INTRODUCTION

Only in the last century has it become evident that the past of Greece was immensely longer than the Greeks themselves imagined, and that it reached a peak of development that may reasonably be termed a civilisation during the Bronze Age, before declining into a long period of recession, the Dark Age, from which it finally emerged in the eighth century BC. This civilisation was partly contemporary with the early civilisations of the Near East, but unlike them it has no mass of contemporary documentation from which the outlines of its history can be reconstructed. Some have sought to extract a kind of history from the Greek corpus of legends. But no objective criteria for isolating genuine BA elements in this material have ever been established, and most treatments of this material make no attempt at source-criticism, so that 'traditional' status is attributed not merely to the legends themselves but to the learned speculations of Herodotus, the brilliant extrapolations of Thucydides, and the work of the late mythographers, which are in fact attempts at codifying and interpreting this material, no different in essence from those of modern scholars. Even the vivid and genuinely archaic setting of the Homeric epics demonstrably mixes elements of different dates, perhaps reflecting the Dark Age more than anything else. The only safe position to adopt has been enunciated by Forsdyke: 'Archaeological discovery may throw light upon the legends, but the use of legendary statements for historical interpretation of material records is a reversal of proper procedure' (1956: 166).

Thus, the Aegean Bronze Age is essentially prehistoric, accessible only through the methods of archaeology. The development of Aegean prehistoric archaeology has normally been recounted in terms of the sequence of major excavations and the controversies over their chronological and cultural relationships. Attention is less often focussed on the underlying preconceptions that determined the excavators' choice of sites and interpretations; yet these have shaped Aegean prehistory quite as much as the major discoveries, and some relevant comments will be incorporated in the following outline.

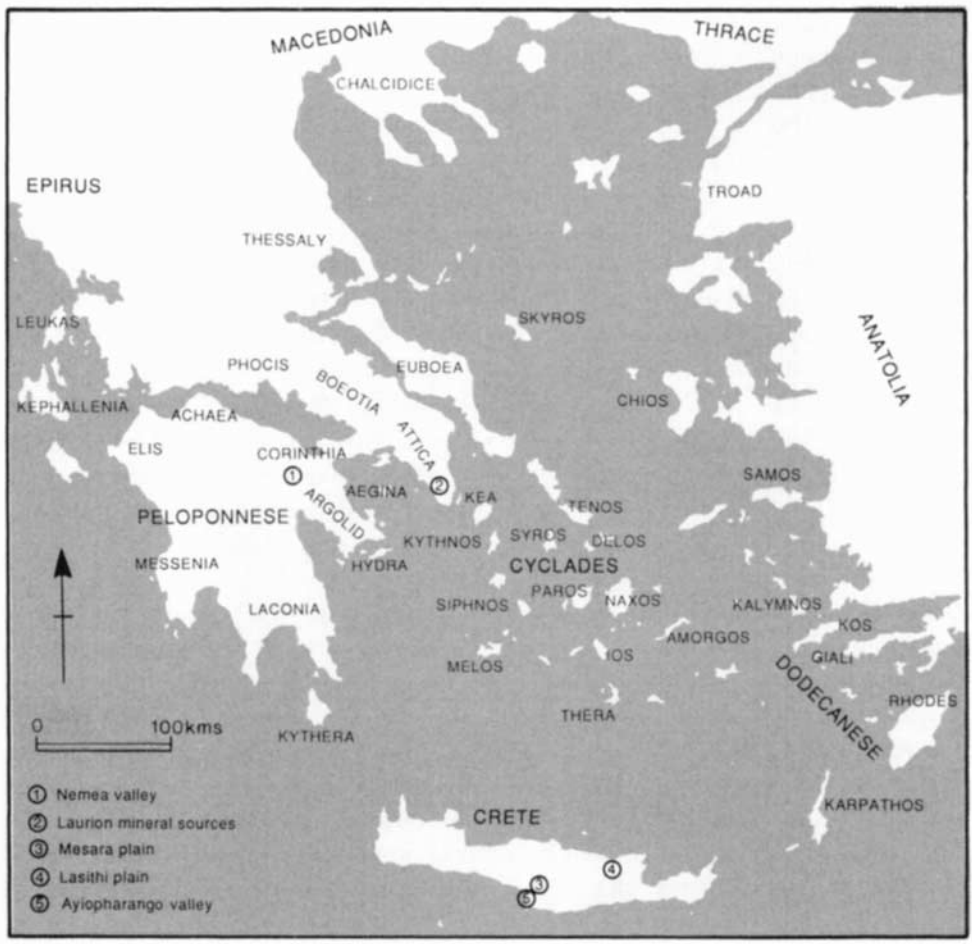
As is well known, Aegean prehistory was effectively founded by the excavations of Schliemann. His finds at Mycenae were so impressive that it seemed natural to apply the term 'Mycenaean' to the similar material found in the following years at many Aegean sites, and it was used in this way in the first great synthetic account (Tsountas and Manatt 1897), in which evidence for a pre-Mycenaean stage was already being cited. Schliemann's other significant excava-

tions in Greece were at sites famous in Greek tradition, Tiryns and Orchomenos, but after him, although Tsountas conducted much further research at Mycenae, there were no conscious attempts to verify the legends. Rather, Tsountas showed a true archaeologist's interest in the evidence for material culture and development for its own sake, investigating first the pre-Mycenaean stage in the Cyclades, mainly through excavating cemeteries, and later the even earlier Neolithic stage of Thessaly, particularly at Sesklo and Dhimini. Other remains were investigated more haphazardly, as they attracted attention, particularly the monumental tholos tombs and other graves.

The first large-scale stratigraphical excavations in the Aegean were undertaken at Phylakopi on Melos in 1896–9 to study the relationship of Tsountas's 'island civilisation' to the Mycenaean. But important though these were, their results had already been eclipsed, by the time of their publication in 1904, by the great series of Cretan excavations which began in 1900. In the space of a few years the finds at Knossos, Phaistos, Palaikastro, Gournia and other sites had completely overshadowed all previous discoveries (Fig. Intro.1). The excavation of the palace at Knossos (Evans 1921–35) was the most spectacular and best publicised, and its excavator, Evans, swiftly produced a chronological scheme dividing the Cretan material into three phases, Early, Middle and Late, of a Minoan civilisation (named after the legendary king Minos), running nearly parallel to the tripartite division of Egyptian history into Old, Middle and New Kingdoms (Evans 1921: 25–7), with a preceding Neolithic period. This gained immediate acceptance and has effectively provided a template for all further classifications of Aegean prehistoric material.

The identification of a civilisation in Crete comparable with those of the ancient Near East had two effects. One was to concentrate attention on the more elaborate architecture and artistic products of this civilisation; the remains of the pre-palatial phases received less attention, except where they heralded the glories of the palatial age, and least attention was paid to the way of life at ordinary level. Boyd Hawes, the excavator of Gournia, enunciated principles that were a model for any period: 'We must know the standard of living as well as the aesthetic principles of a race, and to save our studies from becoming a mere discussion of styles, must keep in view the significance of the humblest articles of use' (1908: 29). But her example was not generally followed. In his survey of Cretan archaeology, Pendlebury was to call Gournia a town of farmers (1939: 191), but to show little interest in it, let alone in the 'humblest articles of use'; once the palatial age was reached, he invariably concentrated on the palaces when discussing architecture, and on the most elaborate fine wares when discussing pottery.

The second effect was more insidious, but a natural consequence of the links perceived with the Near East. Not only was the origin of Minoan civilisation explained through the diffusion of influences, if not actual populations, from the Near East, especially Egypt, but its structure was assumed to be essentially similar. Thus, terms like palace, king and town were commonly used, without



Intro.1 The Aegean, showing geographical subdivisions frequently mentioned in the text.

any defence of their appropriateness or any detailed exposition of social structure seeming necessary. Following Evans, Pendlebury imagined Minoan civilisation at its height as 'an ordered state with a highly centralised bureaucracy' (1939: 285), but beyond that little was said, and it is symptomatic that he could speculate on the Minoan mentality through analysis of art (275–6), while dismissing Glotz's attempt to reconstruct Early Minoan social organisation from its burial customs (279–80). Yet in many respects Evans's overall picture of Minoan civilisation was unlike the Near East, evidently deriving partly from wish-fulfilling use of the imagination (cf. Bintliff 1984: 35–6).

The establishment of Crete's primacy relegated 'Mycenaean' civilisation to provincial status and seems to have stimulated interest in the earlier phases on the mainland, which evidently had little to do with Crete, and especially in the

Neolithic period, represented by long sequences in Thessaly and central Greece. The problem of classifying the abundant mainland pre-Mycenaean material became increasingly urgent, but was solved for the BA by the excavations of Blegen at Korakou, upon which basis Wace and Blegen developed a 'Helladic' system designed to run parallel with the Minoan (Blegen 1921). Much of this terminology came into general use, but Evans and his followers persisted in describing all Late Bronze Age material in the Aegean as Late Minoan, and a bitter split developed over the use of the term 'Late Helladic' by Wace and Blegen to stress the individuality of the mainland material, over the chronology of major monuments at Mycenae, which Wace dated after the accepted date for the end of the palace at Knossos, and ultimately over the 'Greekness' of the mainland civilisation. For in a seminal article (Blegen and Haley 1928) it was argued that the ancestors of the Greeks arrived in the southern mainland at the end of Early Helladic and established the Middle Helladic culture; Late Helladic was argued by Wace and Blegen to develop from this under Minoan influence, whereas for Evans Late Helladic was merely provincial Late Minoan and thus could not be Greek, since the Minoan civilisation was not.

While there continued to be major work in Crete, Mallia and Ayia Triada being the most important new sites, there was increasing interest in large, multi-period sites on the mainland, whose excavators used the Helladic terminology while remaining non-committal as to the 'Greekness' of the later phases. Frequently this was combined with an attempt to investigate the site's cemeteries and view it in its geographical setting, as Blegen did at Zygouries (1928). This and many other excavations were in the north-east Peloponnese, the neighbourhood of Mycenae, with the result that this region became far better known than the rest of the mainland, although important material was also excavated in Boeotia at Thebes and Eutresis. Many Late Helladic cemeteries were discovered, and surveys in search of prehistoric sites were undertaken in several areas of the mainland and Crete. Much of the material thus uncovered was made accessible by swift publication, establishing many of the standard sources of mainland archaeology, particularly Prosymna (Blegen 1937), Dendra (Persson 1931, 1942) and Eutresis (Goldman 1931); but a great deal remained unpublished, and the Cyclades were largely neglected, although much work was carried out in the Dodecanese.

The most startling discovery of the period was in Messenia, a promising but relatively poorly known province, at Epano Englianos (Pylos). Here in 1939 remains of a palatial building were uncovered, in which were found tablets written in the last script used in the palace at Knossos, Linear B script. For many this must have seemed proof that Evans was right and that the Mycenaean/Late Helladic civilisation was Minoan; for others, especially Wace, it strengthened a developing conviction that the final phase of the Knossos palace was 'Mycenaean'. Ventris's decipherment of Linear B as an early form of Greek in 1952, now almost universally accepted, made clear that Wace and Blegen were

essentially right to distinguish Mycenaean/Late Helladic from Late Minoan, and put an end to that controversy. It has also provided one of the most significant advances in Aegean prehistory, making it possible for the first time to use contemporary documents, however obscure, to improve understanding of the late palace societies. But it gave rise to a new controversy over the dating of the Knossos texts, and so of their context, which remains unresolved (see Appendix to Ch. 1).

Since the Second World War a mass of new archaeological evidence has been accumulated, often in 'rescue' excavations within modern Greek cities, as at Thebes (Symeonoglou 1985), or in surveys. Our knowledge of many well-known sites has been substantially altered if not transformed, and many more have been added to the list constantly referred to in discussion (e.g. Myrtos, Zakro, Arkhanes and Kato Symi in Crete, Ayia Irini and Akrotiri in the Cyclades, the Franchthi cave, Lerna, Lefkandi and Perati on the mainland). But the vast increase in data has only partly broadened its scope: many recent finds have related to the field of religion, including for the first time unquestionable remains of mainland and Cycladic religious sites, but most investigations have continued to focus upon palaces and other big buildings, large multi-period settlements, and cemeteries. Very few farmsteads or truly small villages have been excavated, although surveys have identified the likely sites of many such.

The growth of interest in survey has radically affected perceptions of the distribution of population and land-use in the BA, even though its incidence remains patchy and only recently has it begun to be conducted with much system. The traditional method of inspecting likely-looking mounds and high hills had an inbuilt tendency to overlook the truly small sites and dispersed indications of human activity; but 'intensive' methods have only been applied over limited areas, because of their expensiveness, and there is still debate over the legitimacy of drawing wider conclusions from samples, however 'scientific' their basis. The related topics of land-use and the basis of the economy have received much attention, especially in two published surveys (McDonald and Rapp 1972; Renfrew and Wagstaff 1982) and in Bintliff 1977. This long-overdue development has been aided by an increasingly systematic use of the sciences, especially geology, botany and zoology, to investigate the modern landscape and natural setting of sites as well as the remains from them.

In this context, much use has been made of analogy from the practices of traditional rural Greece, following a precedent established in the early days of Aegean archaeology, when archaeologists found themselves working in a countryside whose practices seemed rooted in the past and whose peasants could rapidly apprehend the purpose of excavated items, which matched their own implements and utensils. This approach has great potential if applied with proper rigour, but it runs the risk of underestimating structural differences in setting and society, not to mention the natural environment (cf. Halstead 1987b). Greek villages have for a long time been part of states of considerable size, and so have

often been linked, however weakly, with a money economy and an international trade network. The effect that this can have on the agricultural economy can be perceived in the quite recent development of large-scale olive cultivation in the local economy of Karpophora in Messenia (Aschenbrenner 1972: 49–50) and inland Boeotia (Rackham 1983: 313, 331, 339). Socially, the differences may have been even more marked; for while BA religions could have had a pervasive influence on moral perceptions, their basis and value-systems were surely very different from those of Greek Orthodox Christianity (for whose effect on village society see, for example, Du Boulay 1974: 51–63, 101–6). There is not even an identifiable BA equivalent for that indispensable village institution, the *kapheneion!* The analogy may have most value, then, if confined largely to traditional crafts and agricultural practices, which may be suggested to have changed little, when applied to the same crops and livestock, until the advent of mechanisation.

Scientific analysis has provided data also on the sources of materials and on absolute dating, principally through the radiocarbon technique. A great deal of useful information has been produced, but often this seems to have created more problems than it has solved; the temptation to draw dramatic conclusions from limited evidence has not always been avoided, and methodology is still being refined in many areas. But this work has made a major contribution, not least by its stress on the proper quantification of data and the need for statistically valid samples.

But the most important change of all has been in the approach to explanation. Until the 1970s the most explicit general theories in use were those of Gordon Childe, who conceived the growth of civilisation in Europe to be intimately linked to the search for raw materials, especially metals, by the Near Eastern civilisations, in the course of which ideas and skills were spread from the Near East, and who developed the notion of the archaeological 'culture', a recurring assemblage of archaeological traits, as a means of classifying the material. Inevitably, Childe, and even more his successors, tended to assume that cultures were the archaeological expression of ethnic groups, so that their spread could be conceived in terms of population expansions. Thus the concepts of migration and diffusion came to play major explanatory roles in accounts of Aegean development and, combined with the tendency to treat the Greek legends as a respectable source of historical information, led to the 'event'-dominated accounts of the Aegean BA justly criticised by Snodgrass (1985: 35–6). But such explanations have been looking increasingly implausible, and more recently, in a series of seminal studies, Renfrew has attempted to formulate general theories to explain Aegean development in local terms. While these have in turn come under criticism from a younger generation of specialists, there can be no denying their enormous value, above all in emphasising the necessity of explaining all developments, including the introduction of foreign ideas and even populations, within the context of the continual processes of Aegean social development.

Much more work needs to be done before a new Aegean prehistory can emerge. The available data remain variable in quality, uneven in distribution, often poorly recorded, and limited in different ways. But in fairness to all my predecessors and contemporaries, it seems right to end this short account by emphasising that Aegean archaeology is an immensely rich and exciting field of study, constantly being renewed by stimulating discussions and new approaches.

Bibliography

Forsdyke 1956 rigorously analyses the supposed chronological and historical content of the Greek legends in their developed literary form. On the Homeric material see Dickinson 1986a, Sherratt, E.S. 1990 (with full bibliography), Whitley 1991.

Warren 1989, ch. 1 provides a useful short account of the development of Aegean archaeology; McDonald and Thomas 1990 is more extensive, but concentrates on Mycenaean archaeology.

For an introduction to Linear B see Hooker 1980, and for more detail, Ventris and Chadwick 1973.

CHAPTER 1

TERMINOLOGY AND CHRONOLOGY

Terminology

As already noted in the Introduction, it was Evans who introduced a tripartite system of classification to Aegean prehistory, a system that has become so popular that one might imagine that it was the natural and obvious way to classify material. Evans suggested as much in expounding it: 'This tripartite system, indeed, whether we regard the course of Minoan civilisation as a whole or its threefold stages, is in its very essence logical and scientific. In every characteristic phase of culture we note in fact the period of rise, maturity and decay' (1921: 25). As McNeal has observed (1975: 390), Evans is using a biological metaphor, but the suggestion that a tripartite system necessarily conveys images of growth and decay is surely wrong; it can simply model beginning, middle and end. Evans could not in fact adhere to the pattern that he suggested; he clearly did not regard EM III as a decline, described MM III as a 'splendid revival', and wrote of the early part of LM as 'the golden age of Crete, followed, after a level interval, by a gradual decline' (1921: 27). The model works better, though not altogether satisfactorily, for his view of the pottery styles by which these phases are largely defined; but this is, or ought to be, a separate matter. Unfortunately, Evans's use of the same terminology to denote both his phases and the material, particularly pottery, assigned to those phases, although open to obvious criticism (most succinctly, Renfrew 1972: 53–4, cf. also 1979), has become normal practice (Fig. 1.1 shows a developed form).

The tripartite system has many defects as a means of classifying Aegean BA pottery, which are no different in essence from those cited by D.H. French in his trenchant criticism of using a similar system for Neolithic pottery: 'It cannot include all the pottery groups found in Greece. As used, it does not indicate that the pottery so grouped may contain many elements. It does not allow for the adjustments and additions (to sequences and groups) which may have to be made as more research is carried out' (1972: 2). As a system of historical phasing it is even more clearly inadequate, as two examples plainly show. The rise and fall of the palace societies is evidently the most significant historical development of the Aegean BA; but the First Palace Period in Crete begins after the beginning of MM and ends before its end, while the Second Palace Period begins before the end of MM and ends with LM I. Secondly, it has been customary to detect three major historical divisions in the EBA, but the revised interpretation of the EC

<table>
<tr><th>Crete</th><th>Cyclades</th><th>Mainland</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">EM I</td><td>EC I</td><td rowspan="2">EH I</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">EC II</td></tr>
<tr><td>EM II</td><td>EH II</td></tr>
<tr><td>EM III</td><td>EC III</td><td>EH III</td></tr>
<tr><td>MM IA</td><td rowspan="4">MC
(early)

(late)</td><td rowspan="4">MH
(early)
(middle)
(late)</td></tr>
<tr><td>MM IB</td></tr>
<tr><td>MM IIA</td></tr>
<tr><td>MM IIB</td></tr>
<tr><td>MM IIIA–B</td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>LM IA</td><td>LC I</td><td>LH I</td></tr>
<tr><td>LM IB</td><td rowspan="2">LC II</td><td>LH IIA</td></tr>
<tr><td>LM II</td><td>LH IIB</td></tr>
<tr><td>LM IIIA1</td><td rowspan="4">LC III
(early)

(middle)

(late)</td><td>LH IIIA1</td></tr>
<tr><td>LM IIIA2</td><td>LH IIIA2</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">LM IIIB</td><td>LH IIIB1</td></tr>
<tr><td>LH IIIB2</td></tr>
<tr><td>LM IIIC</td><td>LH IIIC</td></tr>
<tr><td>Subminoan</td><td>Submycenaean</td></tr>
</table>

Fig. 1.1 The tripartite system of classification, showing the most commonly used terms. (Mainly after Demakopoulou 1988: 27, with some additions.)

sequence by Barber and MacGillivray (1980) plainly identifies four; there being no scope for an EC IV, two phases which are not obviously successive statigraphically, have few cultural links, and have largely distinct distributions in the Cyclades, must be termed EC IIIA and EC IIIB. The system has in fact become a bed of Procrustes, to which the material must be fitted willy-nilly.

Nevertheless, some systems of historical phasing and material classification seem required. It is still not possible to use absolute dates, as McNeal hoped (1975: 400–1); even the tidy blocks of decades and centuries that are used by later historians can hardly be deployed when there are few if any fixed points. Rather, the basis for discussing development of any kind must be a relative chronology, based upon regional classification systems (cf. Warren and Hankey 1989: 2-3); the results can be correlated within broad phases that ideally should reflect stages in historical development, and if possible these phases can then be given absolute dates.

It can be conceded to defenders of the tripartite system that it is so familiar that it cannot easily be replaced. But there is no need to continue its use as the system of historical phasing, although its three basic subdivisions, Early, Middle and Late, remain useful in making broad general comments and definitions, and it is convenient to use phrases like 'in LM I' chronologically, as an abbreviation for 'in the phases characterised by LM I pottery'. But in general, for purposes of historical and chronological comment, I propose to use a system of five broad divisions that reflects the rise and fall of the palace societies, close to that favoured by Platon and others. Sometimes, but rarely, it may be possible to use an absolute chronological term, such as 'in the sixteenth century' (all dates will be BC unless otherwise stated).

The familiarity of the tripartite system also makes me reluctant to discard it totally for classificatory purposes. There seems no point in trying to replace the basic Minoan–Cycladic–Helladic division, or the well-developed sequence of Mycenaean pottery phases; the Minoan phasing, though still subject to considerable problems of definition between EM III and MM IIIA (see below) has also been in use for a long time. But there are strong arguments against the use of the system before the LBA outside Crete, because the material divides much more readily into groups that may overlap, mingle, and disappear without immediate successor in the material record, especially in the EBA.

For these groups I propose to use assemblage names, drawn as far as possible from those already suggested by Renfrew, Doumas, and D.H. French; but these will not be termed cultures, to avoid the overtones, especially the equation culture = people, that the word has so often attracted. To indicate their provisional and symbolic nature, these group names will be cited in inverted commas, e.g. 'Lerna III', and where these are absent the reference will be to the actual site, etc., from which the name has been taken. They are intended to provide immediately recognisable reference-points rather than precise definitions; hence 'Phylakopi I' will be used in the general sense indicated by Renfrew's and