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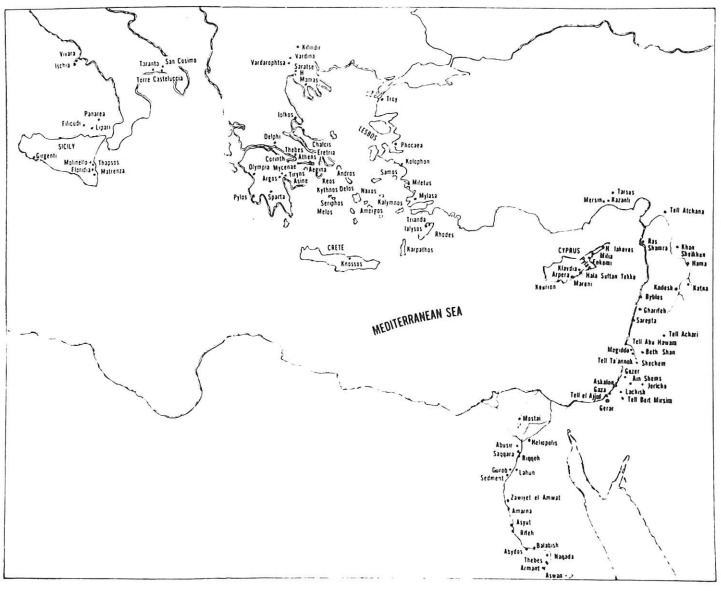
The Mycenaeans in the East

The subject is not at all new, for it has been treated in the past by many scholars and in particular during the International Archaeological Symposium—The Mycenaeans in the Eastern Mediterranean, held in Nicosia in 1972[1]. Therefore what I propose to do here is to deal with certain aspects only, such as the conditions prevailing in the Levantine countries at the time of the arrival of the Mycenaeans, what made them expand there, why they failed to colonize them, and why they had to withdraw altogether. I shall try to give an answer to these questions, yet I fear that, due to our present state of knowledge, more problems will be raised than solved.

By East I mean Syria, Palestine, and the hinterland which includes Jordan, and Egypt. The islands of Rhodes and Cyprus should be considered separately because conditions there were different and because these two islands were used by the Mycenaeans as a stepping stone for carrying on their Levantine trade. As for time, I have in mind the Late Bronze Age or roughly the second half of the second millennium BC.

1. Map showing the distribution of Mycenaean Pottery before 1200 BC.



[1] *Acts of the International Archaeological Symposium—The Mycenaeans in the Eastern Mediterranean*, Nicosia 1972 (hereafter *Acts*).

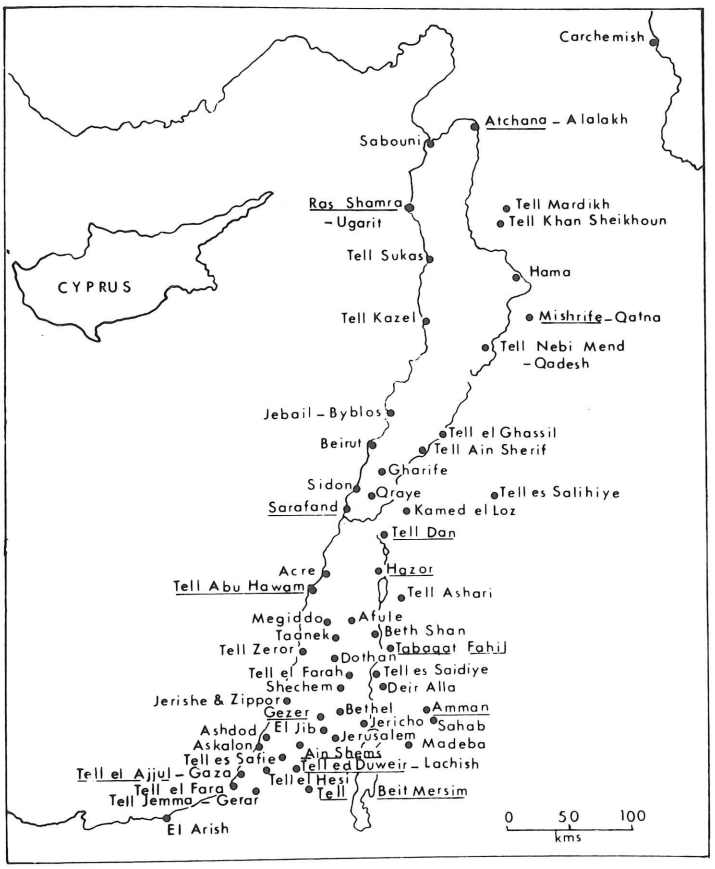
The destruction of Knossos and other Minoan palace centres in Crete, about 1400 BC, whatever its cause, left the leadership of the Aegean world in the hands of the Mycenaeans, and for nearly two centuries (14th and 13th) the Mycenaean civilization was free to develop and enjoy a remarkable prosperity found in part on the heritage of the Minoan culture. Taking advantage of this opportunity they lost no time in exploiting it, and they were soon to enter into commercial and cultural relations with all parts of the Mediterranean. In these two centuries of maturity, Mycenaean Greece becomes part of a much larger cultural area, comprising the whole eastern Mediterranean and exists on virtually the same level as the other civilizations in that area. For the Mycenaeans this was a period of prosperity and peace. We shall see below that they reached the East earlier than the 14th century and left it somewhat later than the 13th, but the Mycenaean golden age must be placed within these two centuries.

In spite of this seeming prosperity and peace, the Mycenaean age was an age of wars and of strife, of extensive wanderings and overseas expeditions, the heroic age of the Greeks; it also formed the background to the Greek myths and the Homeric poems.

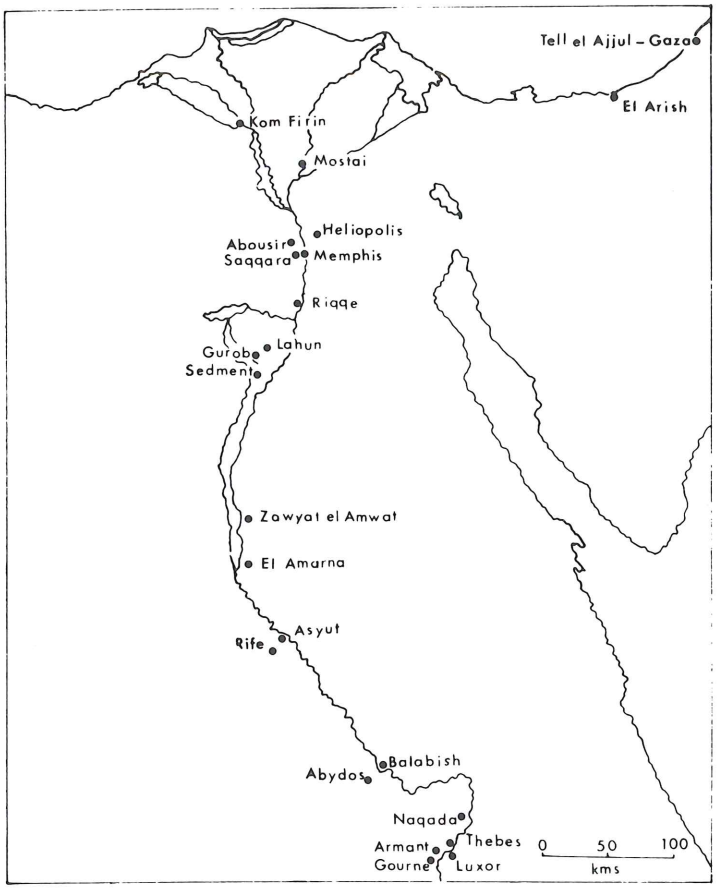
A glance at the map (FIG. 1) showing the places, where Mycenaean pottery has been found, indicates clearly that the Mycenaeans were a sea-borne people. Sea-faring was scarcely native to the ancestors of the Mycenaean Greeks, i.e. the Middle Helladic Minyans. The Mycenaeans learned about the sea from the earlier Aegean peoples they conquered and even surpassed in wanderings and enterprise. In the Levantine countries, the distribution of sites yielding Mycenaean pottery is concentrated in coastal regions and, in the case of Syria and Egypt, in areas accessible by navigable rivers or by the old caravan routes.

There is, indeed, a great number of sites in the Levant yielding Mycenaean pottery, spreading from Carchemish in the north to El Arish in the south (FIG. 2), a distance of about 800 km. Contrary to what is generally believed, the majority

2. Levantine sites yielding Mycenaean pottery.



3. Egyptian site yielding Mycenaean pottery.



of them are not on the coast but in the hinterland. In fact out of 57 sites shown on this map, only 17 are strictly speaking on the coast; the remaining 40 are situated inland, some nearer, others further than the coast, and a few, such as Amman, beyond the river Jordan. In Egypt the sites lie along the Nile (FIG. 3), but again they spread over a considerable distance from Firin in the north to Gourne in the south, a distance of about 600 km.

The discovery of a Late Bronze Age temple at Amman (FIG. 4)[2] in 1955, yielding rich finds, among which a great amount of Mycenaean pottery of IIA (FIG 5A), IIB/IIIA (FIG. 6B), IIIA (FIG. 5B & C) and IIIB (FIG. 6A) style, as well as Cypriote ware and other objects, is remarkable in that they were found in an area east of the Jordan, generally believed to be uninhabited. Vronwy Hankey, who published the finds, is of the opinion that the area was not empty as it appears but that the temple may have been furnished as a result of raids on a city west of the Jordan, where such valuables were to be found[3]. I wonder, however, whether these finds were not curios purchased by nomads travelling west, before placing them in the temple as offerings.

Mycenaean pottery occurs in both settlements and cemeteries, and as we have seen in sanctuaries. It is indeed interesting that it has reached Jordan, and another explanation for the spreading of Mycenaean goods in the hinderland of Syria and Palestine may be the demand by nomads for luxury products and their content. It is not known how they reached those remote areas and there is nothing to indicate that the traders were Mycenaeans. In fact they may have been bought by the nomads themselves, who travelled to the big trading centres on the coast for business. It is possible, of course, that some Mycenaean traders may have ventured to travel inland, but probably there was not a safe way of regular trading through the desert.

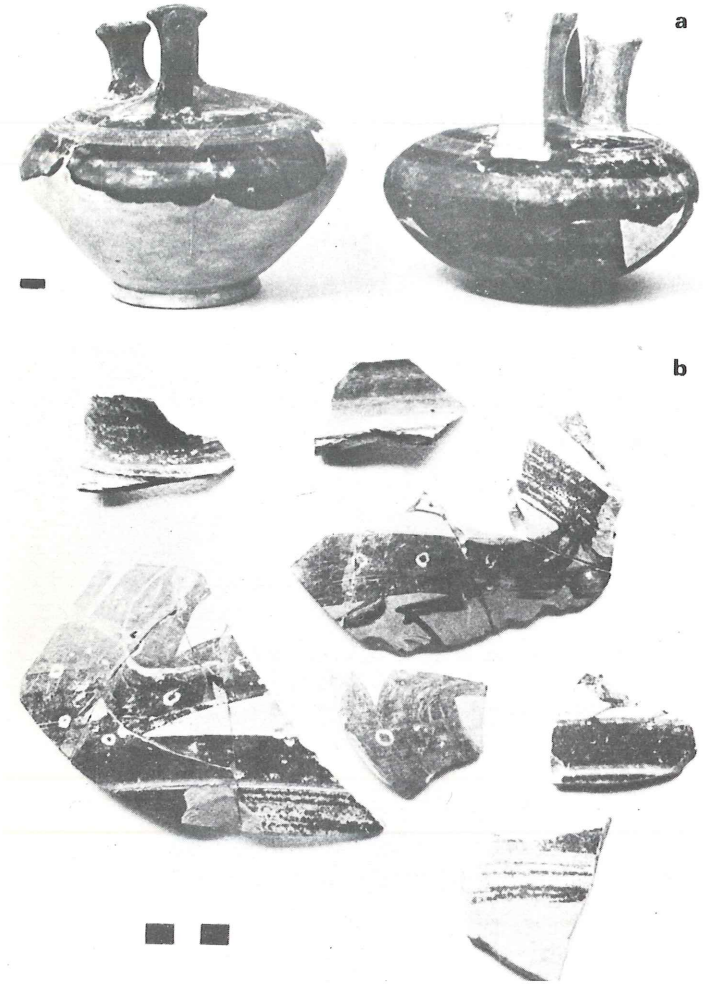
The mainland character of almost all the Aegean pottery found in the Levant is a factor of the utmost importance in connection with the foreign relations of Greece at this time. It indicates that the mainland was already in direct contact with the East. Although in comparison with the enormous amount of LH III pottery found in the East, the LH I and II series is a small one, it leaves no doubt that direct connections between the mainland and the East started at an early date.

What then made the Mycenaeans turn to the East? The answer may be adventure, commercial enterprise, and a desire

[2] Hankey, Vronwy, 'A Late Bronze Age Temple at Amman', *Levant* VI (1974), 131–178; Hennessy, J. B., 'Excavations of a Late Bronze Age Temple at Amman', *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 1966, 155–162; Harding, G. L., *ADAJ* III (1956), 80 and *PEQ* (1958), 10–12. Here, I wish to express my thanks to Vronwy Hankey for discussing with me at length the problem of the Mycenaeans in the East and for permission to reproduce FIGS 2, 3, 4, and Plates I, II, III. Figure 1 has been reproduced from Mycenaean Trade and Colonization by Sara A. Immerwater in *Archaeology*, Spring 1960, p. 3.

[3] Hankey, V., *op. cit.* 143.

6. Further Mycenaean pottery examples.



7. Further Mycenaean pottery examples.

community, to judge by the discovery there of a number of clay tablets bearing the Cypro-Minoan script[8].

The island of Rhodes is well placed for trade with the East. During the 15th century BC Mycenaean traders settled at Ialysos and displaced the earlier Minoan colony. From this time onwards, the Mycenaeans dominated Rhodes. The original importance of the island may have been its strategic position in a bid to outflank the Cretans, but once the Cretan supremacy was broken, Rhodes continued to be of importance for the eastward traffic. At about the same time the Mycenaean commercial outposts shifted further east to Cyprus, Syria, Palestine and Egypt.

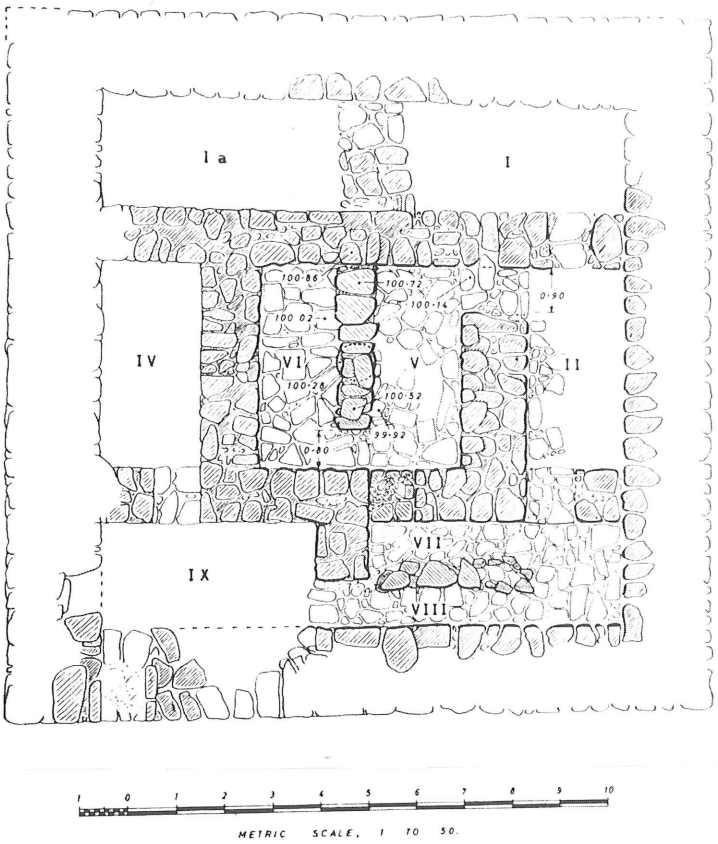
When we turn to Cyprus we have a somewhat similar situation to that of Rhodes: the arrival of traders at first, followed by settlers. The wealth of Cyprus in copper was undoubtedly the reason why the Mycenaeans organised expeditions to the island, but they soon also realized its strategic and commercial position in relation to the Near Eastern countries.

Like Rhodes and Cyprus relations between the Levant and the West go back at least to Middle Minoan times, which was the great age for Cretan expansion. The distribution of MM II objects is a clear indication of Minoan relations with Syria, Palestine and Egypt[9]. Ugarit, on the Syrian coast, may be

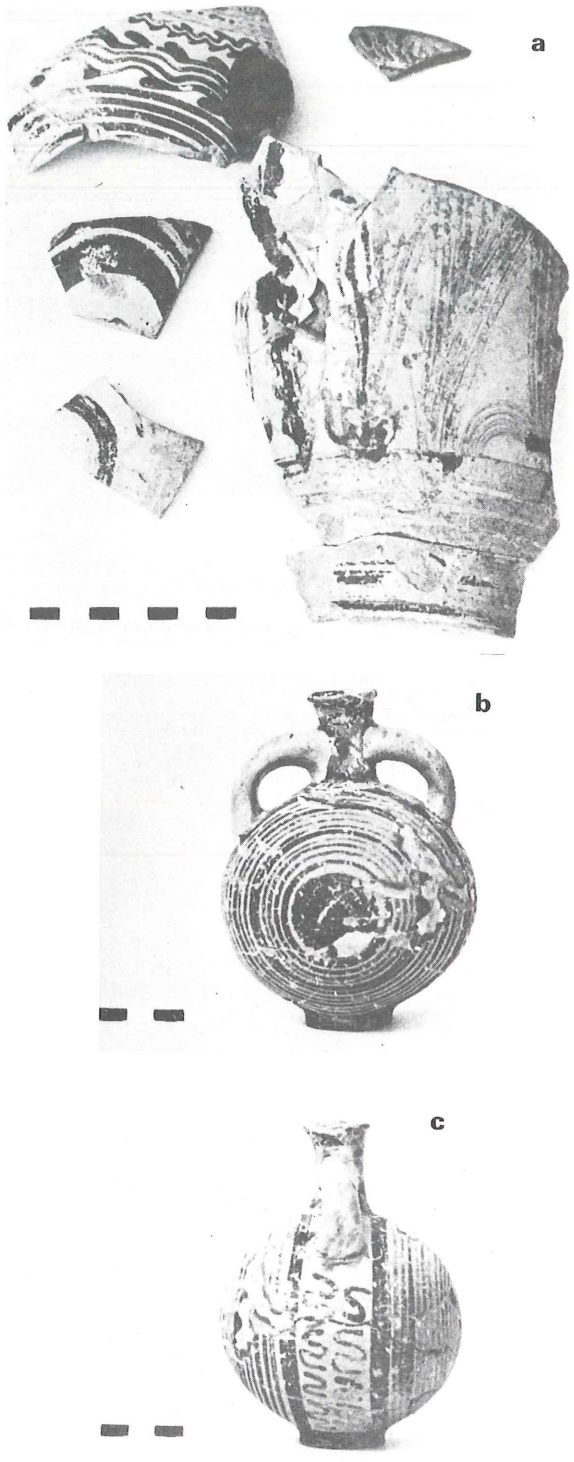
[8] Merrillees, R. S., *The Cypriote Bronze Age Pottery found in Egypt-SIMA* XVIII, 187; *Ugaritica* III, 227 ff.

[9] Stubbings, F. H., *Mycenaean Pottery from the Levant*, Cambridge 1951, 108 ff.

4. Plan of the late bronze age temple at Amman.



5. Mycenaean pottery examples.



to acquire new land. The Hittites, Babylonia and Egypt built up their wealth from natural resources with which they were endowed but Greece had to export or die because she was a poor country. So the Greeks used all their ingenuity and industry towards commercial activities abroad, as in historical times, when they founded colonies all over the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. We may assume that the first Mycenaeans to reach the East were mainland traders, who established themselves in the large commercial centres along the Levantine coast. It is hardly to be assumed that the Mycenaeans sailed directly to the Levant and it looks more likely that they stopped first at Rhodes and Cyprus and that it is from these islands that they carried on their international trade.

At most sites from the mouth of the Orontes to and including Egypt, the imported Aegean pottery is far outnumbered by Cypriote, especially Base Ring II and White Slip II pottery. At Tell El Ajjul[4] the ratio is 1:20. The Aegean pottery at Tell El Amarna outnumbers the Cypriote[5] and Mycenaean ware from the tomb at Sarafend, in south Lebanon, makes up 50 per cent of the total[6] but these are exceptions. The Cypriote ware is occasionally the only imported pottery at a site but as a rule it is the constant companion of Mycenaean ware[7]. This indicates the presence also of Cypriote traders all along the Levant and at Ras Shamra there was in all probability a Cypriote colony or at least an important trading

[4] Hankey, V., 'The Aegean Deposit at El Amarna', *Acts*, 130.

[5] *Ibid.*, 130.

[6] Baramki, D. C., 'The Impact of the Mycenaeans on Ancient Phoenicia', *Acts*, 193.

[7] Hankey, V., 'Mycenaean Pottery in the Middle East', *BSA* 62 (1967), 146.

considered as the principal trading port of Minoan Crete as it was also for the Mycenaean Greeks.

When the Greeks sailed to the East they touched the ports of powers that were among the mightiest of all antiquity, the Hittites and Egypt. During most of the Late Bronze Age, the Levant was in the hands of either the Egyptians or the Hittites or confronting each other and many a battle was fought among them for the possession of this land.

While the two empires struggled, the Greeks remained on the fringes of the great events. They had no stake in the East in the 16th century, when Thutmosis III was extending Egyptian power over Syria or when Mycenaean traders replaced the Cretans about 1400 BC. It was of little consequence to the Greeks whether Hittites or Egyptians controlled the ports of Syria or Palestine. The kings of Greece, far removed from the centre of conflict, were secure in their own cities. Their kingdoms were very different from the empires of the East, where vast territories were united under the rule of one all-powerful king. Greece seems to have been broken up—as in historical times—into a number of kingdoms, each powerful but separate and independent of others.

In the 14th and 13th centuries the Greeks had still no direct interest in the eastern territories and continued to remain aloof from the struggle for control of the Levant. They were interested only in remaining on good terms with the powers in control of the ports to which they wanted access.

The small Greek mainland and island kingdoms made up in aggregate a third power, who left their records not in treaties or on the walls of tombs but in the goods which they brought to ports all over the Mediterranean. Their royal families dealt with the eastern potentates on an equal basis but they were not interested in the lands for which so many Egyptians and Hittites lost their lives. They were primarily interested in the sea, which they dominated for almost two centuries.

Under these conditions and although the Levantine people or the powers in control of those lands were not hostile, it was not possible for the Mycenaeans to establish colonies, as for instance in Rhodes and Cyprus, where the climate was different; eventually they disappeared from the Levantine scene altogether, whereas they stayed on in those two islands.

From Rhodian and Cypriote trading ports the Mycenaeans sailed further east and the first Mycenaean goods to reach Egypt probably came indirectly through the great ports along the Syro-Palestinian coast. As we have seen, the Mycenaeans began to reach the eastern coast of the Mediterranean during the 15th century BC. However, very few vases earlier than 1400 have been found, an indication that the trade at this period was still scanty.

With the turn of the century Greek commerce with the Levant grew rapidly. Mycenaean III A pottery is found in large numbers in most parts of this area. Although much of it differs a little from the common types of the Peloponnese, its similarity to the types of Rhodes and Cyprus indicates that the bulk of the trade with the Levantine countries was carried on from Mycenaean centres on these islands. Mycenaean III B pottery is even more frequent than Mycenaean III A, and again much of it suggests Cypriote origin rather than Greek or even Rhodian.

Relations with Egypt were also active and we know that the Cretans were bringing gifts to the coast of Pharaoh. It is interesting to find that the Mycenaeans penetrated Egypt pretty early, for a number of Mycenaean I and II pottery have been found in tombs here. Mycenaean III A and III B have been found in greater quantities. Much pottery of the III A:2 and III B:1 type comes from Tell El Amarna[10]. The general character of the Mycenaean III A imports in Egypt is similar to that of Syria and Palestine. It seems reasonable therefore to infer that the Amarna pottery comes from the same manufacturing centres as the III A:2 and III B:1 pottery imports in Syria and Palestine, which is mainly Rhodes and Cyprus.

For the III B material a Cypriote origin is suggested by certain features of decoration. These features are more frequent, and types peculiar to Rhodes are no longer in evidence. The paucity of the pot types shows that it was not the pottery that mattered so much but the content (perhaps olive oil), which interested the Egyptians. Consequently they obtained their supplies from the nearest market, which is Cyprus[11].

I have made an attempt to give a general picture of the arrival of the Mycenaeans in the East, of their commercial activities and of the conditions prevailing at the time in those countries. I will now say a word as to their recession.

The Mycenaean world came to an end towards the end of the 13th century BC. Archaeology fails to explain the recession of the Mycenaeans but at least, as far as the East is concerned, some hints may be obtained from the historical records of the Egyptians and the Hittites.

In the fifth year of Merneptah (1236–23 BC), Egypt successfully repelled an attack by the people of Libya, who were supported by a number of allies from overseas, among which were the Akawasha, who have been equated with the Achaeans or Mycenaean Greeks[12]. If the Akawasha were Mycenaeans there is no evidence where they came from; perhaps they were a band of mercenaries or adventurers.

The attacks recurred in the reign of Ramses III. This time Egypt had to face not only the Lybians but also a combined land and sea invasion by a number of other people, including Denyen, who have been identified with the Danaoi[13]. If so the Mycenaean Greeks were once more involved against Egypt. In these circumstances, it is not surprising that the Mycenaeans were no longer wanted in Egypt and that all their commercial activities came to an end at that time.

It is the same with the Hittites. There is evidence that some of these marauders were of maritime origin and that they had been operating against the Hittite land of Arzawa and against

[10] Hankey, V., 'The Aegean Deposit at El Amarna', *Acts*, 128–136.

[11] Stubbings, F. H., *op. cit.* 101.

[12] Stubbings, F. H., 'The Recession of Mycynaean Civilization', *CAH* II, 2, 339.

[13] *Ibid.*, 339–340.

Alashiya before they joined other forces in Syria. Thence these allies made their way south destroying many cities, including Ugarit. These people, known in the Egyptian records as the Sea Peoples, were finally defeated by Ramses III on the borders of Egypt in 1191 BC[14].

Early in the 13th century BC, Millawanda (Miletus) had been under the control of Ahhiyawa (Achaeans) but later in the century the city appears as vassal to the Hittites. It seems that the Mycenaean—Hittite relations, which used to be friendly, now became hostile and in the text of a treaty made between the Hittite Tudkhaliyah IV (*c.* 1265–40) and the king of Amurru in northern Syria, the name of the king of Ahhiyawa is found to be deliberately deleted from a list of kings, reckoned of equal rank to the Hittite emperor. The same text, if correctly restored, shows it was Hittite policy to prevent ships of Ahhiyawa trafficking with Syria[15].

The Mycenaeans were in trouble not only externally but internally as well. At the time of the Sea Peoples and probably for the same reasons, the Mycenaean centres, such as Pylos, Mycenae and others, were afflicted by disaster. In fact this disaster hit the entire Mycenaean world, both at home and overseas. As a result of this a considerable diaspora of the mainland population took place. The main sources of evidence are archaeological, consisting of the abrupt appearance of Mycenaean materials of types hitherto unknown; this is the Mycenaean III C:1 pottery. This pottery appears to originate in the Argolid. In Cyprus the Mycenaean III B period was also brought to an end at the time of the general unrest but the appearance soon after of large quantities of Mycenaean III C pottery, indicates the arrival of many Mycenaean refugees fleeing the Argolid.

In the same situation were found the Mycenaeans in the East, when the Mycenaean imports cease with the end of III B. Exceptions, such as Tarsus, where a number of Mycenaean III C pottery has been found, do not change the picture. But here the similarity ends. The hostility of the Egyptians and of the Hittites at first and the general destruction in the Levant caused by the Sea Peoples, in which even Ugarit never recovered, forced the Mycenaeans or what may be called by this time the Cypro-Mycenaeans in the East to interrupt all activities and abandon their centuries old trading posts altogether. In all probability they went to Cyprus, where they could feel safe at home. So that the Mycenaean refugees from the Argolid were now joined in Cyprus by fugitives fleeing the Levant. Apparently it fell to Cyrus to shelter the remains of Mycenaean civilization from both East and West.

It is claimed that, following the destruction of Enkomi, about 1190 BC, there are signs of considerable contacts with the Levantine coast and that Levantine refugees arrived in Cyprus introducing with them certain oriental elements in the culture of the island[16]. Archaeological evidence, however, indicates that the influence was stronger from the Argolid[17]. There is possibly little doubt that refugees arrived from both East and West but it is my belief that the refugees from the East were Mycenaeans or Cypro-Mycenaeans. There is no evidence to show that among these refugees were Levantines, who had no reason to abandon their homes, whereas the Cypro-Mycenaeans were foreigners and had to go. Therefore there is nothing surprising in the presence in Cyprus of objects of Syro-Palestinian origin or influence. The Cypro-Mycenaeans, who had been trading in the East for generations, could not avoid being influenced by oriental culture and not unnaturally brought back home some at least of their belongings, including minor works of art, as for instance bronze figurines, ivories and seals.

One last question: Were all the traders in the Levant mainland Mycenaeans and did they ever establish any trading posts there? I suppose that there were originally mainland Mycenaeans, who did establish trading posts along the coast. We have seen that the Mycenaean goods are usually accompanied by Cypriote goods. This indicates that there were also Cypriote traders and we have seen that there was at least one considerable Cypriote community at Ugarit. But then we also know that Mycenaean III B and III C pottery was produced in Cyprus, probably by Mycenaean settlers or by Mycenaeanized Cypriotes. Therefore, at least for the later period, the traders in the East may have been what we may call Cypro-Mycenaeans.

[14] *Ibid.*, 340.

[15] *Ibid.*, 340; Goetze, A., 'The Hittites and Syria' (1300–1200 BC), *CAH* II 2, 262.

[16] Catling, H. W., 'Cyprus in the Bronze Age', *CAH* II 2, 210; Schaeffer, C. F. A., *Acts*, 289.

[17] Dikaios, P., *Enkomi* II, Mainz 1971, 523 ff.