

Preface

As the chorus of dissent that I expect to arise from this study will surely not fail to point out, I am not a specialist in Mycenaean pottery nor have I ever excavated a Late Bronze or early Iron Age site in the southern Levant (although I spent a few seasons working at the Iron Age sites of Tell esh-Sharia and Tel Gerisa in Israel, and at the multi-period site of Pella in Jordan, during the 1970s and 1980s). Although I have little expertise in Egyptian archaeology and iconography, I was trained in cuneiform – Akkadian, Hittite, Ugaritic – and Hieroglyphic Luwian, as well as other ancient languages peripheral to the present study. However, from the time of writing my MA thesis on the ‘sea peoples’ while a research student at UC Berkeley (1973), I have maintained a strong interest, read widely, and taught courses in Levantine prehistory, especially that of the southern Levant, and particularly at the end of the Late Bronze Age. Having also been trained from my undergraduate days as an (ancient) historian, I have often observed that some archaeologists, and even more philologists, seem unable to stand back from their specific disciplinary concerns and try to present a broader picture. I hasten to add, however, that many of the archaeologists whose writings and ideas I confront in this study are quite capable historians as well: they simply operate under a paradigm (‘the Philistine model’) that compels them to see a migration where others see quite different phenomena. Having observed this situation throughout my academic career, I decided it was time to write it up. Those who hope to find the answers to what actually happened at the end of the Bronze Age in the eastern Mediterranean may be disappointed; I will be content, however, if this work succeeds (1) in calling into question the validity of the migrationist paradigm and the ‘Philistine model’ that emanates from it, and (2) in demonstrating the contradictions that result from adhering to that paradigm.

1 Introduction

We are living in ‘an age of migration’ (Brettell and Hollifield 2015: 2) and scholars from all areas of history and the social sciences, including archaeology, have become fascinated with what is widely acknowledged as a very complex phenomenon. Those most intimately associated with studying *prehistoric* migrations tend to feel that the main stimulus behind this phenomenon was human agency rather than climatic or environmental change (e.g. Bellwood 2013: 244). Whereas the causes of migration are multiple, complex and often historically specific, the most common explanations proposed in the archaeological literature assume a single, typically generalised cause (e.g. population growth, climate change or other natural disaster, war or invasion, technological developments, socio-economic collapse).

Anthony (1990: 897) commented long ago that archaeologists have ‘a paralyzing fascination with the causes of migration, which in most archeological cases is a hopeless quagmire’. People moved or migrated for multiple reasons, but beyond cases of ‘forced’ migration (e.g. Driessen 2018; Hamilakis 2018), one crucial (‘push’) factor was the need for new land or access to new marine or terrestrial resources (e.g. for fishing, hunting, farming). Alternatively, where people had the technological wherewithal, the need for such resources might be met by intensifying local production (e.g. opening marginal areas to agriculture), which would have increased land value or encouraged the development of other resources, thus reducing incentives to migrate.

One key problem that arises in studying prehistoric migrations relates to their size; exact figures are in most cases impossible to determine. However, beyond certain known ‘mass’ migrations (e.g. Palaeolithic or more recent, long-term European colonisations of North America), it is generally acknowledged that – in prehistoric contexts – migration episodes involved relatively small numbers of people (Bellwood 2013: 247). In the case of the southern Levant at the end of the Bronze Age, the subject of this study, there seems to be little awareness of such issues. Stager (1995), for example, imagined a seaborne migration (‘Philistines’) of some 25,000 people, while Yasur-Landau (2010: 333–4) envisioned a land-based migration involving a minimum of 5,000 to 6,000 people. Such numbers have no basis in material, documentary or historical reality.

Given the general lack of congruence between patterns in language, culture and biology, identifying ancient migrations is a difficult and often controversial task for the archaeologist (Bellwood 2013: 32). Research regarding migrations in the Late Bronze Age (LBA) eastern Mediterranean – whether based on archaeological or documentary evidence, or both – is not only controversial but also tends to be narrow in focus, devoid of theory, replete with terminological inconsistencies, often contradictory, and thus ultimately confusing. Moreover, when Bronze

Age eastern Mediterranean archaeologists engage with the material remains of new ‘Philistine’ settlements in the early Iron Age southern Levant, or with documentary evidence related to the ‘sea peoples’, there is a widespread assumption that such settlements were (re-)populated by migrants from the Aegean, Cyprus or Anatolia (or all three). Even accepting that there must have been some level of migration in the southern Levant at that time, only rarely do the associated studies consider just what kind of migration this was, on what scale, and how it may have differed (i.e. what was the ‘migration experience’), for example, from other areas in the northern or central Levant, or in Cyprus, Egypt or Anatolia for that matter.

This study attempts to take a fresh, if highly critical, look at notions of migration and mobility at the end of the Bronze Age in the eastern Mediterranean. First, the stage is set by considering some historical background to the development of migration studies, including types and definitions of migration as well as some of its possible material correlates. I also consider some of the interpretative aspects of both migration and mobility, in the attempt to refine how we go about studying migration: while migration obviously involves human movement, mobility is a much more complex and multifaceted process, one that may or may not involve migration. Secondly, I present, on a general level, the history of research related to migration and ‘ethnicity’ in the southern Levant at the end of the LBA, examining both migrationist and anti-migrationist views. Thirdly, I examine and critique some recent studies on palaeoclimatic and related environmental issues, as well as the current state of evidence from palaeogenetics (ancient DNA–aDNA) and strontium isotope analyses. Following a detailed discussion of mobility and migration in the Late Bronze Age southern Levant, it is argued that most migration scenarios envisioned for the end of the southern Levantine Bronze Age are not only idiosyncratic but also inadequately invested in the wider archaeological, social science, palaeoclimatic and palaeogenetic literature. The conclusion, while ultimately inconclusive, attempts to look anew at this problematic period of transformation and social change, of mobility and connectivity, alongside the hybridised practices of social actors old and new.

2 Migration Studies in Archaeology

As emphasised in several recent works (e.g. Hakenbeck 2008, 2019; van Dommelen 2014: 478–9; Van Oyen 2017), the concept of migration has long engaged the attention of archaeologists, whether positively or negatively. The use of migration as an explanation for cultural transformation has typically been opposed by arguments for indigenous development, diffusion or evolutionary change. Childe (1928), for example, championed diffusionism over migration as

an explanation for social change, but he also sought repeatedly to understand how migrations might be identified in the archaeological record (e.g. Childe 1950). Migration and diffusion represent two key aspects of a culture-historical framework; they are seen to provide an explanation for cultural change in prehistory, one that underpins beliefs in the importance of immutable ethnic identities and the boundedness of archaeological cultures.

In general, Anglophone and European archaeological research during the first half of the twentieth century – broadly defined as the culture-historical approach – failed to explain how migration worked or how its archaeological correlates might be identified (Trigger 1968: 39–47). Nonetheless, the culture-historical paradigm has proved to be one of archaeology's most enduring frameworks, one that continues to dominate archaeological discourse in many parts of the world and to shape archaeological notions of migration (Hakenbeck 2008: 12–13). In this paradigm, ethnic groups form the principal actors. Once identified plausibly (or not) in specific material culture assemblages, such groups are tracked in the archaeological record (and associated with each other, or not) and their material patterns are seen as a result of migration or diffusion. Such views of migration typically assume the short-term migration – or 'migration event' – of a specific ethnic or social group (e.g. Philistines, 'sea peoples') that involved major population displacements and long-distance (often maritime) travel, and that had a profound socio-economic and cultural impact on the receiving areas. In terms of method, the culture-historical approach to studying the origin and directions of migrations tends to focus on isolated aspects of the archaeological record thought to be diagnostic in ethnic terms.

Processual archaeologists challenged these methodological and theoretical shortcomings and proposed that cultural development and social change stemmed primarily from internal social dynamics, that is, from systemic factors such as population growth or eco-environmental variability (Clarke 1968: 411–31); this resulted in what was famously termed a 'retreat from migrationism' (Adams et al. 1978). At the same time, island archaeologists sought to develop explicitly comparative, quantitative, biogeographical models of migration to explore cultural patterning, especially in the Pacific and the Caribbean (e.g. MacArthur and Wilson 1967; Rouse 1986). Meanwhile, however, the status of migration as an explanation for demic diffusion, colonisation or cultural change continued to be contested (e.g. Ammerman and Cavalli-Sforza 1984; Renfrew 1987).

By the 1990s, post-processual reactions to such grand scale syntheses began to set in, and archaeologists increasingly engaged with works stemming from the other social sciences to consider the variety, complexity and social contexts of migrations. Archaeological studies of migration thus emphasised some of the following factors involved in migratory movements: transport and economics,

demographics and ideology, ‘push-pull’ dynamics (e.g. Anthony 1990: 899–905; Chapman and Hamerow 1997; Burmeister 2000: 543–4). In turn, Clark (1994) criticised population pressure as an explanation for cultural change, as well as the tendency to equate archaeological assemblages with ethnic groups. Like many others of the time, Clark’s scepticism about migration formed part of the processual legacy that rejected migration (and diffusionism) as markers of cultural history and cultural change.

Not long afterward, a growing body of work, initially termed ‘archaeogenetics’ (Renfrew and Boyle 2000), began to examine migration and the spread of different populations through the interdisciplinary study of genetics, historical linguistics, demographic modelling and archaeological data. More recently, stable isotope analyses of human skeletons have been touted as direct evidence for the movement of individual people (e.g. Bentley 2006; Vander Linden 2007; Nafplioti 2016), or at least of the first generation of migrants (Burmeister 2017: 63–6). Thus, advances in biochemistry – for example, in analysing strontium isotope ratios – have the potential to indicate whether or not individuals were indigenous to the area where their remains were recovered. In turn, geneticists have now begun to compile extensive aDNA (ancient DNA) data sets (e.g. Vander Linden 2016; Feldman et al. 2019; Agranat-Tamir et al. 2020) which, when carefully balanced through interdisciplinary collaboration with archaeologists, have the potential to address key questions about who may have migrated where, and when.

The jury is still out on the issue of just how vital the work of post-processual or social archaeology has been for the study of ancient migrations. There is still some reluctance to consider migration as a research topic in its own right (van Dommelen 2012: 403). Rarely do we find serious engagement with anthropological theory concerning migration, much less any awareness of potentially relevant ideas stemming from economics, sociology, demography, human geography or political science. Anthropologists and geographers, for example, seek to explore the role of social networks and ethnic identity in the movement of people and populations across time and through space, whereas sociologists aim to study the outcome of migratory movements and how immigrants are assimilated, or not, into the receiving society (see various papers in Brettell and Hollifield 2015).

Some recent archaeological approaches have moved away from considering migration simply as a vector for change and instead focus on migration as a complex phenomenon worthy of study in and of itself (Hakenbeck 2008: 21; Leppard 2014; Kristiansen 2016; Burmeister 2017; Leppard et al. 2020). Moreover, the current revival of interest in migration as an explanatory concept is at least partly associated with postmodernist and postcolonial approaches whose aim is to empower the local and indigenous while rebuffing the global and imperial. Many archaeologists, however, still seem motivated simply to

demonstrate that large-scale migrations (or invasions) took place without considering adequately the implications of such movements and the range of possible outcomes they typically elicit.

This is certainly the case with the specific episodes that concern us here – the so-called Aegean, ‘sea peoples’ and/or Philistine migrations at the end of the LBA. Doubts must be raised immediately, however, because archaeologists and especially prehistorians, unlike scholars in other disciplines, confront a unique problem: how can we identify migrants or migrations in the material record in the first place, and how can migration be distinguished from other instances of human mobility? Indeed, this is the crux of the problem for the Bronze Age Mediterranean more generally, as is the issue of identifying the material markers of ethnic identities so readily assumed, argued or passively accepted by many archaeologists.

Migration is a social phenomenon and must be understood as one aspect of human mobility and connectivity, alongside transhumance, exchange, technology transfer, networks, seafaring and ‘cultural mobility’: it is ‘a key constituent element of human life in virtually all periods’ (Greenblatt 2010: i) and a ‘fundamental part of being human’ (Cabana and Clark 2011: 4). It is therefore essential to consider not only the reasons why people were motivated to migrate but also the diversity and complexity of both mobility and migration, and the outcomes for migrants as well as for the communities they left and those that received them (van Dommelen 2014: 480).

Types of Migration

In an edited volume on migration in anthropology, Cabana and Clark (2011: 5–6) observe that people move in two fundamental ways: (1) as individuals or small groups acting independently with a common purpose, and (2) as a larger social group coordinated by a central authority. At a minimum, therefore, migration involves an individual or group of individuals moving from their place of origin to a new – known or unknown – destination on a relatively permanent basis. Such migratory movements may involve crossing a visible material, geophysical or political boundary, or else an invisible, conceptual or cognitive one (e.g. spiritual or mythical movements). Migration thus involves the movement of individuals or social groups between two places that are somehow understood as being different: the movement is therefore not just physical but also social and cultural.

There are many different types of migration that may be related to different social strategies and different kinds of human experience, including attachment to or detachment from a place. These range from brief but repeated movements like those associated with seasonal labour to major diasporas involving the permanent and forced deportation of people (van Dommelen 2012: 404). In

cases of ‘return migration’, people initially move only on a temporary basis (e.g. for work or for reasons of security) but may eventually give up on return movements to their homeland. In cases of ‘chain migration’, people or even entire communities migrate successively over a long period of time and establish permanent settlements elsewhere; in so doing, they may establish and maintain interregional connections across formal political boundaries that impact on their socio-economic, kinship and community relations (Anthony 1990: 902–4).

Some of the key variables that must be considered in studies of migration include motivation (e.g. push, pull and ‘stay’ factors), structure and scale (who is involved, and how many people, in what time frame, and what kind of boundaries are being crossed?), distance (geographic, ecological, social), mode (e.g. by land or sea), and the impact on both the immigrants and the receiving community (migratory behaviour) (Cabana and Clark 2011: 6–8). Push factors might include population growth, economic or social breakdown, warfare, the need for new territory, diminished resources or natural disasters. Pull factors may include social or economic advantage, available space, new opportunities or exploration ventures (Bellwood 2013: xv, 2–4, 14).

Considering such variables provides a basic conception of migration linked to a specific research agenda, and thus stands in contrast to approaches that begin with the observed impact and simply infer migration, then work backwards to identify and categorise immigrants, through their ethnicity for example. Mass movements of people to entirely new and different socio-spatial environments may represent the most dramatic type of migration, but they are rare in comparison with most other known types or with cases where one group of people may co-exist with or be assimilated by another group as a result of migration. ‘Migration is an inherently social act or process’ that involves crossing both real and perceived boundaries that are socially and culturally, if not politically or linguistically constructed (Cabana and Clark 2011: 9). Because such boundaries may not have clear physical manifestations, any attempt to define them or to determine their presence or absence is fraught with difficulties. Although archaeologists have long sought to discern distinctive material boundaries that separate human social groups from one another, even the most carefully contextualised trait lists of material culture seldom provide an adequate basis for establishing a group’s social or ethnic identity (Cusick 1998: 137–8).

Migration: Definition and Archaeological Correlates

As already emphasised, migrations are a central fact of social life. While the renewed attention archaeologists focus on migration seems entirely appropriate,

Anthony (1997: 30) argued that it is more important to understand the structure of migratory events than to pursue the actual causes of migration. Migration involves broadly predictable human behaviour ‘typically performed by defined subgroups with specific goals, targeted on known destinations and likely to use familiar routes’ (Anthony 1990: 895–6). Silberman (1998: 272) echoes this definition, especially with respect to movement, describing migration as ‘continuous adaptive behavior between regions with long-standing familiarity, characterized by considerable back-and-forth movement, not a permanent exodus’. Bellwood (2013: 2) defines migration as ‘the permanent movement of all or part of a population to inhabit a new territory, separate from that in which it was previously based. Permanent translocation is an essential part of this definition’. Migration, however, is not simply the physical movement from point of origin to destination; it also involves ‘a complex swirl of biological, sociocultural, and linguistic activities’ and thus may be considered as both a process and an agent of change (Cabana and Clark 2011: 4).

In order to adopt the concept of migration as an explanatory tool, archaeologists need to be able (1) to identify its material cultural traits; (2) to recognise how it works (as patterned behaviour); and (3) to distinguish between the many different types of migratory behaviour that exist (see previous section). Archaeologists typically discuss migration primarily in the context of cultural change, but this focuses on the outcome, not the migration episode itself (Burmeister 2017: 58). In addition, it is necessary to consider what triggers migration, the specific actions involved in such movement (e.g. over land, by sea) and the social processes at work in the destination area (e.g. population density, resistance to incomers, environmental suitability for food production).

What, then, are some *possible* material correlates of migration?

- shared artefact styles
- technological improvements or industrial patterns (metalwork, weaving practices)
- developments in transport (e.g. wheeled vehicles, longboat and sail, ship representations, horse or camel domestication, construction of road networks)
- settlement patterns
- shelter, architecture (houses) and household structure (spatial layout)
- mortuary practices
- symbols, clothing, dress and bodily ornament (e.g. jewellery, headdresses, cosmetics)
- food preparation/cuisine and consumption practices (e.g. faunal remains, fireplaces or hearths, organic residues).

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Such material factors, however, should not be understood as essential traits of migration applicable in every prehistoric or historic context (Chapman and Hamerow 1997: 2).

Because long-distance migration can be propelled by knowledge of accessible routes and attractive destinations, shared artefact styles may make it possible to reconstruct information or to identify exchange networks that facilitated migratory movements. In instances of chain migration, artefact types may reflect regional groups or subgroups of migrants. In historical cases of ‘return’ migration, the migrants involved typically had invested in land or prestige goods, the latter acquired during their journey (Cameron 1995: 116).

Because migration is affected by ease of travel and transportation costs, one may assume there will be more evidence for short- rather than long-distance migratory movements; at times they may be expected to occur in the wake of technological developments in transport. In the case of the Bronze Age southern Levant, for example, Emanuel (2016: 271–2) has suggested that improvements in maritime technology – the oared rower’s galley, brailed sailing rig, crow’s nest – could have facilitated transportation and the movement of people, raiders and traders around the time of the LBA ‘collapse’ (i.e. c.1200 BC).

Settlement patterns may reveal isolated pockets around founder communities separated by considerable distances from the point of origin (Anthony 1997: 27). In turn, the dwelling places of migrants in their new location may show distinctive differences with local dwellings, not least in the layout of rooms, hearths and other fixtures. In other words, when people migrate to a new area, they often hold onto various aspects of the culture, dress, cuisine and other material trappings linked to their homeland and expressive of their identity, including food preparation and consumption practices. The differentiation of migrant cultures into inner (private) and outer (public) spheres of life may have different material correlates, and it is the inner sphere (‘ingrained habitual practices’) that has the potential to bear archaeological witness to migration (Burmeister 2017: 62–3).

Whatever else migrants may have to abandon in order to mix and integrate with the receiving society, most do not willingly renounce their identity, ideology or beliefs. Even so, immigrant societies have to be somewhat flexible in their cultural practices; when confronted with new social settings, ecological niches or changed politico-economic conditions, they may adapt their (material) culture, just as the receiving society may modify their own cultural practices. In other words, some migrants tend to break with their home culture and, in adapting to a new culture or new geographic area, they make and display new material and cultural forms. The act of migration thus may change the migrants’ idea of home, weakening old bonds and forging new ones. Mapping cultural features alone therefore does not adequately reflect all these processes (Burmeister 2017: 60),

and archaeologists should consider the material effects of multiple cultural meetings and mixings – the exchange of ideas, ideologies and sociocultural practices – on both the migrant and receiving groups.

Migration provides a context for analysing social identity because changes in residence force migrants as well as those in the receiving culture to reassess how they see or understand their own personal or collective identities. Identities, in other words, may well have material markers, but ethnicity is another matter entirely (see further under *Ethnicity*).

3 Migration in the Late Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean

... archaeological migration studies are by and large still defined by a default, if often implicit, conceptualization of migration as ‘invasion’ and ‘large-scale population movement’ ... There also remains a strong concern with demonstrating that migration did take place and that people actually moved, to the extent that there has been very little consideration of the implications of migration.

(van Dommelen 2014: 479)

One can but marvel at the number, level and scale of ‘migrations’ envisioned in the eastern Mediterranean at or near the end of the LBA (twelfth and eleventh centuries BC). In the wider Mediterranean world of the early Iron Age, this resulted at least in part from the protracted mobility that forged more intensive connections between polities near and far, the ‘trafficking of people and objects’ (van Dommelen 2018: 219; see also van Dommelen and Knapp 2010). In the eastern Mediterranean, such migrations purportedly stemmed from as far afield as Italy in the west (e.g. Jung 2017), or the Balkans/central Europe in the north (Matić and Francović 2020), and thence through the Aegean, Cyprus, Anatolia and the Levant, to Egypt in the southeast, and farther within or between some of those regions (see, e.g., papers in Fischer and Bürge 2017). This includes, for example, migrations ostensibly involving people from Italy or adjacent parts of Europe moving to Greece; Greek heroes returning from the Trojan war; ‘sea peoples’ from almost anywhere in the Mediterranean moving elsewhere (but mainly to Cyprus, Cilicia, the Levant and Egypt); Aramaeans moving into the Levant and ‘Neo-Hittites’ into northern Syria; Syrian refugees from Amurru moving into the southern Levant and Egypt (Ben-Dor Evian 2018); Philistines and other ‘sea peoples’ moving into the southern (and now the northern) Levant, if not Egypt; and Israelites occupying part of the southern Levant.

In the Aegean, Wachsmann (1998: 161) understood the Linear B ‘rower tablets’ from Pylos (PY An 610, PY An 724) to indicate a polity preparing for ‘mass seaborne Aegean migrations’ in which its palace, as well as the surrounding towns and countryside, were abandoned in favour of colonies overseas. Like many other notional migration scenarios of this period, this one is seen to have