BOOK REVIEWS

Kelder, Jorrit M. and Waal, Willemijn J. I. *From 'Lugal.Gal' to 'Wanax' Kingship and Political Organisation in the Late Bronze Age Aegean.* Leiden, Sidestone: 2019. 160 pp. ISBN 978-90-8890-798-2 (softcover); 978-90-8890-800-2 (hardcover); 978-90-8890-799-9 (e-book). Price € 25.00 (softcover), € 75.00 (hardcover), € 9,95 (e-book). Review by *Federico Giusfredi.*

The book under review contains a selection of the papers presented at the workshop "From LUGAL.GAL to Wanax," which took place in Leiden in October 2016. According to the foreword by the editors, the goal of the event was to "address the much-debated problem of the political organization in Mycenaean Greece" (p. 7). The book, however, is more than this, as it also contributes to the ongoing discussion about the problem of the (perceived or actual) role of the Mycenaeans as neighbors or even members of the Bronze Age Anatolian (and more generally Ancient Near Eastern) world. The book is a pleasant and informative read. It is generally very well written, and, for a multi-authored work, it exhibits some consistency, even though several of the views presented by the different contributors necessarily contradict each other, at least in part.

I will now comment on the single chapters separately, in the order in which they appear.

In her *'My brother, a Great King, my peer'. Evidence for a Mycenaean kingdom from Hittite texts*, W. Waal kicks off by immediately tackling one of the most problematic and debated problems in Anatolian studies, that of the meaning and significance of the relationship between the Hittite kingdom and what the Hittite kings refer to by the name of *Ahhiyawa* (also *Ahhiya*, henceforth "A."). Waal's chapter is a solid piece of scholarship, and it has the merit of presenting the corpus of evidence in a clear and exhaustive fashion. Waal makes several sensible observations and, as is the case with every highly debated topic, the choice to agree or disagree with her conclusions will depend on how individual scholars rate the significance of the different pieces of evidence. The only point that, in my opinion, objectively requires revision is the attempt to assess the size and significance of the corpus (p. 22) of texts that mention A. In order to prove that the evidence is not as negligible as some scholars would have it, the author compares the number of "A. texts" with the number of documents mentioning the names of Assyria, Babylonia, Mittani, and Egypt. While the figures are reliable, it is evident that the high significance of the contacts between, for instance, the Hittites and the Mesopotamian world is illustrated not only by the number of occurrences of the names of a small group of selected polities (why are Hanigalbat and Kizzuwatna not included?) but also by the reference to areal and cultural designations (why is Hurri not counted?), by the presence of a large number of Akkadian and Hurrian texts from the archives of Hatti, and by the enormous influence that Anatolia and Mesopotamia had exerted on each other in terms of political jargon, administrative culture, religion, and literature ever since the Middle Bronze Age. In general, the impression is that the discussion about the significance of Hittite-Mycenaean contacts is far from concluded and will continue in the years to come, hopefully with other papers as comprehensive as Waal's on both sides of the scholarly barricade.

O. Dickinson's chapter (*What conclusions might be drawn from the archaeology of Mycenaean civilisation about political structure in the Aegean?*) is, in my opinion, the strongest piece in the collection under discussion. With a balanced and unbiased attitude, the author carefully reviews the archaeological evidence available for different stages of Mycenaean history and its significance (and in some cases lack thereof) for the reconstruction of the political and social structure of the relevant polity or polities. As is often the case with sound pieces of scholarship, the conclusions reached by the author are more sensible than they are sensational. Whereas other papers (more or less heavily) rely on the idea of a unitary Mycenaean kingdom (whose king may have been the westernmost Great King of the Ancient Near Eastern continuum), Dickinson's conclusion, without being unbalanced and remaining entirely open to further discussion, insists on the evidence for an original localism and on hints that would point to the existence of different centers of power in the later stages as well.

F. Blakolmer's chapter (*No kings, no inscriptions, no historical events? Some thoughts on the iconography of rulership in Mycenaean Greece*) is a complex and dense piece dedicated to the very difficult problem of the Mycenaean imagery and visual rhetoric of political power. After presenting the terms of the problem, Blakolmer proposes a diachronic interpretive model of continuity in order to explain the lack of an explicit iconography of kingship as connected to the transition between the Cretan age and the Mycenaean one, which appears very convincing (pp. 73–75). After this, the evidence is re-examined in order to evaluate whether or not it can serve to answer the question about the presence or absence of a supreme political authority. Here, the conclusion is that while there is no evidence of a specific pre-eminent palace, either in Mycenae or in Thebes, the homogeneity of the iconography all over the Mycenaean world makes a mere polycentric system with several equal *wanakes* very unlikely (p. 76). The

point is well argued, but I would like to add a methodological consideration, which certainly does not diminish the great value of Blakolmer's article. In my opinion, the tendency to assume that cultural homogeneity must *always*, or even just *often*, depend on the presence of a politically centralized power is fallacious. Examples of culturally homogeneous areas in which no political unity can be identified existed in antiquity. As the problem is also referenced in the conclusions, I will briefly return to this point towards the end of this review.

The next chapter in the collection is co-authored by E. Mantzourani, K. Kopanias and I. Voskos, and is entitled *A Great King of Alašiya? The archaeological and textual evidence*. Obviously, it represents a point of discontinuity in a book that is otherwise dedicated to the Mycenaean area proper, and a very welcome one. The chapter is extremely interesting and informative and collects data from the philologies and archaeologies of the several areas that were involved in the vivid networks of superregional relationships of Cyprus in the Late Bronze Age. If the involvement of the king of A. in the Ancient Near Eastern cultural continuum is still an object of debate (see above), that of Cyprus is not, although some degree of political fragmentation seems to emerge.

The last chapter before the conclusion is M. Bányai's *Die Mykenische Staatenwelt: Zwischen Mykene und Theben*. The article compares the evidence for a Mycenae-centric and a Thebes-centric model of political pre-eminence in the Mycenaean world, proposing a diachronic model. While the methodology and the dating system employed appear, in some cases, to be a little idiosyncratic, the amount of data collected is impressive and, regardless of each scholar's views about the specific conclusions that are proposed, the chapter is a highly stimulating one.

Kelder and Waal's concluding chapter, *Epilogue: Kings and Great Kings in the Aegean and beyond*, attempts to present and summarize the content of the book and, at the same time, to

provide a characterization of the results that is as consistent as possible. This is no easy task because the different views presented in the different chapters are in some cases less than compatible. In general, it would be unproductive for me to dwell on the general attempt by the editors to emphasize the importance of the political contacts between the Hittite kingdom and the Mycenaean world. There are opposing views in the literature, and currently, both the maximalist and the minimalist approaches are perfectly defendable (although I support the latter and prefer a less optimistic interpretation of the evidence). Instead, it would be more interesting for me to comment on a point that emerged earlier in the book (p. 76), is discussed again in the conclusion, and has overarching methodological significance.

It concerns the relationship between the presence of a centralized political authority and the homogeneity of a culture. While it is true that the former may cause the latter, the correlation is not a bidirectional implication. The claim (p. 150) that the III millennium cultural network of the Sumerian city-states was in fact due to the political pre-eminence of the center of Kiš is inaccurate, as the *historical* hegemony of Kiš was limited in space and time, while the Sumerian cultural network was a phenomenon of the longest *durée*. At the same time, plenty of examples exist of regional and superregional powers that did not always enforce consistent cultural expressions in religion, iconography, textuality, and rhetoric. One may easily think of the diversity within the early Achaemenid empire or the Roman one, where the presence of a center of political power did not impose a completely homogenous culture. All in all, this seems to be a case of loose coupling, rather than a case of implication, so political unity should not be expected to imply cultural homogeneity, nor should the latter be expected to imply the former.

All in all, the book under review is a very important, informative, and interesting collection, and it can be read on several levels. The easiest way to read it is simply to use it as a collection of data, problems, and hypotheses. A more advanced approach involves comparing the views and methodologies of scholars who work very differently from each other and reach conclusions that sometimes diverge, sometimes overlap. The editors certainly deserve the gratitude of the scholarly community for their successful endeavor.

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