

In the past century archaeologists have been able to learn a great deal about the Greek Bronze Age (3000-1200 B.C.), especially about its later phase generally known as the "Mycenaean Age" after its premier site at Mycenae in the Argolid of southern Greece. We now know, for example, that this Mycenaean culture flourished between 1600 and 1200 B.C., that it was the "age of heroes" reflected in the Iliad and Odyssey of Homer, that there were massive fortified citadels controlling pockets of the Greek mainland, and that imperialism was rampant as the aggressive Mycenaeans took over control of Crete (around 1450 B.C.) and the Aegean in general before venturing on the great expedition to Troy. The evidence for such assertions falls into three main categories: 1) archaeological finds, 2) mythological "reflections", especially in Homer, and 3) the famous Linear B tablets, which, in the 1950's, were deciphered by Michael Ventris as an early form of the Greek language, and which give us a priceless insight into the day to day functioning of Mycenaean society. But we are only in the early stages of pushing the clock further back, into the time when no Greek-speakers yet inhabited the Greek peninsula. The picture which is slowly emerging will undoubtedly enable us to understand for the first time the full history of human habitation in Greece.

At the moment, we can go as far back as 6000 B.C., when the people living in Greece had a neolithic-type civilization, that is, they lived in small settlements (one, at Sesklo in Thessaly, had a good size fortification wall around the village), used stone tools, and practised farming and animal husbandry. The pottery

made by these people is crude in many respects, but brightly decorated with geometric patterns. Their sites also reveal clay figurines of women of ample proportions, sometimes called "Venus figurines", which seem to be connected with a vegetation-cult form of religion. Who these people actually were is not presently clear, but most scholars currently believe they were not Indo-Europeans (i.e., a people speaking one of the Indo-European languages, such as Greek itself). The only other "fact" of note is that this civilization endured for approximately 3000 years, ending around 3000 B.C.

The year 3000 B.C. now stands as the dividing mark between the neolithic and the so-called Bronze Age, for new people or peoples seem to have arrived in Greece at this time bringing the manufacture of bronze with them. These immigrants may have come from Anatolia (Asia Minor, or roughly modern-day Turkey) and could (just possibly) be the enigmatic "Pelasgians" of later Greek myth. They, too, lived in walled towns, one of which, at Lerna in the Argolid, has been extensively excavated and studied. Lerna seems to have been a thriving town until around 2200 B.C., when it was destroyed, its major structures burned to the ground. (The most impressive structure on the site today is the "House of the Tiles", which may have served the town as a kind of community (and religious) centre.) This period of destruction heralds the close of the so-called "Early Helladic" age in Greece.

After the destruction of Lerna, a new style of pottery begins to appear in quantity in Greece - the attractive Minyan Ware, which features a greyish-coloured pottery made on a

potter's wheel; moreover, there now appears for the first time the presence of the horse, an animal destined to play a large role in the future development of Greece. Both of these new "arrivals" lead some historians to believe that these immigrants were "proto-Greeks", that is, a people in some way ancestral to the Greeks who would later keep records in Linear B script during the Mycenaean Age. A common scenario is that these new people mixed with the previous inhabitants, between 2000 and 1600 B.C., to create real "Greeks" - that is, the Mycenaeans (or the Achaeans, as Homer calls them). If this is so, then the people who arrived between 2200 and 2000 B.C. should have been Indo-Europeans. In any event, the period from 2000-1600 B.C. is traditionally classified by archaeologists as the "Mid-

dle Helladic Age", and characterized as the period which laid the basic foundations for the Mycenaean culture of the "Late Helladic Age" (1600-1200 B.C.)

There are obviously still many problems in need of resolution, but the general picture is at least becoming clearer, and new archaeological finds throughout the Greek peninsula promise more knowledge in the years to come. Perhaps, for example, we may soon know who the strange "Pelasgians" really were, or how many different peoples were indigenous to the Eastern Mediterranean before the Greeks became dominant. Migration patterns may emerge, as well as the reasons behind the mass movements of different peoples. In any case, we have a lot to look forward to in the coming years!