

\(^{53}\) Johnson 1999, 76-7 (see, also, Wills/Dorshow 2012).

\(^{54}\) Johnson 1999, 76-7.

\(^{55}\) Binford 1964, 444; Johnson 1999, 22.

\(^{56}\) Binford 1962, 219-20.

\(^{57}\) Ibidem, 220.

\(^{58}\) Ibidem, 220.

\(^{59}\) Sackett 1977, 370.
other formal possibilities. In other words, there are other ways of achieving a similar result. This makes the decisions made by a certain people to produce something in a certain way contingent on local or context-determined circumstances. Because these choices are socially transmitted, Sackett sees degree of similarity in style in different historically related loci or contexts as indicative of the intensity of social interaction between groups. Similarity in style is, therefore, seen as an index of ethnic similarity and difference.\textsuperscript{60}

Despite the many differences, in processual archaeology a similar conception of ethnicity as in the culture-historical tradition is used.\textsuperscript{61} As is clear from the above, both approaches conceive of ethnicity as a self-manifesting social given, which is passively reflected in the archaeological record. This is similar to the primordialist view of ethnicity, which has been treated in section 2.1 above. This perspective also presumes that there is a (real or socially constructed) relation between ethnic identity and a group’s ‘cultural stuff’, which are essentially seen as the self-manifesting ‘products’ of ethnicity. The only difference between the two archaeological approaches is that in contrast to culture-history, where the particular focus is on complexes or assemblages of material traits, the new archaeological perspective concentrated on style as the natural ‘carrier’ of ethnic identity.

\textbf{2.2.2 Active conceptions of ethnicity in archaeology}

The second mode of thinking is characterized by an active archaeological conceptualization of ethnicity. It can be viewed in conjunction with today’s interpretative school of thought in the discipline.\textsuperscript{62} An important difference with the two approaches discussed in section 2.2.1 above is the relative position of the social agent or actor.\textsuperscript{63} As noted above, one of New Archaeology’s main methodological instruments is the socio-cultural system. Within system’s theory, the only role people have is to perform the duties or tasks which are required to maintain the equilibrium with the external environment. Hence, they actively contribute in reproducing the socio-cultural system.\textsuperscript{64} Human behavior is thus seen as teleological in

\textsuperscript{60} Ibidem, 371 (see, also, Jones 1997, 111-2).
\textsuperscript{61} Jones 1997, 107-8; Díaz-Andreu/Lucy 2005, 2, 4.
\textsuperscript{63} Díaz-Andreu/Lucy 2005, 5-6.
\textsuperscript{64} Johnson 1999, 104.
nature.\textsuperscript{65} In today’s interpretative school of thought, on the other hand, people are believed to have had a more active and constitutive role in society. Within the structures of society, they act and behave in accordance with their own interests, motivations, emotions, etc. They posses what is called agency.\textsuperscript{66}

The active role of agents is also apparent in the way material culture is conceived. As noted above, in processual archaeology material culture is seen as man’s extra-somatic means of adaptation.\textsuperscript{67} In today’s interpretative school of thought, the archaeological evidence is perceived as principally “meaningfully constituted”.\textsuperscript{68} These meanings are conferred upon the material remains through the behavior of past social agents. Meanings may be deduced from the archaeological evidence by paying attention to contextual associations.\textsuperscript{69} Consider the following example, which is derived from M. Johnson’s 1999 monograph “Archaeology Theory – An Introduction”.\textsuperscript{70} Johnson discusses different meanings an axe might have depending on the context in which it is found. The meaning of an axe inside a grave is, for example, dependent on the person it is buried with (male, female, child, etc.) and any other burial gifts with which it is associated (e.g. weapons, jewelry, ceramic containers, etc.). The same object can appear with different assemblages in other graves from the same cemetery. Moreover, it is also possible for an axe to be found on the floor of a house (part of an inventory) or in a rubbish pit (together with other discarded remains). In all of these cases, the meaning of the object is contextually constituted. The next step is to interpret the ‘clues’ left in the material record in terms of the significances behind the objects and associations. Did the axe belong to the deceased (personal possession), did it have a symbolic significance (for example as a sign of masculinity) or was it intended for use in the afterlife? The answers to these questions may not be immediately obvious. The extent to which it is possible to provide satisfying answers is dependent on a number of factors, such as the size of the data set, the availability of evidence from other sources (e.g. historical texts and visual representations), but also the creativity of the interpreting archaeologist. In the end, it should be remembered that there is always more than one perspective. Funeral ceremonies may, for example, be attended by family members, kin’s men, people from the same or neighboring villages,

\textsuperscript{65} Ibidem, 142.
\textsuperscript{66} Dobres/Robb 2000, 4-17 (see, also, Johnson 1999, 5; Díaz-Andreu/Lucy 2005, 5).
\textsuperscript{67} Binford 1964, 440; Johnson 1999, 22.
\textsuperscript{68} Hodder/Hutson 2003, 1-2.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibidem, 162-87.
\textsuperscript{70} Johnson 1999, 107.
political allies, enemies, etc. These persons look at and perceive of the rituals performed in their own distinctive way. In that sense, the perspective of the modern interpreting archaeologist can be seen as yet another way of looking. The evidence can be interpreted in different ways, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but complement each other.

How do these observations affect the conceptualization of ethnicity in archaeology? A groundbreaking book in this respect is I.R. Hodder’s “Symbols in Action” (1982). This study was based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted by him in the Lake Baringo area of Kenya. He showed that the tribes studied by him only employed certain features of material culture to express their distinctiveness vis-à-vis each other. A good indicator, for example, is represented by female ear decorations. Other features of material culture, such as ceramic pots and tools, had a more diffuse pattern of distribution associated with them, not following the (geographic) boundaries separating the individual tribes from each other. The implication of Hodder’s work is that it cannot be assumed that the distribution of archaeological cultures coincides with the habitats of distinctive ethnic groups. Which traits – if any – are used to express ethnic distinctiveness is dependent on interactions between groups. In other words, its meaning is context dependent and socially constituted. These insights are clearly related to Barth concept of the ethnic boundary discussed in section 2.1 above. In the next section, I will pay attention to how the insights gained by Hodder’s work have influenced the study of ethnicity in archaeology in recent years. In the last two decades, numerous case studies and volumes have been published. In section 2.2.3, the focus is on the work of S. Jones (1997), who has had an important influence on the field of ethnic studies in contemporary archaeology. The criticism by the ancient historian J.M. Hall (1999) will also be discussed.

2.2.3 The archaeology of ethnic boundaries

As is clear from the previous two paragraphs, although there have been a number of major transformations in archaeology, these have had only a limited effect on the conceptualization of ethnicity in the discipline. A groundbreaking book in this respect is Hodder’s “Symbols in Action” (1982), which, as noted above, made evident that distribution patterns of material culture (archaeological cultures) need not coincide with the habitats of distinctive ethnic groups. What matters is how objects are used in everyday life. While some items clearly were

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ethnically-laden, others were not. As a result, identities should not be seen as passively reflected in the archaeological record, but as actively constructed by actors in relation to each other.

Hodder’s work was, however, carried out in the ethnographic present (Lake Baringo area of Kenya). S. Jones is one of the first scholars who developed a methodology based on this practical turn in archaeology aimed at studying the expression of ethnic identity in the material record. The methodological-interpretative framework proposed by her in the book “Archaeology of Ethnicity: constructing identities in the past and present” (1997) is called “multidimensional ethnicity”. The approach is strongly influenced by Bourdieu’s habitus principle (see section 2.1.2 above) and Barth’s concept of the ethnic boundary (see section 2.1.1 above).

In Jones’ book a number of principle guidelines are proposed that can be used to recognize ethnic boundaries, or rather the active markers associated with them, in the archaeological record. Since ethnic boundaries are the principal means through which ethnic distinctiveness is expressed, the focus should be on what Jones calls the “objectification of cultural difference”. This is what happens when persons with different habituses meet in contexts in which ethnicity plays an important role in structuring the relations between groups. The archaeological correlates of such inter-ethnic encounters – what Jones calls “manifestations of ethnicity” – may be recognized in the material record by paying attention to ‘untidy’ distribution patterns “disrupt[ing] regular spatio-temporal stylistic patterning”. This also highlights the main difference between Jones’ approach and the earlier culture-historical and processual archaeology paradigms (see section 2.2.1 above). It is the study of regular spatio-temporal patterning (see above), through the definition of stylistically homogeneous cultures, which is central to culture-historical archaeology (see section 2.2.1 above). In processual or New Archaeology, a similar conception of ethnicity, as manifested in formal stylistic traits cross-cutting the different, functionally-explained, categories of artifacts is used (see section 2.2.1 above). According to Jones, by focusing on shared elements in material culture, there is a tendency to overlook variation (‘untidy’ distribution patterns disrupting regular spatio-temporal stylistic patterning) which she believes should be central to

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74 Jones 1997, 84-105.
75 Ibidem, 88-92.
76 Ibidem, 59-60.
77 Ibidem, 96.
78 Ibidem, 97.
79 Ibidem, 129.
The book includes one case study which Jones uses to illustrate the potential of the approach developed by her. She focuses on a number of settlements in south-east Britain in the period from about 100 BC to 200 AD. During this period, an increasing influence of Roman (material) culture is apparent in the archaeological record, which is seen as the result of the area being incorporated into the Roman Empire (cf. Romanization). According to Jones, the analysis of early Roman Britain was and still is strongly influenced by culture-historical archaeology. This is, for example, reflected in the common use of such categories as “Roman” or “native” to order the material remains. In this way, the archaeological record is being represented as constituted by different, spatially-separated, cultural traditions, which are seen as the material ‘residues’ of well-defined populations with readily distinct identities (Romans versus natives). As is clear from the primordialist-instrumentalist debate in the social sciences (see section 2.1 above), as well as from the ethnographic fieldwork conducted by Hodder in the Lake Baringo area of Kenya (see section 2.2.2 above), objects do not passively reflect identities, but may be involved in the practices through which people express their identities in different social contexts. Thus, according to Jones, in order to study identity in the archaeological record it is necessary to let go of the social and cultural group as the primary unit of analysis (cf. Romans and natives) and adopt a contextual approach. It is through the comparative study of contexts and the archaeological assemblages associated with them that we can learn more about how material culture was used to construct and manipulate identities in the past. In her book, Jones defined a number of contexts or ‘locales’ for investigating the expression of identity in Early Roman Britain: rural settlements, nucleated settlements, military forts, extra-mural settlements and burial sites or cemeteries. One of the elements of material culture discussed by Jones is architecture. It is demonstrated that at the different sites investigated by her changes in architectural style occur at different times and take different forms. For example, while in some settlements Roman building styles are adapted (e.g. masonry construction and villa-style architecture), there are other sites that do
not show an equivalent transition, maintaining pre-Roman building traditions instead. There are also many variations distinguishable in the pottery assemblages from the different sites. This concerns the relative proportions of imported pottery, local copies and ‘native’ products. Jones interprets these variations as an indication that there were different identities being expressed by the populations at the different sites. Some of these identities might be site-specific, such as the use of Roman-style architecture, through which the people employing it may have attempted to associate themselves with a broad Roman identity, while others, such as particular styles of pottery or burial customs, may be shared on a more regional basis serving to reproduce what Jones calls “regional ethnicities”.

To sum up, Jones’ model of multidimensional ethnicity may be used to demonstrate, or make plausible, that certain traits of material culture were employed to signal differences between groups. A major difficulty is, however, the interpretation of these traits as ‘emblems’ or ‘carriers’ of ethnic distinctiveness. What kinds of differences are being objectified? The answer to this question may not be immediately obvious. Jones concludes that “ethnicity, amongst other factors, may disrupt regular spatio-temporal stylistic patterning” (italics not in original). It is hardly surprising that the model of multidimensional ethnicity cannot ‘escape’ from the materially-biased and multi-interpretable nature of the archaeological evidence (see section 2.2.2 above). One of the circumstances hindering a straightforward ethnic interpretation of the evidence is that, as noted by J.M. Hall, the active signaling of social boundaries is not a practice that is definitionally limited to ethnic groups. In other words, there is nothing definitionally ‘ethnic’ about the marking of social boundaries in the social world or the occurring of identity-laden patterns in the material record. Similar practices may also be observed among other self-conscious identity groups, such as religious, social status and political groups. However, it should be stressed that ethnicity is often intermeshed with other aspects of identity or social belonging, such as age, gender, status and religion.

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86 Ibidem, 132.
87 Ibidem, 133.
88 Ibidem, 134.
89 Hall 2002, 22, fn. 65.
90 Jones 1997, 129.
91 A similar point is made by N.M. Sweeney in the article “Beyond Ethnicity: The Overlooked Diversity of Group Identities” (2009). In this article, she argues that the archaeological debate on identity has been dominated by ethnicity. According to Sweeney, this has led to a neglect of other ‘socially-binding’ group (e.g. regional, landscape and political) identities in archaeological interpretation.
93 Hall 1997, 137-8.
94 Eriksen 2001, 269-71 (see, also, Jones 1997, 135; Lucy 2005, 100).
Another difficulty is the material nature of the archaeological evidence. As noted in section 2.1.1 above, members of an ethnic group usually claim descent from a common ancestor. Even though material culture could have been used to express real and/or imagined kinship relations, it is argued by Hall that without any written evidence, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to demonstrate that a single or a collection of cultural trait(s) was employed to mark an ethnic boundary in the past.95

On the above grounds, Hall draws the conclusion that “there can be no archaeology of ethnicity among societies who have left us no [written] record”.96 Although disappointing from an archaeological point of view, his criticism is valid and makes clear that interpretation in archaeology has many seemingly unbridgeable difficulties associated with it. Nevertheless, there are other ways of studying ethnic groups or rather “groups” in general in the archaeological record. The method developed here, which is henceforth referred to as neo culture-history, is described in section 2.3 below.

### 2.3 Neo culture-history and the Archaeology of “Groups”

It is not the aim of this study to identify traits which may or may not have been used by social agents to ‘label’ ethnic boundaries in the past. The approach used in this research focuses on what can be called the contextual production of groups. As indicated in the previous sections, the archaeological record should not be seen as constituted by monolithic cultures representing the behaviors of past ethnic groups. Ethnicity can offer only a partial explanation for the patterns and variability observed in the material record. One of the reasons for this is that even though everyday behavior might be influenced – or even structured – by it, through a person’s habitus or cognitive knowledge structures (see section 2.1.2 above), ethnic identity is only actively expressed in a limited number of social contexts. What characterizes these contexts is that the activities which are contingent on them lead to temporary heightened or elevated levels of ethnic awareness and group cohesion. Within these contexts, ethnic categories are temporarily transformed into discrete groups or entities. This idea is based on Brubaker’s notion of group making as a project (see section 2.1.2 above). Although it was

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95 Hall 2002, 142, 182.
96 Ibidem, 24.
developed in connection with fieldwork conducted by him in contemporary settings, such as in the Romanian city of Cluj, I believe that thinking about ‘groupness’ as a contextualized event or state of being can also lead to new insights about groups in the past.

The first step in translating the concept of ‘groupism’ to archaeology is by defining a range of contexts which can readily be identified in the archaeological record and might be capable of attracting large numbers of similarly-minded persons. In this PhD study, the focus is on the manifestation of groups in tombs. Another type of context which may be fruitfully studied from the perspective adopted here is represented by religious or cultic sites, such as temples and (open air) sanctuaries. Prior to discussing the neo-culture historical methodology used in this research, attention is given to (theoretical) developments in funerary archaeology. This serves to provide a historical overview of the different ways tombs have been approached in archaeology and to show how the methodology developed here is related to current debates in the discipline. Attention is paid to how this important topic has been addressed in the different archaeological paradigms: culture-history, New Archaeology and post-processual or interpretative archaeology.

In culture-historical archaeology, the focus is on the describing of burial gifts and tomb types. As noted in section 2.2.1 above, these are among the criteria used to define archaeological cultures – or by extension cultural entities or ethnic peoples. 97 Culture-history focused on the burial as an “object”. 98 New Archaeologists looked at tombs in a different way. According to them, the study of ancient burials could lead to deeper insights about a society’s social organization. 99 Social complexity constitutes an important part of the socio-cultural system (see section 2.2.2 above). Binford believed that the tomb and the burial rites performed were aimed at reproducing the social persona of the deceased. The social persona is defined as “the composite of the social identities maintained in life and recognized as appropriate for consideration at death”. 100 According to Binford, the most commonly recognized classes or dimensions of the social persona are age, sex, social status, conditions of death, location of death and social affiliation. 101 In this way, the artifacts recovered were seen as faithfully reflecting “aspects of a living society”. 102 The same ideas were applied to

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97 Brown 2008, 301 (see, also, Chapman/Randsborg 1981, 3-4).
98 Laneri 2008, 1.
99 Laneri 2008, 1; Robb 2008, 303; Chapman 2013, 49.
100 Binford 1971, 17.
101 Ibidem, 17.
102 Hodder 1982, 152.
the (spatial) organization of cemeteries. Divisions or clusters were seen as representing groups in society.¹⁰³

The interpretative school of thought in archaeology (see section 2.2.2 above), however, rejects the notion that there is, by definition, a close correspondence between tomb and social structure. This is related to the criticism which has been raised against New Archaeology in general and, in particular, its way of conceiving of society as a self-reproducing socio-cultural system (including its social organization) (see section 2.2.2 above). Tombs and rituals are meaningfully constituted. By virtue of the active agent, however, it is not necessary for these meanings to coincide with the (experienced) realities of everyday life. Another dimension which is likely to be involved is represented by a group’s attitudes to death, which may be expressed in the performance or enactment of specific rituals, the treatment of the dead and the deposition of particular objects with the deceased. Medieval ‘Christian’ burials are illustrative of how attitudes to death can influence the material constitution of tombs. It is commonplace in ‘Christian’ burial practice to be buried in a shroud and/or coffin without accompanying burial gifts.¹⁰⁴ The ‘possessionlessness’ of dead bodies can be seen as an expression of the idea that “the dead had moved away from an earthly world separated by gender and class to a paradise without these constraints”.¹⁰⁵ Thus, it is possible for social relations to be inverted or distorted through mortuary practices. As a result, the funerary record need not passively reflect the social realities of everyday life. It is a consciously constituted record; a social arena in which social relations are actively manipulated with reference to people’s perceptions, beliefs, ideas, etc.¹⁰⁶

The task of archaeologists to ‘translate’ the objects found within tombs to past human practices and interpret them in terms of the different meanings expressed is far from obvious.¹⁰⁷ The ‘messages’ embodied in the archaeological record are often difficult to comprehend, especially among societies that have left us no written record. In this light also consider the reservations expressed by Hall (see section 2.2.3 above) towards interpreting material culture in strictly ethnic terms. As stressed by him, ethnicity, if socially relevant, may be articulated in a variety of different cultural ‘media’, only one which is material culture. Again it is important to stress that multiple interpretations can exist side-by-side. Past events,

¹⁰³ Chapman 2013, 50.
¹⁰⁴ Similar practices can be observed in burials in the Islamic World, in which it is also uncommon for the dead to be accompanied with burial gifts (Petersen 2013, 242, 245).
¹⁰⁵ O’Sullivan 2013, 264-5.
¹⁰⁶ Parker Pearson 2003, 32-3; Chapman 2013, 52-3; Ekengren 2013, 174-5.
such as funerals, could be attended by a variety of people, including persons belonging to
different age groups (children, adults and elderly), sexes (male and female), occupations,
religions and ethnicities. These people saw the events with different ‘eyes’. As noted above,
in this light, the archaeological perspective can be seen as yet another set of ‘eyes’ (see
section 2.2.2 above). Besides our own preconceptions and theoretical inclinations, these
‘eyes’ are also influenced by a number of practical issues, such as the standard of excavation
and recording, the robbing of tombs and the often poor preservation of certain materials (e.g.
wood, clothing, bone and metal).

The approach adopted in this research is inspired by the post-processual or
interpretative school of thought in archaeology. The main premise of this study is that the
funerary record is to be seen as a consciously constituted record. As such, and based on the
theoretical framework discussed in section 2.1.2 above, tombs are considered as suitable
arenas for studying the expression of group identities. The passing away of a group member
may be conceptualized as a situation or an event which often resulted in the gathering of a
potentially large group of mourners. The ceremonies performed in conjunction with it may be conceived as a kind of ‘group-making-project’. The
burial of the deceased in a tomb usually constitutes part of a sequence of events. It is possible
for the dead body to be presented in the house of his/her family. Subsequently, the deceased is
carried on a bier to the cemetery, which may be accompanied by a funeral procession. In
and/or outside the tomb, various ceremonies are performed: the corpse is inhumed or
cremated and burial gifts are placed by its side (e.g. jewelry, incense, food stuffs, etc.). These
and other individual and/or group-based rituals probably happened in accordance with
specific, often strongly controlled, cultural values and beliefs, which are usually related to the
common group identity of the people involved. The ceremonies performed serve a variety
of functions. From the perspective of the deceased, he/she is given a proper funeral, thereby
‘securing’ a safe passage to the hereafter. In this way, the dead were prevented from haunting
the community of the living. The group members present are able to mourn together and
through the rituals performed “reassert the ties that have been weakened by the loss of one
member, and to restore continuity and unity, i.e. the collective identity”. In addition to this,
these group-based activities may also serve to express any socially relevant differences (e.g.

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109 For Mycenaean Greece, see, for example, Georgiadis 2003, 61-3; Burns 2010b, 182-5.
110 Robb 2008, 289.
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ethnicity, social status, religion, treatment of the dead, etc.) to any ‘outsiders’ present (cf. Barth’s concept of ethnic boundaries in section 2.1.1 above).\footnote{Baumann 1992, 99.}

In this research, the focus is on the material ‘residues’ of these group-based activities. These ‘residues’ are what is left in the funerary record of the ceremonies performed. It is not the aim of this study to develop concrete ideas about the activities in which the objects recovered were involved. The focus of this research is on the relations between the objects found inside a particular tomb. The term “objects” is used here to refer to both items of material culture, such as pottery, and human bone material. This whole complex (tomb context, items of material culture and human bone material) constitutes what in this study is called the “tomb” or “funerary assemblage”. These assemblages represent the primary unit of analysis of this PhD study.

One of the premises of this research is that if material culture is used to express group identities, this should manifest itself archaeologically in differently constituted tomb assemblages. An assemblage type is defined on the basis of a number of characteristic traits, which are either objects often (positive) or hardly ever appearing together (negative). For example, it is possible for some vessel forms to (almost) only occur in combination with each other.\footnote{On the Greek mainland, this is for example the case with the large piriform jar and the kylix with high-swung handles (Chapter 3).} It is important to stress that the relations have to be structural. This means that similar patterns of association (positive or negative) should be observed in a number of different tomb contexts in the same cemetery. In other words, every assemblage type is defined on the basis of its own internal structural relations. Besides material traits of which the purpose is to mark the differences between groups (see above), there may also be specific traits cross-cutting the different types of assemblages. Features which can appear in a large number of tombs in the same cemetery are, for example, the tomb type and the treatment of the dead.\footnote{In the south-eastern Aegean, there is a link between the use of chamber tombs, inhumation burials and the deposition of unguent containers (small piriform jars and stirrup jars) (Chapter 5).}

Hence, tomb assemblages are constituted or informed by two different types of relations. “Relations of difference” are used to distinguish assemblages from each other. It is through the identification of these relations that it can be made plausible that material culture was used to express different group identities. This may be seen in connection with what

\footnote{Baumann 1992, 99.}
\footnote{On the Greek mainland, this is for example the case with the large piriform jar and the kylix with high-swung handles (Chapter 3).}
\footnote{In the south-eastern Aegean, there is a link between the use of chamber tombs, inhumation burials and the deposition of unguent containers (small piriform jars and stirrup jars) (Chapter 5).}
Jones’ calls “the objectification of cultural difference” (see section 2.2.3 above). She, however, explains it in relation to the construction of ethnicity by the ‘juxtapositioning’ of different cultural traditions. I do not see the different assemblage types as the manifestation of different ethnic identities. Which differences are being expressed, may they be of an ethnic, a religious, an economical or a political nature, is ultimately dependent on local circumstances. No generalizations can be made here. The second type of relation constituting the tomb assemblages is represented by “relations of similarity”, which emphasize the similarities between the different types of assemblages. They can be seen as the manifestation of the communal character or background of the different social groups whose dead are buried in a particular cemetery. Since ethnicity relates to shared feelings of belongingness (see section 2.1 above), it is tentative to see “the relations similarity” as a possible way of expressing this sentiment of social belonging in the funerary record.

The approach described above can be used on different scales or levels. It is possible to develop insights about the different group identities expressed on a site-specific level. The same analysis can, however, also be repeated on a regional and inter-regional basis. By comparing the assemblage types from different cemeteries in terms of their constituting relations of difference and similarity (see above), it is possible to address the social connectivity between areas, which is a good indicator for interactions between groups and possibly the movement of ideas and/or people. In this PhD study, a comparison will be made between group identities expressed in tombs on the Greek mainland on the one hand and the south-eastern Aegean on the other. The individual regions are considered in Chapter 3 and Chapter 5, respectively. The inter-regional comparison is made in Chapter 6.

A final point of attention is the name given to the approach developed here, which I coined “neo culture-history”. The main reason is that similar to ‘traditional’ culture-history, which was discussed in section 2.2.1 above, emphasis is placed on patterns of similarity and difference in the archaeological record and the definition of complexes of associated material traits. An important criticism against ‘traditional’ culture-historical archaeology is that while on a conceptual basis archaeological cultures were defined as assemblages composed of a variety of different types of artifacts (see definition by Childe in section 2.2.1 above), in praxis, their identification was often based on only a few archaeological indicators. An illustrative example is Childe’s discussion of Iron Age cultures in Britain. Immigrant peoples

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115 Jones 1997, 96.
were identified by him on the basis of fine ware pottery styles alone. For example, the
discovery of ‘haematite’ pottery at a number of sites was regarded by Childe as indicative of
the presence of ‘Jogassian’ immigrants (late Halstatt culture of north-eastern France).117 This
introduces another point of criticism which is often raised against ‘traditional’ culture-history;
the tendency to equate cultures with ethnic groups (see section 2.2.1 above). The problem is,
however, that ethnicity cannot be seen as the primary variable structuring variation in the
archaeological record, because it is not primordial or simply ‘out there’, but only comes into
play in a limited number of social contexts. Moreover, as pointed out by Jones and others (see
section 2.2.3 above) the social landscape should not be regarded as composed of a large
number of monolithic cultural blocs. Groups, as argued by Brubaker (see section 2.1.2 above),
can best be seen as temporary manifestations of increased awareness.

The problems associated with ‘traditional’ culture-history have been resolved by the
approach developed here because the focus of research is directed to the ‘locale’ in which
group identities are actively expressed. As noted above, in this study, attention is mainly paid
to tomb contexts. In addition, in Chapter 4, a comparison is made between tomb and
settlement contexts in order to show that the former deviates from the latter, which can be
seen as evidence that the funerary record (at least in this case) is a consciously meaningfully
constituted record. The other problem, of developing definitions on the basis of single traits
only, is avoided by making the definition of assemblage types dependent on their internal
structural relations. In other words, there are multiple variables involved. As noted above, it is
necessary for the relations between objects to be structural. The premise is that if material
culture is used to express different group identities, this will manifest itself archaeologically
in differently constituted tomb assemblages, which differ from each other through their
“relations of difference” and are similar to each other through their “relations of similarity”.
In the next chapter, the neo culture-historical approach developed in this chapter will be
applied to the archaeological record of Late Bronze Age Greece.

117 Childe 1940, 204-6 (see, also, Jones 1997, 30).