INTRODUCTION

EFFECTS OF TRADE

"Trade made New York," reads a display in the Museum of the City of New York. The same can be said, and indeed has been said, about a number of mercantile cities: Alexandria, Rome, London, Boston, and Los Angeles. All trading centers were founded where a river meets the sea, funneling goods from an interior hinterland to a broader, international market. Exchange helped each new city to prosper, stimulating population growth, urban development, and local industry. Museums in many cities promote this kind of shared history, melding the contributions of many past workers with success of a prominent few citizens to tell a positive tale of economic transformation.

Beyond a sense of commercial profit, the story lends itself to a broader question about economics and society: How does trade *make* culture? The success that spurred progress in each trading capital also stimulated the formation of a communal identification (New Yorkers, Alexandrians, and so on). By uniting people, customs, and ideas, trade has created many multicultural communities. In other cases, the experience of trade solidifies the definition of a people in opposition to other places. Yet whether it be among the mingled population of a thriving port or the sheltered community welcoming home a daring traveler, the interaction affects people's

understanding of their world and creates new possibilities for ways of living.

Similar to the cultures that grew up around port cities and mercantile capitals, Mycenaean civilization in Greece arose and developed in dialogue with foreign lands. The Mycenaean phase of the Greek Bronze Age is typically defined as the combination of the indigenous Helladic culture with influences from Minoan Crete and other, more remote, centers of the eastern Mediterranean. The very transition from Middle to Late Bronze Age is characterized by the burials of the Shaft Graves at Mycenae, where an elite group first distinguished itself through exotic prestige goods. The connection between local authority and foreign trade grew more complex over the following centuries, as international commerce fed into the political economy of the palatial era. The elite ruling classes from administrative centers at Mycenae, Tiryns, Pylos, and Thebes enjoyed rare luxuries and also benefited from the exchange networks now vital to maintaining their centralized power. Thus, one might well say that "trade made Mycenae," and Aegean scholarship generally links international exchange with the structure, success, and fall of the Mycenaean palace economy (Vermeule 1960; Iakovides 1993; Sherratt 2001). Yet to comprehend the impact of international trade on society, we need to take a step beyond the actual exchange and look at the subsequent activities that were stimulated, enabled, and empowered by external impulses.

This book offers a new understanding of the effects of Mediterranean trade on Mycenaean Greece by directly considering the possibilities represented by traded objects. The majority of surviving imports are luxury objects: engraved gemstones, faience scarabs, glass ornaments, alabaster vessels, ivory mirrors, and ostrich egg rhyta. These objects were made of materials unavailable in Greece at the time, and many bore foreign writing or iconography that emphasized their external origins. They functioned as tangible evidence of connections beyond the Aegean and they remain the most reliable data for

deciphering both the actual facts of exchange and the subjective understandings of why trade mattered. To locate a specifically Mycenaean perspective, I have analyzed the artifacts not in terms of their origins of manufacture or means of transport, but rather their existence as traded objects in a new environment.

This study emphasizes the archaeological context of imported artifacts. I stress this fact because, by virtue of their identification as foreign-made goods, imports are distinguished from other objects, entered into selective catalogues, and often physically separated in museums. Scholarship discusses imported objects more often in terms of their alleged place of manufacture, the original provenience of material, and the route by which they traveled, rather than the circumstance of their actual use and final deposition. The exploitation of foreign-made goods and exotic materials in palace workshops, elite burials, and cult rituals indicate the values and associations imports held in the Mycenaean world. In short, it is through acts of consumption that these artifacts are adapted or venerated, integrated into a new system, but sometimes remain strange things in a strange land.

Consumer Cultures

The growing emphasis on the consumption of material goods in studies of Aegean prehistory (Dabney 1997; van Wijngaarden 1999; Steel 2002), as in many other disciplines, is no doubt related to scholars' own relationships with modern, and postmodern "consumer cultures" (Baudrillard 1970). Emphasizing the acquisition and possession of goods as distinct, and distant, from their production does not necessarily retroject the values of modern consumer society onto the past. Rather, a focus on the uses of material objects provides a cultural-specific approach to their cumulative significance, often retaining the care invested in production and the allure recognized through exchange. Nonetheless, imported objects are by definition

removed from their initial stages of existence, and I seek to direct attention away from the intention of the artist and the motivation of the merchant, toward the agency of the consumer, who values the foreignness of the objects in question. I aim to shift the perspective away from the traditional goal of determining the source of artifacts and the status or ethnicity of their traders. This is not to deny that consumers participate in a larger system but to emphasize that they are motivated by their own local situation. It is perhaps akin to Roland Barthes' description of modern society's "constant effort to go beyond exchange," even if there is no true escape from the collective economy (1973: 40). Of course, because Barthes could suggest a cultural economy that compares the works of Proust with the pyramids of Egypt, he also reminds us to seek out the values particular to each cultural sphere.

In this book, my focus is to delineate "Mycenaean" perspectives on their own world and that beyond the realm of daily existence. Rather than follow Mycenaean travelers across the Mediterranean to colonies in Sicily or emporia in the Levant, my study remains rooted, as it were, on Greek soil. In doing so, it emphasizes the spheres of activity and influence, in which imports were used. This approach also highlights the effects of exchange on internal processes and examines acts of consumption as the Mycenaean response to the stimulus of external contact. Mycenaean economies were not fully dependent on external markets, but the ruling administrations were certainly eager to engage foreign markets. Yet the palace elite were not the only ones who benefited from international commerce; the wider range of archaeological contexts suggests social groups who used traded artifacts to define identities outside the palace hierarchy.

A full engagement with varied aspects of political and social economy is required to appreciate the significance of foreign contact in any particular time and place. This book is therefore structured so that each chapter presents evidence for consumptive acts within particular arenas delimited by time, geography, and social hierarchy. In each setting, I emphasize the symbolic

potential of goods acquired from external sources to effect change within a local sphere. This requires repeated redefinitions of inside and outside, local and foreign, as conceived by the agents in question. Prior to specific case studies, I therefore begin with a consideration of the long-standing scholarly dilemma of how to define Mycenaean Greece.

A further problem with which this study necessarily engages is the influence of eastern Mediterranean cultures on unfolding Greek glory. Discussion throughout the book is aware of the implications of scholarly attempts to deny "foreign influence" or to compensate by emphasizing the reciprocal flow of cultural traits both east and west. My own resistance to characterizing Mycenaean Greece as economically dominated by an eastern core or the pressures of international commerce is a conscious choice to pursue Mycenaean priorities. I also deliberately focus on the associations of eastern material with power and ideology. By no means, however, am I interested only in the direction of foreign impulses toward the legitimization of centralized or palatial power. Objects from remote places can hold memories of a personal past, the promise of a new destination, or the hopes and fears of an unknown, somewhat unreal, distance. Through the consumption of these objects, people can bridge the distance and lay claim to external sources of power. By emphasizing the power of imported objects to invoke new possibilities, I offer equal consideration to the ability of outside connections to not simply legitimize hierarchical power, but also to destabilize the status quo.

The first two chapters interrogate the broad problems of eastern influence and Aegean identity from methodological and historical perspectives. The early discoveries of Aegean prehistory offered dramatic evidence for viewers to further modern agendas through material culture, as they interpreted new symbols according to the ideologies of their own time and place. Finding an approach to trade that resonates with Mycenaean priorities, I distinguish the objectives that have driven scholarship to document exchange, rather than to interpret objects. The analysis of imports in the "Shaft Grave

period" (or Late Helladic [LH] I, 1700–1500 BCE) in Chapter 3 adopts this more interpretive approach and underscores the importance of context in constructing the meaning of foreign objects.

Chapters 4 through 6 concentrate on the "palatial period" (or LH III period, 1400–1200 BCE), considering questions of style and identity in the context of more developed political and economic systems. The local production of prestige items alongside the increased importation of foreign items enabled wider circulation of potent symbols that reinforced social networks. Consumption, in its most transformative sense and most conscious display, centered in the palaces but to varying degrees in different regions. The Argolid offers a complex set of diverse contexts, suggestive of a more competitive framework and the pursuit of foreign impulses by economic and ideological rivals of the palace system.

The concluding chapter of the book brings together various case studies to characterize broad power struggles that existed within Mycenaean kingdoms. Several comparisons suggest the changing values of exotic materials and implications of foreign style. Emphasizing the different needs met through contact with distant cultures, I find the ultimate importance of external symbols in contrast with the material culture generated by the centralized authority of Mycenaean states.

I close with a few practical comments about this text. All translations (including Greek) are my own; I have transliterated Greek, both ancient and modern, without accents, and I have used familiar Latinized forms when appropriate. Finally, the archaeological identification of items as imports, although destabilized in my argumentation, is key to the analysis of this book. The most recent attempts to compile comprehensive listings of objects imported into Bronze Age Greece are Connie Lambrou-Phillipson's *Hellenorientalia* (1990) and Eric Cline's *Sailing the Wine-Dark Sea* (1994). In discussion of individual objects, I have referenced the latter catalogue, except in cases of disagreement. When fuller information is appropriate,

I also provide the primary publication of the artifact, which includes illustration of the object as well as its archaeological context. Bibliographic abbreviations follow those used by the *American Journal of Archaeology*; chronological abbreviations are compiled separately.

ONE

AEGEAN AGENCY IN MEDITERRANEAN EXCHANGE

[T]hroughout the later part of the Second Millennium, only the sailors, merchants, and craftsmen of Mycenaean Greece can justifiedly lay claim to the honor of forming the links connecting the Aegean with the Orient.

– H. Kantor 1947: 103

Helene Kantor concluded her 1947 volume *The Aegean and the Orient in the Second Millennium B.C.* with a celebration of the makers and movers of Mycenaean artifacts. For her, the Aegean participation in Mediterranean exchange was best represented by the spread of Mycenaean objects to Egypt and the Levant, and the incorporation of Aegean motifs in eastern arts. Kantor presented the objects and motifs transferred from west to east as a counterbalance to the well-established diffusion of knowledge and styles *ex oriente lux*. But the establishment of an exchange model in such consciously reciprocal terms obscured important aspects of Aegean agency, including the creation of new associations with exotic images and the varied deployments of imported goods.

In this chapter, I introduce the key concepts, methods, and scale of analysis for my study of exotic objects in Mycenaean Greece. The evidence for an Aegean role in Mediterranean commerce is plentiful and varied, enabling numerous perspectives on the significance of cultural exchange across the great

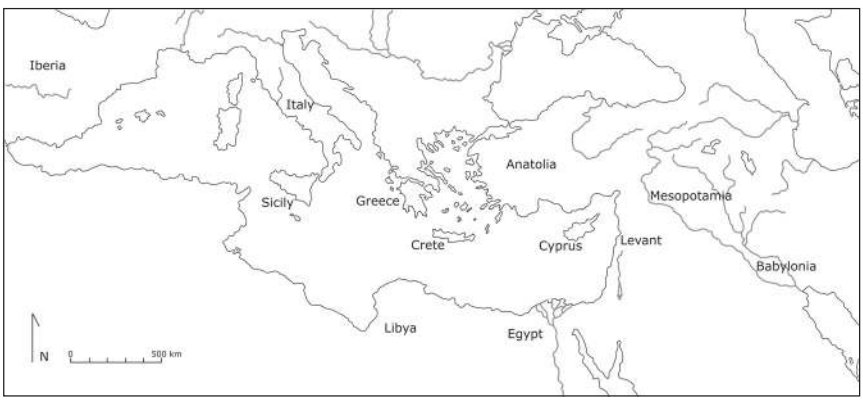
expanse of the sea. This book is, at its core, concerned with internal Mycenaean politics, how people within that system drew on external sources of power, and how material objects played a role in the articulation of local power and prestige. I contend that accumulated facts of long-distance exchange are rivaled in importance by the individual artifacts that spawned their own tales of foreign peoples and distant places.

In the following pages I introduce evidence for the Mycenaean participation in Mediterranean exchange. As asserted by Kantor, the distribution of Aegean material abroad demonstrates significant engagement, but the initial scholarly perspective was formulated on the basis of foreign material found within Greece. Furthermore, notions of eastern influence have not developed solely through the documentation of material acquisitions and artistic adoptions, but have been further shaped by the scholarly incorporation of the Aegean into the network of political interaction that bound together east Mediterranean polities.

I suggest that an approach based on acts of consumption is one that is specific to each area involved in the larger system. A pair of case studies (on a group of Egyptian plaques at Mycenae and the famous ivory pyxis lid from Minet el Beida) demonstrates that the critical value of traded objects is determined more by the context of their use than factors determining their production. The emphasis on each object's archaeological and social context also clarifies the impact of external activity on internal processes of material control and competition. I close this chapter with an overview of the distributions of foreign-made objects within Greece, which form a basis for the more detailed analyses that follow.

Exchange in the Bronze Age Mediterranean

Objects deemed foreign, or literally out of place, make up the basic evidence for exchange between the distinct cultural groups of the Mediterranean. One aim of this book is to explore the meaning of such objects in their new place, through



1.1. Map of Aegean and Mediterranean regions.

analysis of specific contexts and individual associations. There is no denying that these artifacts, in their aggregate, provide an essential background. The dispatch of objects beyond their region of manufacture and the diffusion of crafting technologies into new places is most fundamentally proven through large-scale patterns of circulation across social boundaries.

The people of Mycenaean Greece were able to acquire objects from many distant sources, as several comprehensive catalogs demonstrate (Pendlebury 1930; Lambrou-Phillipson 1990; Cline 1994). The major criterion of analysis throughout these works is the geography of production, with the place of manufacture being determined predominantly by artistic and technological style. Determinations can be made with greater or lesser specificity, and there exists a broad range of referents that can equate with large cultural zones such as the Levant, great political entities such as the empires of the Hittites of Anatolia or pharaonic Egypt, or key production centers such as the island of Cyprus or the Mesopotamian city of Nuzi [Fig. 1.1]. Raw materials particular to certain geographical zones, such as lapis lazuli from Afghanistan or amber from the Baltic, offer a more fixed category of evidence, which is actually tied to limited natural resources (Hermann 1968; Hughes-Brock 2005). Despite the numerous intermediary stages that might connect an object from the geographical place of its material origin to