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Helène Whittaker. *Religion and Society in Middle Bronze Age Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 291pp., 14 figs., 7 maps, hbk, ISBN 978-1-04987-1)

Whittaker says right up front that the Middle Bronze Age has been ‘something of an unloved and neglected stepchild in comparison with other periods of the Aegean Bronze Age’ (p. 1). And what she says is true. The archaeological evidence for the Middle Helladic (MH) period is strikingly less abundant and less spectacular than that of the Late Helladic (LH) period, and the seal-using peoples of the Early Helladic (EH) have also been found more worthy of study than those of the MH. Nonetheless, in recent years, greater attention to the sites and material evidence of the MH period has led to a greater appreciation of its culture. *Mesohelladika: The Greek Mainland in the Middle Bronze Age* (Phillippa-Touchais et al., 2010) signalled that the study of the MH period was gathering momentum with the variety of topics that it covers. However, the topic of religion was represented by only five of the seventy plus contributions, one of which was by Whittaker (2010).

Of course, the small number of contributions to *Mesohelladika* on religion is not surprising given that it is a field of study that has at times been neglected by scholars of the Bronze Age. After the early

works of Evans (1901, 1921–1936), Nilsson (1927), and Persson (1942), religion was hardly touched upon for decades. It was really the pioneering conference *Sanctuaries and Cults in the Aegean Bronze Age* (Hägg & Marinatos, 1981) and the innovative work of Renfrew (1985) on the sanctuary at Phylakopi that created a foundation for the modern study of Bronze Age religion. Since then religion in prehistoric Greece has been a growing area of study, producing another seminal volume, *Potnia: Deities and Religion in the Aegean Bronze Age* (Laffineur & Hägg, 2001). The religion of the Middle Bronze Age, though, has still gone without serious treatment, which led scholars to surmise that, since no religion was discussed, it must have barely existed.

Hence, Whittaker’s volume on Middle Bronze Age religion is a very welcome contribution to the field on two counts: it will serve as a valuable corrective to outdated views of MH culture, and it will provide a foundation for our growing understanding of Helladic religion and its development.

Whittaker started her career by documenting the cult places of the LH period

(Whittaker, 1997). Thus, she too was initially more involved in the culture of the LH period, but working on the article for the *Mesohelladika* volume must have inspired her (many of the ideas seen in that paper are expanded here), and the result is this book. Its scope reflects the breadth of Whittaker's work. Her first chapter provides a good review of the study of religion by Bronze Age scholars from the founding of the field. In Chapter 2, Whittaker tries to address the rather fraught topic of the transition from the EH II to the EH III/MH period, as preparation for the main topic of her book, the religion and society of the MH period, which she presents in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, Whittaker discusses the evidence for the transition from the MH to the early LH period, and in Chapter 5, she takes a detailed look at the evidence for the religion of the LH I period.

I have to mention here, given the length of Chapters 4 and 5, something that puzzled me. Both the 'Introduction' and the 'Conclusions' are clear that there is a dual focus to this book: 'This book [...] explores religious beliefs and rituals in the Middle and early Late Helladic periods' (pp. 1, 207). Indeed, roughly equal amounts of the book are devoted to each of the time periods. Perhaps this book should have been entitled 'Religion and Society of the Middle and Early Late Helladic Periods'.

The opening lines of the 'Introduction' let you know right away that you will be reading an interesting book—Whittaker is candid about her topic. She says that 'the negative underdog image' is what originally attracted her to study the 'worldview', the society and ideology, of the Middle Bronze Age. She uses the 'Introduction' to set the stage for this consideration, discussing the relationship between ideology and religion. Her historiographic review of the literature could be

useful for any reader new to the topic of prehistoric religion. I also found myself in agreement with many of her sensible views; for instance, that ruling elites 'just as much as their subjects, profoundly believed in the ideologies that upheld their status' (p. 4). I also appreciate her contention that 'religion should not be discussed in isolation from other social and cultural contexts' (p. 9).

What I missed though was some consideration of more recent, theoretically conscious approaches that discuss the use of material evidence to elucidate religious practice and belief. In the subsequent chapters of this book, Whittaker infers social belief from the ritual practice that she sees in the material evidence, and while she does mention that scholars such as Hägg preferred to deal with religious practice rather than belief, she does not enter into a full discussion of this particular methodological point. Such a discussion may have helped to inform her interpretations, and might have pushed her to be a bit clearer about the jumps she takes to get to her proposed character of Middle Bronze Age society. I do not object to taking such jumps when attempting to acquire meaning, but a fuller acknowledgment of their existence, and what they are based on, would have provided a better foundation for her theories.

In Chapter 2, Whittaker takes up the much-debated question of the transition from the EH II to EH III period. Traditionally, scholars have seen a major break in culture at this juncture, signalled by destructions at many sites at the end of the EH II period, and the new pottery types and architecture that follow in the EH III/MH period. It has been thought that it is at this point that Greek speakers enter the scene. But in reality, the evidence for when and how this change took place (and whether it involved the initial arrival of Greek speakers) is not so clear-

cut, and Whittaker is, laudably, at pains to set out all the relevant evidence and associated arguments. The problem, though, is that this presentation is not well organized.

While it is a virtue to be even-handed in presenting differing views, it is at the same time helpful to the reader to provide some indication as to what the author's final opinion will be, especially if the conclusion is that we cannot know for sure which possible scenario is the most likely. At first Whittaker seems to favour the idea that there was no great change between EH II and EH III (apsidal houses, after all, are found in EH II; pp. 40–42). But then she states, 'the Early Helladic III period represents a radical break in material culture' (p. 42), and goes on to illustrate her case via a lengthy excursus on the Anglo Saxons and how they replaced the Celtic and Latin-speaking peoples in England. While the comparison may be instructive, it would have been helpful if she had come back to the apsidal house.

Also, while Whittaker presents the full evidence for the various destructions at the beginning of the chapter, many other key elements are only brought up towards the end of the discussion. For instance, she brings in the EH II corridor houses several pages after her mention of the EH III apsidal houses (pp. 41, 49). Thus, their chronological order and the fact that corridor houses are generally regarded as the culmination of the EH II period is lost. Also, the differences in the pottery and burial customs of the two periods are only discussed on pp. 62–71. The section that addresses the issue of continuity between the EH and MH periods is also a frustrating read.

Once we get to Chapter 3, Whittaker has recovered her balance. In her discussion of the various types of evidence for religion in the MH, she is fairly negative

about the sites that have been claimed as religious (Nisakouli, Mt. Kynortion, Malthi), and indeed says, 'there is no indisputable evidence for the existence of sanctuaries in the Middle Helladic period' (p. 78). However, Whittaker does find that she can say something about religion in this time period by looking at the mortuary evidence; this discussion and the theories she builds from it constitute the most valuable part of the book.

In particular it is the MH tumuli that she finds the most suggestive for her theories. She provides useful compilations (Table I, Appendix) and considerations of the tumulus evidence; see in particular pp. 100–01, where she discusses the tumuli associated with earlier habitation sites, and pp. 111–16, where she explores the status of those buried in the tumuli. Whittaker also builds her case for the nature of MH religion and society on the basis of the tumuli. The fact that the tumuli are the most conspicuous monuments of the time (p. 93), leads her to surmise that in addition to 'expressing new or old links between the land [...] and the people' (p. 98), they were also 'the focus around which communal rituals were staged' (p. 94). These rituals and the tumuli, she implies, were not built to honour one individual in particular, but the ancestors in general, who ensured agricultural prosperity for the community.

Whittaker combines this idea with another insightful one—that if the MH peoples had wanted to indulge in the accumulation of prestige goods, they could have (given that they had already established extensive trade contacts; see pp. 118–19), and so the answer must be that they must not have wanted to. Rather, she posits that MH society did not value displays of wealth, and likely discouraged them (pp. 121–22). She does not

state this explicitly, but the relative dearth of religious artefacts can then also be understood in this light.

In Chapter 4, Whittaker discusses the great changes that the Helladic population must have been experiencing later in the MH period. She sees the people moving from a society in which displays of status were not acceptable, to one that was much more interested in such displays, particularly in the funerary realm. Here Whittaker proposes a profound change in the culture, one that would have 'entailed a restructuring of communal ritual life' (p. 146).

The main topic of Chapter 5 is the Shaft Graves of Mycenae. Although Whittaker is going over well-trodden ground, the discussion is made interesting by her deliberations on the identities of those buried in them as warriors and 'ritual specialists'. There is also an interesting (but rather lengthy, given the focus of the book) section on hunting in LH I. The material that I found most valuable in this chapter comes when Whittaker presents the evidence on Early Mycenaean burial assemblages from other parts of Greece. As this information is not discussed very often, this discussion reminds readers that Mycenae was not alone in LH I in its increase in prestige goods buried with elites.

The greatest strength of this book lies in its ideas concerning the religious practice and societal values of the Middle Bronze Age (as is appropriate given its title). It is almost certain that 'the inhabitants of Middle Helladic Greece undoubtedly lived within a religious culture', and I find compelling Whittaker's reasoning on why the remains of that religious culture are so slim. Whittaker has done an admirable job of working with the available evidence and finding in it a reasonable view of the culture and religious practice of the Middle Bronze Age.

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Manuel Fernández-Götz. *Identity and Power: The Transformation of Iron Age Societies in Northeast Gaul* (Amsterdam Archaeological Studies Monograph 21. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014, 288pp., 15 colour and 75 b/w figs., hbk, ISBN 978-90-8964-597-5)

The area of the central Rhine and the Mosel Valley, historically the territory of the Treveri, has played a special role in the archaeology of the Iron Age of temperate Europe. In the second half of the nineteenth century it came to prominence as the focus of the richest burials of what came to be called the La Tène period, dated on the basis of imported objects from the Etruscan world to the fifth century BC. The main publisher of the finds, Ludwig Lindenschmit the elder (1809–1893), the founder of the Römisch-Germanisches Museum in Mainz, did not accept that any of the metal objects from the tumulus burials such as Rodenbach, Schwarzenbach, or Waldalgesheim (Lindenschmit, 1881) were locally made (he thought that all metal objects from north of the Alps dating to before the Roman conquest were imports from the Mediterranean region, nor did he accept the Three Age System). Nonetheless by the turn of the century under the influence of British prehistorians, mainly Sir Augustus Franks (1826–1897), Sir Arthur Evans (1851–1941), and Reginald Smith

(1873–1940), what is now called ‘Celtic Art’ was considered to have its origin in northern France, southern Germany, and Bohemia, developing under the influence of Greek and Etruscan Art. On the continent this idea was finally accepted just before the First World War, led by Joseph Déchelette (1862–1914) in his *Manuel d'Archéologie* (Déchelette, 1914) and his chronology of the La Tène period was partly based upon these finds.

However, the rich burials were only one aspect of the archaeology of the region. It was also an area of defended hill-top sites and the systematic study of these in the first half of the twentieth century led to the recognition of fortified sites contemporary with the burials, like the early phase of the spectacular site of Otzenhausen, or the hill-fort of Preist which became a type-site for a common type of stone and timber rampart; in the post-war period this research continued with the complete excavation of the defended site of Bundenbach by Reinhard Schindler. In more recent times the excavation of defended sites has concentrated on the