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**THE COMING OF THE GREEKS
AND THE FORMATION OF THE GREEK NATION :
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

The definition of nation has changed many times. A common language is one of its most important characteristics, but not the only one, as Herder and the theoreticians of romanticism stressed in the last century. Even in our world today, there are different nations using an identical language and some nations using more than one language. The self-identification of a nation has more than one means, and in ancient Greece this term embraced different levels of identification from the city-state to a federation based on similar dialect or interests and finally to pan-Greek feelings; this was also the case in the history of other nations in the past, and we often find self-identification based on territory or religion prevailing over that of a language. The language of the earliest Greeks cannot be learned without written sources, but one of the tasks of scholarship is to try to enlarge human knowledge beyond the area of the already known. Even if the contribution of archaeology to this question must remain modest, at least some preliminary survey of the field may be useful for further strategy.

The discovery of traces of invasions in archaeology is difficult, but not impossible, as we can draw a probable picture from analogous situations known both historically and archaeologically.¹ The formation of any nation is a process taking a relatively short time after the invasion (colonisation etc.) of a new territory with a previous settled population, or if the invaders (colonists) belong to more than one ethnic group. The new language may be basically either that of the old settlers or that of the newcomers, though in both cases it would show some traces of the language which had been suppressed and disappeared. The basic character of the new language depends on the size of the two groups, on their social position (who are the victorious and who the subjugated), and on the

¹ Cf. J. BOUZEK, *Invasions and Migrations in the Bronze Age Aegean: how to decipher the archaeological evidence*, Acts of the Vth conference for the Aegean Prehistory, Athens 1987, printing.

women more often than on the men. Many invaders lost their language because they came as military force without their women; children usually take the language of their mothers, and only a few groups with strong literary and/or oral culture escaped this fate.

As for Mycenaean Greek, A. Bartoněk described it as a childless aunt, sister of the lady whose daughters may represent Ionic, Doric, Aeolic and other Greek dialects.² The first Greek inscriptions from Cyprus date from the 11th century B. C.,³ the tablets deciphered as being in Mycenaean Greek dialect found on the mainland date from the late 13th century B. C. As concerns Knossos, the majority of scholars⁴ now prefer a late 13th century date for the final destruction and the tablets, while others⁵ still consider a LH III A 1 date (i. e. c. 1370/60) being the most probable one. The society that emerges from the deciphered documents (mainly those of Pylos, which form the bulk of the evidence) is considered a new one, existing only for a few generations;⁶ Linear B was taken over from another language and only modestly adapted for use in writing Greek. Unlike Linear A, which was widely used for dedications to deities in sanctuaries as well, those texts in Linear B known to us are only palace records kept by specialised scribes: the Mycenaean gods, like most of Mycenaean Greeks, were illiterate.⁷

Nearly all elements in Mycenaean art and material culture which did not disappear with the end of the Mycenaean world, but continued across the Dark Age, originated in LH III A 2 (a few) or in LH III B (most of them). There are iconographical motifs on painted pottery (the horse-leader, birds, bird and fish or snake),⁸ rhythmical elements later developing towards the triglyph-metope scheme,⁹ bird askoi of particular types,¹⁰ bosses or warts on "female" vases,¹¹

² Expressively in one of his lectures in Prague, cf. A. BARTONĚK, *On the Prehistory of Ancient Greek*, SMEA 26 (1987), 17-22.

³ The last survey by V. Karageorghis in the Pierides Foundation Symposium "Cyprus and the West Mediterranean", Larnaca 1989, printing.

⁴ Cf. E. HALLAGER, SMEA 19 (1978), 17-33; W. D. NIEMEYER, *Kleine Schriften*, Vorg. Sem. Marburg 11 1982, 29-127; A. BARTONĚK, *Datierung der Linear B - Texte*, Listy fil. 106 (1983), 138-141.

⁵ The last survey P. WARREN, Pierides Foundation Symposium Larnaca (note 4), printing.

⁶ Cf. S. DEGGER-JALKOTZY, *E-QE-TA, Zur Rolle des Gefolgschaftswesens in der Sozialstruktur mykenischer Reiche*, Wien 1978, 209-12; J. CHADWICK, *The Mycenaean World*, Cambridge 1976.

⁷ Cf. A. BARTONĚK, Listy fil. 106 1983, 141.

⁸ Cf. J. L. BENSON, *Horse, Bird and Man: The Origins of Greek Painting*, Amherst 1970; S. Langdon, *AJA* 93 (1989), 185-201; M. IACOVOU, *The Pictorial Pottery of 11th century Cyprus*, Göteborg 1988.

⁹ Cf. J. BOARDMAN, *Symbol and Story in Geometric Art*, in: W. MOON (ed.), *Ancient Greek Art and Iconography*, Madison 1983, 15-36; J. BOUZEK, in: R. HÄGG (ed.), *The Greek Renaissance of the 8th century B. C.*, Stockholm 1983, 69-73; J. L. BENSON, *Symptom and Story in Geometric Art*, *BAnt. Besch.* 63 (1988), 69-76.

new shapes of amphorae, jugs and oenochoi not known in the earlier repertory.¹² New ornaments are probably derived from basketry and from the textile binding of vessels similar to those known from northern Greece (Bobousti etc.) and from the Balkans.¹³ Another LH III B phenomenon is the Barbarian Ware and the first weapons, armour pieces and dress fasteners of European descent or inspiration.¹⁴

At the same time, many links with Cyprus, Anatolia and the Levant can be traced, notably in the field of religion, sanctuaries and bronze figurines (the smiting god).¹⁵ One of the simplest Phylakopi figurines of clay, however, points to European inspiration: it may be considered a predecessor of the Olympia Dark Age clay figurines.¹⁶ Outside that, there is very little continuity in Greek sanctuaries from the Age of Bronze to the Age of Iron, and the modest evidence does not go back beyond LH III B-C.¹⁷ All this seems to suggest that in Mycenaean Greek of Linear B we may have a trace of a group of 13th or late 14th century B. C. invaders preceding the Ionians and Aeolians (the Dorians and Northwest Greeks came even later anyway).¹⁸ The Mycenaean Greeks of this group may have come first as mercenaries and after some time replaced those they served, as has happened so many times in analogous situations (the ancient Near East, the end of Classical Antiquity, etc.).

For the Iron Age Greeks, the formative stage of their nation is preserved in legends, going back only a few generations beyond the Trojan war: of the Bronze Age civilisation in the Aegean, only the final stage became part of the self-identifying legends of the Iron Age Greeks, while its earlier stages were rejected as alien. We may perhaps recall here a general rule in legends of the origin of nations, which are kept alive as a means of self-identification anywhere, while later stories belong into a much less important category. For the Greeks, the

¹⁰ Cf. J. BOUZEK, *Eirene* 8 (1970), 110-117; J. PAPADOPOULOS, *Mycenaean Achaea*, Lund 1979, 101-104 and AAA 1980, 166-170.

¹¹ *Eirene* 8 (1970), 104-110; J. BOUZEK, *The Aegean, Anatolia and Europe: Cultural Interrelations in the 2nd Millennium B. C.*, Prague-Lund 1985, 195-6.

¹² J. BOUZEK, *Op. Ath.* 9 (1969), 45-56.

¹³ H. THOMPSON, *AJA* 50 (1948), 288; J. BOUZEK, *The Attic Dark Age Incised Ware*, *Sbornik Nat. Mus. Prague A* 28 (1974), no. 1.

¹⁴ J. BOUZEK, *The Aegean, Anatolia and Europe* (note 11), 95-175; A. HARDING, *Mycenaean and Europe*, Academic Press 1984, 152-187.

¹⁵ J. BOUZEK, *Proc. Preh. Soc.* 38 (1972), 156-164; H. GALLET DE SANTERRE, *BCH* 111 (1987), 7-29.

¹⁶ C. RENFREW, *The Archeology of Cult, The Sanctuary of Phylakopi*, London 1985, pl. 35; W. HEILMEYER, *Frühe olympische Tonfiguren*, Berlin 1972.

¹⁷ Cf. the contributions by T. C. DIETRICH and C. ROLLEY in: R. HÄGG (ed.), (note 9), pp. 85-89 and 109-114.

¹⁸ F. SCHACHERMEYR, *Ägäische Frühzeit V: Griechenland im Zeitalter der Wanderungen*, Wien 1980, 206-318.

frontier was just after the Trojan War: the age of heroes had passed, and later founders of cities were much less important and never became heroes of tragedies and more sophisticated myths.

For the predecessors of the LH III (A-) B Mycenaeans we have no written records from the Greek mainland: they may have used either more archaic Greek or some pre-Greek language (Pelagian was probably one of the Sea Peoples' languages, but there are other candidates). In the Shaft Graves period, the ruling dynasty seems to have been linked with the Balkans and with Anatolia,¹⁹ but the next earlier period of basic changes and destructions comparable with final Bronze Age "threshold" was in Early Helladic II-III.²⁰

Various links of the new elements, if taken as a complex, point notably to the eastern Balkans and to the North Pontic area.²¹ Some predecessors of the Greeks, probably Indoeuropeans and possibly speaking some Protogreek language, may well have come from this part of the world.²² It seems unnecessary to proceed beyond this stage here, but we may bear in mind that both invasions were connected with climatic changes in Europe and the Mediterranean, which contributed to shift the balance of power between the Mediterranean civilisations and their northern neighbours living in the temperate zone of Europe.²³

The close of the Bronze age was a dramatic period. Many groups moved from one place to another in the Mediterranean, and new Iron Age nations were in the formative period of their history: the Israelites and the Philistines in Palestine, the Phrygians and the Lydians in Anatolia and, according to the legends, also various peoples in Italy. As after all invasions, migrations and colonisations, "melting pots" arose in specific areas, and the language of the strongest group prevailed at the end. New nations with new national consciousness swallowed minorities, while others, like Eteocretans and Eteocyprists, persisted at least as local relics.

During Classical Antiquity, Greek nation absorbed slaves and metoikoi from many other countries; during Mediaeval times it integrated many Slavs, Albanians and Vlachs, while after changing their religion, parts of the Greek-speaking population became Turkish, Arabic, Italian etc. Without any doubt, pre-Iron age history of the Aegean region was not a mechanical projection

¹⁹ J. BOUZEK, *The Aegean, Anatolia and Europe* (note 10), 80-83.

²⁰ Cf. G. CADOGAN (ed.), *The End of the Early Bronze Age in the Cyclades*, Leiden 1986, most notably the contribution by S. HOOD, pp. 31-68; M. WIENCKE, *AJA* 93 (1989), 495-510; S. MULLER, *BCH* 113 (1989), 1-42.

²¹ J. BOUZEK, *Die Ägäis, Anatolien und Mitteleuropa im 3. Jt. v. Chr. in Europa*, Akten der XIV. internat. Symposiums über das Äneolithikum und die früheste Bronzezeit in Mitteleuropa, Liblice 1986, (Prague 1989), 109-114.

²² Cf. now J. P. MALLORY, *In Search of the Indo-Europeans*, London 1989, 66-73.

²³ J. BOUZEK, in: A. HARDING (ed.), *Climatic Changes in Later Prehistory*, Edinburgh 1982, 179-92; *Ib.*, *Climatic Changes: New Archaeological Evidence from the Bohemian Karst and Other Places*, in: *Antiquity* 1993, printing.

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backwards of what we know about Archaic and Classical Greek culture. Not only in historical times, but also earlier, the green tree of life must have been brighter than any grey theory, but we should at least try not to simplify our picture of the past too much. We should respect the “mirror of memory” of Greek tradition, behind which there was another world with the human mind very different from what it became later with Iron Age Greece and also with a different history.

