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Pharaohs, Phoenicians, and Peoples of the Sea

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Final Essay topic 1

Throughout history societies have risen and fallen. The Mediterranean and the Aegean sea have served as a hotspot place in the development of civilization and societies. Archeologist, Gordon Childe recognized global similarities in the growth and emergence of states. Childe's work regarding the emergence of state set the groundwork for methods that are used today. Childe broke his criteria down into different parts such as population growth, trade, accumulating wealth, the development of writing, art, monumental structures, and social hierarchy. The Aegean's history saw the rise of a variety of different cultures and people. Gordon Childe's criteria for the emergence of states and social complexity can be applied usefully to the ancient Bronze Age Greeks. Greek cultures such as the Mycenaeans, Minoans, and others smaller settlement saw changes that fit in with Childe's criteria. I will be examining settlements such as Ayia Irini on Kea, Dimini and Kastro, and the palace structures of the Mycenaeans to show the usefulness of the Childe's criteria and demonstrate how it can be used to accurately describes Greek bronze age society.

One of the most common characteristic shared by all groups and people is the necessity of trade. Childe includes foreign trade in his criteria as an important part of settlements emergence into a social complexity society. Trade was not new by the time social societies were emerging, but the changes that trade underwent made it rise in importance. Doctor Michael E.

Smith writes “With the first states trade expanded tremendously. Rulers and elites obtained large numbers of foreign goods, many of which accompanied them to their graves”.¹ On the island of Kea the settlement Ayia Irini fits with Childe and Smith’s trade criteria. Ayia Irini central position in the Cyclades Islands made it an ideal for trade with multiple groups. Its position and sea pathways connected it with Minoan Crete and other Cycladic Islands. As the settlements influence grew so did their imports. Doctor Natalie Abell estimated that half of Ayia Irini’s imports came from Crete and a significant portion came from Central Greece and the Peloponnese. As the trade and wealth grew in Ayia Irini so did burials. Gravesites were found outside of the walls of the settlement and provide insight into the wealth of the people living in Ayia Irini. Twenty-five graves have been excavated and they reveal a difference in prosperity. About half the graves found had some kind of burial gift with them. An additional three graves were buried with numerous items and bodies, signaling a family with more wealth. The Rich graves were larger than their counterparts and contained a large variety of items, including a golden diadem, glass beads, and rings.² Metal goods, made from bronze and lead, were some of the most commonly found grave items at Ayia Irini helping link the settlement to the bronze age metal trade. The Trade Ayia Irini was involved in brought large amounts of wealth to the settlement. In a short amount of time Ayia Irini went from a small colony to a thriving town. Based on the grave findings and distribution of grave goods it can be suggested that social hierarchy was developing with wealth. However, the architecture of the settlement did not

¹ Michael E. Smith “Gordon Childe and the Urban revolution: a historical perspective on a revolution in Urban societies”

² Evi Gorogianni and Rodney D. Fitzsimons “Social complexity in Late Middle Bronze Age and Early Late Bronze Age Cyclades: a view from Ayia Irini”

represent its new riches. Many of the house remained simple and undistinguishable from the others. Based on the findings in the graves authors Gorogianni and Fitzsimons suggest that the wealthy did not use architecture to display their prosperity. Two of Childe's criteria, trade and accumulation of money, are represented within the Ayia Irini colony. Childe's criteria remains useful and accurate when examining Ayia Irini because their pattern of trade and growth mimic what he had previously suggested.

A key part of growing a town or society is having specialized jobs and trades. Childe's list this as one of his points in an emerging towns and it reflects in the findings of bronze age archeology. In the late bronze age at the Mycenaean settlement of Dimini there has been evidence of rooms dedicated to specialized craftsmen in various homes. Doctor Panagiota Pantaou suggest that this might represent a two tiered society in which there was a small separation between social elite and craftsmen. There is no evidence that points to an individual leader at Dimini leading Pantaou to believe "social practices observed at Dimini (e.g communal monuments or collective rituals and feasting) with less emphasis placed on individual wealth and status are reminiscent of Renfrew's group oriented communities".³ Dimini and its nearby neighbor Kastro both have archeological remains that point to metal workers being the main craft and export. Fragments from clay crucibles have been found at both sites. Architects and builders have also believed to have had a role in society due to the large walls and impressive free standing homes both settlements had. Another important role within the Dimini society was the position of priest. Priest acted as a specialized role in the elite class of Dimini. Pantaou believes the priest connected the classes of workers and elites and maintained order through regular

³ PANAGIOTA A. PANTOU Mycenaean Dimini in Context: Investigating Regional Variability and Socioeconomic Complexities in Late Bronze Age Greece

hosted religious festival, feasts, and ceremonies. Because of the close interactions between the upper and lower class of Dimini society it was believed to be very fluid with specialized workers being able to rise to elite status. Toward the end of the late bronze age new architectural techniques were employed to build new buildings and tombs that separated the people into an elite and non elite zone. As the new elite zones were formed and society became more stratified problems began to arise, and soon Dimini was abandoned. The settlements of Dimini and Kastro serve as examples of Childe's emergence of state criteria by showing how craftsmen and specialized roles fit into society and how they also established social hierarchy.

One of Childe's emergence criteria is the development of the political organizations. Smith describes this as important for "power [becoming] centralized around key institutions such as the ruler and other components of government".⁴ Hierarchy and differences in class are evident in many parts of ancient bronze age society. The differences in class can be seen in the lower levels through trade and who becomes wealthy. It can be easy to distinguish how well a settlement did based on their grave sites and grave goods. In other settlements such as Dimini and Kastro social hierarchy was defined by wealth and how useful your specialized job was. This left room for social mobility and a changing elite status. The Palaces of the Mycenaeans is different from the others. The Palace operated as the center of power in Mycenaean culture. James Wright hypothesis that the development of palaces started as a defensive one. He supports this argument by pointing out the landscape they are built on, the defensive walls, and political instability of the time to support his argument. Wright also argues that the Palace served as a way for influential elites to demonstrate their power and wealthy by building with exotic of difficult

⁴ Michael E. Smith "Gordon Childe and the Urban revolution: a historical perspective on a revolution in Urban societies"

to obtain materials. Wright says “The last two are significant since they are also symbolic of access to highly restricted resources... In this sense the construction of monumental architecture, whether as palace or tomb, is the same kind of aggrandizing display as that of wealth deposited in high-status tombs”.⁵ As palaces became more common in bronze age Greece the designs became similar. Wright argues that this was not done on purpose, but rather the Mycenaeans were influenced by their neighbors and foreign powers. While much of the designs were similar Wright says individual elites would add their own designs to make the palace their own. The Mycenaean palaces fit in with the criteria Childe sets by being monumental architecture and evidence of governmental sites. In the Mycenaean linear B tablets there are references to the title Wanax. The Wanax was an elite who operated in the same way a king does in later periods. The Wanax ruled from their palace and acted as an authority figure. The establishment of a king and central region of power continued to grow the emerging states.

Despite the Usefulness of Childe’s criteria there are parts of it that are not as helpful in identifying emerging states. Steps such as writing and art are difficult to place on the list of emerging qualities. Art and writing are extremely important and can be found all across the globe but using them as a criteria that is needed in an early state does not seem relevant. In Doctor Smith’s writings about Childe’s criteria he dismisses complex writing on the basis that there are societies that grew, especially in the Americas, that do not demonstrate a form of written communication. Smith does add that a form of record keeping in early societies is an important characteristic and can work alongside writing. The usefulness of art is also under question. Art is an important part of any societies culture, but its importance to an emerging complex society is

⁵ James Wright The formation of Mycenaean Palace part 1

difficult to pinpoint. Smith writes “While all early states had distinctive regional art styles, these were not necessarily any more sophisticated than the art of neolithic groups”.⁶ Smith later clarifies that arts impact in an emerging society is questionable, but its uses later in history to promote self interest or ideologies has a significant impact on the development of states. Even though the usefulness of writing and art can be uncertain there are still examples in bronze age Greek society that fit in with Childe’s criteria. At the sites of Dimini and Kastro there are signs of literacy in stone tablets carved with linear B inscriptions. While art was not as common for the Mycenaeans it still remained an important part of their culture. According to Doctor Fritz Blakomer paintings were commonly found at the tombs of societies elite or at palaces as a demonstration of wealth⁷.

Childe’s criteria laid the ground work for archeologist and presented a clear and easy way to identify new and emerging states. Childe’s guide covered various aspects of life and society that can be related to groups all over the world and still remain relevant. Despite some flaws The Childe’s criteria has stood the test of time and still remains an important and easy guide to follow. With some minor adjustments and exceptions the criteria can be applied to different regions of the world and various time periods. Using Childe’s criteria it is easy to analyze bronze age Greece and see how a socially complex society formed. At sites such as Ayia Irini, Dimini, and Kastro there are examples of trade, craftsmen ship, burials, grave goods, and social hierarchy. The archaeology surrounding the Mycenaean palaces and Wanax provides evidence

⁶ Michael E. Smith “Gordon Childe and the Urban revolution: a historical perspective on a revolution in Urban societies”

⁷ Fritz Blakomer Was there a ›Mycenaean Art‹?: Or: Tradition without Innovation? Some Examples of Relief Art

for a central authority figure and a seat of power at a monumental structure. Although some of the criteria, such as art and writing, can be debated or changed they still have a place and usefulness within criteria list. While Childe's criteria may seem broad at first glance it provides a useful tool for examining the past.

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