

1 My Analytical Frame

This is a book about the ancient Greeks. But it is not a history of the ancient Greeks. It does not treat issues such as the lives of great people, military campaigns, and battles – the common themes of books on Greek history. It is also not a traditional cultural overview of the ancient Greeks, which often provides a broad outline of the world of the ancient Greeks and focuses on some of the more well-known and high-profile issues, such as the development of participatory democracy in some of its city-states. This is also not a book, like many on ancient Greece, which highlights some of the more well-known ancient Greek communities, such as Athens or Sparta. Rather, this is a case study of the ancient Greeks which seeks to dig deep, to expose the underlying timbers that made up the social structure of a society which could manifest itself in the Bronze Age in varying centers such as Knossos or Mycenae, and later on in politics with internal constitutions running from democracy to tyranny (unconstitutional one-man rule) to monarchies.

This book looks at civilization in Greece from the Neolithic to the second century CE when the Greeks were embedded into the Roman Empire, and outlines the tremendous spread of the ancient Greeks from the Iberian Peninsula to the mountains of Afghanistan. As such, this book has a very wide temporal and spatial scope. To deal with this situation I am employing the concept of social structure to identify what the underlying armatures of ancient Greek culture were, and I am using evolutionary theory, here complexity theory, as an analytical frame for interpreting its development. Let me turn to the issue of social structure first.

Social Structure as an Analytical Frame

My concept of social structure is somewhat unique but close to Giddens's (1986) idea of structuration, in which culture is defined as made up of units of shared repeated behaviors and associated meanings that direct the actions of individuals. For me, these units equate with our

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concept of institutions, recurring sets of behavior which are recognized as valued in society. As an archaeologist, my units equate with the remains of identifiable contexts of interaction, spaces marked by specific features and landscape where actors negotiated for identity and social position. As we shall see, these contexts could be linked together in larger social strategies that drove evolutionary change in ancient Greece. I use the total number of these identifiable contexts of interaction, their internal dynamics, and how they link up with other contexts in the Greek past, as an index of social complexity.

In arriving at my concept of social structure I have been very much influenced by Humphreys's (1978) application of concepts of developing social articulation in ancient Greece. She described the development of ancient Greek culture by charting the birth and development of different social interaction contexts. These contexts were spatially and temporally separated, and had their own rules and norms. A measure of increasing structural complexity for ancient Greece was the birth of new social interaction contexts as the culture in general became more structurally articulated. I plan to follow that analytical view in this book.

Following Humphreys's analysis, I see these contexts of interaction as those of cultural performance, similar to Goffman's (1967) contexts of dramaturgy, a concept which still resonates in studies of performance in past cultures (Hodder 2006; Inomata and Coben 2006). That is, people create their contexts and, in turn, are shaped by them.

I have an open definition of performance within these contexts. I would not restrict performance to only formal activities within an interaction context, but would include any repeated, therefore institutionalized behavior taking place between two or more people (see Houston 2006 for excellent overview of definitions of performance contexts).

I seek to analyze social structure through a strong focus on these distinct social units of interaction, which are amenable to archaeological investigation because they were spatially distinct in their social settings. Therefore, a great deal of my approach deals with the spatial units visible in the archaeological record. The distribution of these spatial units through time and space allows me to identify the various cultures which occupied the territories which the Greeks inhabited throughout time. Yet there are caveats to this approach, as with any. Sometimes the archaeological record supplies only a limited set of identifiable contexts. But for most periods in ancient Greece the sample we do have is robust enough to allow us to use it as an indication of social structural complexity.

I utilize this analytical window in both a spatial and a temporal analysis of the Greeks. Using social structure as an analytical frame allows me to effectively compare different spatial dimensions of ancient Greek culture,

be they similarities or differences. A case in point is the eighth century BCE and after, when the Greeks spread throughout the lands of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. A social structural frame highlights the amazing similarities that many of the Greek poleis (city-states) exhibited among themselves in this tremendous cultural exodus, as it also allows us to document cultural differences. Looking at cultural change over time, the use of this analytical frame provides a unit of comparison between different developmental periods in the Greek past. It focuses our attention on what was newly created in the culture as time progressed. Therefore, throughout this book, I will take time to measure aspects of social complexity through this structural frame to give us both a chronological and spatial bearing in our treatment of the ancient Greeks.

Complexity Theory

To study the dynamics of structural change I am applying the concept of complexity theory. This theory is enjoying a dramatically increasing popularity in the fields of science, economics, management, and the social sciences (Cleveland 2009; Garnsey and McGlade 2006; Manson 2001; Reitsma 2003). My interest here is its application to archaeology (Beekman and Baden 2005; Bentley and Mascher 2003, 2007; Kohler 2012; Levy 2005), because it is well suited to the study of social change and concepts of cultural evolution. An enormously widespread interest in complexity theory has produced numerous definitions of what it actually is, often dissimilar and sometimes at odds with one another. Yet it is possible to chart some common characteristics and apply them to archaeological investigation.

Complexity theory defines societies as open systems, where the relationship between different units is nonlinear; that is, the result of their connections produces a set which is greater than one would expect from the sum alone. In a temporal sense, complexity theory sees society moving through periods of identified structure, then a chaotic rapid transition to an identified new social structure. When moving from a chaotic phase, societies self-organize and are affected internally by attractors, repeated behaviors which produce internal structure, seen in the presence of new social units, new organization, new forms of social control, or new social boundaries. The transition is labeled a “phase transition” and is quick and totalizing, not limited to a piecemeal creation of new social structure.

As in the employment of any theory, I am using complexity theory as an analytical frame which can suggest important links between various bits of data in the historical record. At best, it can suggest important

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linkages between disparate information we have on the past and can help us frame meaningful questions to be applied to our record of the past. I do not believe in applying theory with a sledgehammer, however. I have witnessed far too often the application of theory in archaeology where the data do not quite fit the complete features of the theoretical perspective, and the value of the application of that theory is damaged by a focus on where the theory does not fully apply. Theory should be applied with care, as a useful analytical frame. It is a tool, not an outcome.

To see how complexity theory has been used in a very useful sense, I turn to Yoffee (2005: 198–232), who gives a good description of evolution in Mesopotamia seen through this analytical frame. He describes a situation in which a gradual increase in the number of new social institutions reached a tipping point, then produced chaos and a quick phase transition to a new level of social organization:

Mesopotamia, and I believe elsewhere, persisted as modest villages for thousands of years, while social roles and identities changed in significant ways. From the environment of village life, the circulation of goods and marital partners led to institutionalized interconnections among unrelated people and to the formation of interaction spheres. Codes of communication and symbols of shared beliefs allowed and expressed new aspects of cultural identity among the villagers. Certain individuals, nascent elites, began to restrict access to the technology of symbol manufacture and also the means of communication and the venues of communication such as feasts and ceremonies. Control over these symbols and esoteric knowledge became a domain of power in these early villages ... In Mesopotamia, the formation of larger spheres of interaction over time and the growth of a belief system that connected both northern and southern Mesopotamia resulted not only in regularized exchanges of goods but also reasons to shift production goals from local consumption to production for exchange ... Within interaction spheres, cities crystallize, at some point, rapidly ... as phase transitions. (Yoffee 2005: 229–30)

In Mesopotamia the phase transition from the stage of villages to large polities included the invention of written language and the associated bureaucracy (food rations, military regulation, etc.) that utilized it. There were also new temple precincts with new religious and political institutions, rulers, slaves, tribute-bearing associations with foreign cultures, etc.

A review of Yoffee's description highlights two important points about complexity theory. The first is the question of what produced the rapid change. Somehow the old social structure was not able to meet the needs of new social entities. For Yoffee these were new social roles, new connections between people, and – reading between his lines – new wealth. These new features in Mesopotamian society had built up until the old

social structure could not adequately meet the new demands they created, and there was a rapid transformation to a new social structure which did. It is highly important to ask the question, what produced the structural crisis which triggered the phase transition? It will be asked in our analysis of structural change for ancient Greek culture.

The second point is just as important. Yoffee correctly mentions “certain individuals, nascent elites” who began to change the ways in which society was structured and triggered the actual phase transition. The search for these individuals and the period in which they were operating is a key focus in my analysis of the ancient Greeks. In my search for periods of phase transitions and those actors who were behind the creation of new social structure, I am going to focus on evidence of feasting. Recent work has made headway into an understanding of how ancient feasting can supply a context for the mitigation of social scalar stress, the creation and solidification of social roles, and the integration of communities. These functions would have been supplied not only through the very context of the feast itself but also through the effect that creating a feast would have had on the social and economic spheres of a community. In its transformational character, a feast would have filled the needs of a society in rapid transition.

To isolate feasting in the archaeological record I define this institution as an occasion different from daily meals. A feast includes a larger number of people participating; consequently, there would be more food and drink. There might also be specialized foods or foods which require unusual methods of preparation. Feasts are often held in special temporal or physical settings, which might include the use of specialized dining arrangements, distinct serving materials, and particular seating configurations. Within the archaeological record of ancient Greek culture, we shall see that there are several examples of commensality that meet this definition.

The role of feasting in cultures in transition has been crucial, in the Paleolithic/Neolithic transition (Munro and Grosman 2010), in the European Mesolithic (Hayden 2004), the Levantine Neolithic (Benz 2000; Twiss 2008), sixth to fourth millennium Syria and Anatolia, and early Bronze Age Ban Non Wat in Thailand (Higham 2014). In prehistoric Europe, Dietler (1996) has argued for the power of feasting in developing political economies. In the Classical world, the same author (Dietler 2007) has also demonstrated the important role that feasting can play in mitigating the social chaos engendered by colonialism, by constructing and validating new social norms. In studies of the Greek past specifically, Halstead (2004) has noted the potential social transformative power of feasts in the Neolithic.

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Some of the best ethnographic information we have on the power of feasting within cultures in transition has come from work with transegalitarian societies (Blake and Clark 1999; Clark and Blake 1994; Hayden 1995). Transegalitarian societies are societies that moved away from an egalitarian structure to a hierarchical one. In these societies power and prestige have moved beyond the level of the individual households, but they are not yet guaranteed by inherited wealth or title. In a close way a transegalitarian society matches the description of a chaotic period of a phase transition. New wealth, new positions, and new prestige exist, but they are not secured by the then current social structure. In these societies, Yoffee's nascent elites, or as they are often referred in egalitarian societies, aggrandizers, create new institutions that will eventually secure their positions.

Hayden (2009; see also LeCount and Blitz 2010) demonstrates that within transegalitarian societies elaborate funeral feasting, and I would add other feasting venues as well, provides an institutionalized context in which these nascent elites can act like aggrandizers and work to secure the positions which they hold outside the structure of the family. They often use these funeral contexts to create alliances with others. These alliances could provide social assistance in endemic warfare, offer affiliations with others who can help with the high cost of bride prices and dowries, offer access to investment in wealth, create alliances for regional trade, and protect the interests of the deceased family from the exploitive schemes of others. All these alliances operate above the level of the family and create new contexts of interaction or institutions, which become permanent as the society moves to a more hierarchical social structure. A focus on this type of feasting isolates the actors or aggrandizers who were instrumental in directing the self-organization of societies, as seen through the frame of complexity theory.

Structure and Scope of This Book

Book titles can be difficult. Although "Ancient Greece" is in the title, this book has temporal boundaries which are larger than those the reader might be accustomed to associating with ancient Greece. It begins with the Neolithic and continues until the middle of the second century CE of the Roman Empire. There are therefore several cultures which are analyzed here, rather than just those of the period from 1000 BCE to the Roman Empire, which are most often identified as "ancient Greek." While these earlier cultures differed in many ways from that of the Greeks in the first millennium, they are important structural antecedents to the creation of those later cultures and are crucial to our understanding of the full context of their evolution.

In what may be seen as unusual, I do not follow established chronological units for Greece. The periods used by scholars of ancient Greece can be arbitrary, not matching those of significant cultural development. My chapters often divide or lump together these units. Readers who wish to know the accepted chronologies may turn to Whitley (2001: 60–74) and Mee (2011: 3–7).

Because this is a case study, I have chosen to analyze this period from the Neolithic to the Roman Empire with foci on social structure and evolutionary change as seen through the application of complexity theory. A focus on complexity theory produces a pace for this book which is somewhat different from other treatments of ancient Greece. More attention is paid to some periods than others, especially those periods when we can study elements of evolutionary change. In an unusual deviation from other treatments of Greece, I have interrupted the story of Crete with an analysis of the development of social structure outside the island (Chapters 7 and 8). The social structure of Crete after 1000 BCE was unique and is best analyzed in the light of developments in the rest of the Greek world. And some nontraditional periods are included, such as the history of Greek communities in the Roman Empire, which rounds out the developments seen in the evolutionary changes of the eighth through sixth centuries BCE. In cases where the scope is more narrow than usual, such as the Classical era of the fifth and fourth centuries, the reader who wishes to explore these periods in greater depth is directed to the sections on further readings, which, in the case of the Classical era, supply reference to issues which do not receive the attention that they might have in more traditional treatments on the ancient Greeks. I have also included several topical boxes, which highlight some interesting topics, such as the Greek statue-erecting.

The scope of the book is large in time and large in geographical extent. Each chapter therefore includes a section which summarizes its developments with an index of complexity. This allows the reader to compare the nature of social complexity between different periods and between different parts of the Greek world. Differences between Crete and the mainland after 1000 BCE are highlighted, for example. The complexity index, focusing on the issue of social structure, also allows for a comparison between the ancient Greeks and other past cultures, here, the Classic period Maya.

Readings

Those who would like to read further on the various internal subcultures and the historical development of the ancient Greeks are encouraged to

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turn to excellent historical treatments such as that of Cartledge (2011), Hall (2013), Martin (2013), Ober (2015), Osborne (2009), and Pomeroy et al. (2011).¹ My focus in this book is on social structural complexity and evolutionary change, and I therefore do not focus on some important social issues. Those interested in women in ancient Greece are encouraged to read Blundell (1995) and MacLachlan (2012). For slavery, Finley and Shaw (1998) is a must as well as Bradley and Cartledge (2011) and Wrenhaven (2012). I shall refer to more specific cultural studies as the chapters develop.

The application of theory is vital to the development of observations in this book. For additional readings on the use of theory in Greek archaeology, see Kotsakis (1991), papers in Papadopoulos and Leventhal (2003), in Haggis and Antonaccio (2015), and in Nevett (2017a). In the latter, Nevett's introduction and the contribution by Stone, "A Theoretical or Atheoretical Greek Archaeology? The Last Twenty-Five Years," are extremely insightful.

For excellent additional introductions to the power of feasting within cultures, see Dietler and Hayden (2010), Hayden (2014), and Hayden and Villeneuve (2011). Although I am using feasting in a new way to look at the Greek past, I make no claim to be the first person to focus on feasting or even funeral feasting in ancient Greece. The study of feasting in general has been of recent interest. Wright's edited section in *Hesperia* (2004) was one of the first publications to focus on feasting itself. Another is the edited work by Hitchcock et al. on Aegean feasting (2008). An important additional study is Haggis's treatment of diacritical feasting at Middle Minoan II Petras (2007).

The majority of these studies, however, have not been concerned with funeral feasting. Although studies such as that of Wright (2004) did treat material from the shaft graves at Mycenae to isolate some artifacts that may have been used for feasting, the issue of funeral feasting was not pursued. Perhaps the only person to treat funeral feasting so far has been Hamilakis (1998), who gathered much information for funeral feasting at Bronze Age Agia Kyriaki. Hamilakis, however, was not interested in how funeral feasting changed over time.

¹ The Readings sections not only recommend works not mentioned in the chapters, but also include a few important works already referred to in the chapters.