

INTRODUCTION

Recent scholarship has begun to emphasize the formative role Cyprus and the Aegean world played in the development of the small territorial states that emerged in the eastern Mediterranean during the early centuries of the first millennium BCE. Central to this discussion has been the contribution of the Sea Peoples, who conveniently have assumed a role as the 'Vikings' of the Mediterranean world, responsible for destroying the venerable Bronze Age civilizations of the ancient Near East, and ushering the region into a historical 'Dark Age' during the ensuing centuries of the Early Iron Age (ca. 1200-900 BCE).

Ancient textual sources do indeed portray a turbulent world at the end of the thirteenth century, marking the transition from the Late Bronze to Early Iron Ages that coincided with the collapse of the centralized state bureaucracies of the preceding era, with their extensive commercial networks and rich cuneiform scribal traditions. However, increasingly, syntheses of the archaeological record have begun to note the evidence for cultural continuity, and to articulate a more gradual process of consolidation and transformation during this period, characterized by the emergence of regionalized settlement networks and the formation of small, ethnically defined territorial states. Concurrently, and perhaps ironically, excavations are uncovering an ever expanding material cultural assemblage with strong links to the Aegean, the presumed homeland of the Sea Peoples. Whether these remains are the cultural signature of a distinctive socio-ethnic group, of multiple groups, or should be seen as the by-product of expanding inter-regional commercial activity during this period, predictably, has become the focus of intensified scholarly debate.

However, while the Sea Peoples are increasingly acknowledged to have played an important role in the development of Early Iron Age society, particularly in the context of the biblical Philistines, the archaeological evidence for an expanding presence remains surprisingly under-explored. To date, Aegean-style pottery (specifically Mycenaean III C:1) has been reported at a growing number of Early Iron Age sites, mostly in the southern Levant, but also increasingly at northern Levantine and Cilician/southern Anatolian sites. It seems likely, therefore, that the evidence of contact with the Aegean world during this formative period remains under-represented in the archaeological record, and was considerably more widespread than has been recognized thus far.

The literary accounts of the Sea Peoples, which include the annals (and wall reliefs) of New Kingdom Egyptian pharaohs, the biblical narratives of early Israel, particularly as portrayed in the Book of Judges, and even the Homeric epics of classical Greece, also convey

important historical insights. While historians have questioned the veracity of these accounts, read broadly, they clearly constitute the formative expressions of corporate self identity, and therefore provide revealing glimpses of the competing cultural and ethnic identities in play during this dynamic era.

Particularly intriguing has been the suggested possibility that there were distinct cultural zones distributed along the eastern Mediterranean seaboard, and that these might reflect the territorial settlement of specific sub-groups within the broader Sea Peoples cultural movement. Concerted archaeological investigations along the southern coast of Israel, for example, have outlined the distinctive material cultural signature of one such group, typically identified with the Peleset, and it is now widely accepted that this group should be equated with the biblical Philistines. Until recently, however, very little empirical evidence could be linked confidently to other groups named in the ancient sources, such as the Tjekker, the Sherden, or the Denyen, despite the fact these groups are often associated with specific regions of the eastern Mediterranean (the Tjekker with the central Levantine coast, the Sherden with Cyprus, and the Denyen with Cilicia and the northern Levant). The expanding scholarly interest in this period now renders a broader, inter-regional approach to the study of the Sea Peoples both possible and timely.

As a result, in 2006, an international conference was convened at the University of Toronto on the subject of "Cyprus, the Sea Peoples and the Eastern Mediterranean." The primary aims of the conference were to explore the role of the Sea Peoples during this formative period from the perspectives of the principal cultural traditions and regions involved, and to better articulate the range and diversity of their material cultural expression in the archaeological records of these regions. It was also hoped that such a gathering might help transcend the geographical and political barriers that have often impeded inter-regional collaboration in the eastern Mediterranean, while identifying new avenues and opportunities for interdisciplinary research.

Over the course of the day-long event, sixteen scholars presented papers organized around four thematic sessions: (1) Cyprus and the Aegean Connection, (2) Textual and Iconographic Perspectives, (3) Southern Anatolian and Northern Levantine Perspectives, and (4) The Southern Levantine Perspective. These conference presentations, and ensuing discussions, have provided the primary content for the edited papers that appear in this volume. Several papers submitted following the conference have also been included.

As the papers in this volume demonstrate, the conference identified a number of important trends, or themes. In particular, they give witness to the rapidly expanding evidentiary knowledge base on this subject, and to the surprisingly widespread distribution of Aegean-style material culture throughout the eastern Mediterranean. As several of the authors in this volume report, this distinctive cultural expression is well-represented not only on Cyprus and in the southern Levant, but in Cilicia and the northern and central Levant as well. At the same time, the assembled cultural record betrays a remarkable

diversity and significant regional variation, suggestive of a considerably more complex and heterogeneous developmental trajectory than most have assumed. The result has been a growing disillusionment with the mono-causal explanations that have long held sway, and a breakdown, or a 'fragmenting', of scholarly consensus, to invoke the lead title of Ayelet Gilboa's perceptive paper.

In light of this, as several authors emphasize, future research efforts will need to focus on developing more detailed, or nuanced, 'local histories', if we are to achieve a deeper understanding of the complex socio-cultural experience of this era. To accomplish this task, excavations will need to continue developing detailed stratigraphic sequences and greater chronometric precision. As several authors argue, field research strategies must also incorporate a multi-scalar approach to the archaeological record, while employing multi-disciplinary analytical methods and techniques that more thoroughly exploit the rich and diverse archaeological evidence available. Clearly, there is considerable research still to be done, and many exciting discoveries still to be made. It is hoped this volume represents a modest step forward in that endeavor.

The conference was hosted by St. Michael's College of the University of Toronto, and sponsored by the following institutions and organizations: the Canadian Institute for Mediterranean Studies, the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Cyprus, the Consulate of Israel and the United Jewish Agency, the Department of Classics and Ancient Mediterranean Studies at Pennsylvania State University, and the Royal Ontario Museum. Major funding was provided by the Connaught Fund of the University of Toronto and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I wish to acknowledge and thank each of these sponsors and funding agencies. The conference would not have been a success without their support, and the encouragement of my colleagues on the Board of the Canadian Institute for Mediterranean Studies.

I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers who generously read each paper and provided constructive critical feedback. This volume has certainly benefited from their input, though they do not bear any responsibility for whatever errors might remain. The production of this volume has also benefited from the help of numerous individuals. In particular, I wish to acknowledge the dedicated editorial assistance of Stanley Klassen and Heather Snow. Their contribution has been indispensable. Anthony Percival and Jorge Guerrero were instrumental during the early stages of the editorial process, while Stephen Batiuk and Taber James provided invaluable assistance formatting images and producing page layouts. To each I owe thanks. Finally, I wish to voice appreciation for my colleague John S. Holladay, Jr., and his unflagging support, patient ear, and good counsel throughout the production of this volume. I will be forever grateful.