

BOOK REVIEW

Nemea Valley Archaeological Project Volume I: The Early Bronze Age Village of Tsoungiza Hill. By DANIEL J. PULLEN. Princeton: The American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 2011. Pp. xxxix + 1047. Hardcover, \$150.00. ISBN 978-0-87661-922-3.

This volume succeeds in the full integration of all material from the Early Bronze Age (EBA) periods on the Tsoungiza hill, located in the district of Corinthia in the north-eastern Peloponnese. It is the final publication of the excavations by James Penrose Harland in 1926–1927 and the re-excavation and extension of his work by the Nemea Valley Archaeological Project (NVAP) in 1984–1986, as well as of the work done by Pullen (in collaboration with Robert Bridges) under the scepter of University of California at Berkeley (UCB). The result is a highly detailed and comprehensive publication (the first of a scheduled pair, the second concerning the Middle and Late Bronze Age occupation at Tsoungiza, being in preparation).

The archaeological and environmental frameworks are outlined in Chapter 1 (Introduction) and are followed by a presentation of the scanty remains from the Neolithic period (primarily Final Neolithic, FN; Chapter 2). Also the EH I period (Chapter 3) was most likely a “small-scale affair” (51), with no preserved architecture and the analysis based instead on the material from a number of pits and a cistern. Being mostly representative of late EH I habitation, however, the results work well with the results from the following EH II Initial period (Chapter 4) in giving valuable evidence of the so far little known EH I/II transition. Most interesting is the short discussion on the potential transitional character of EH I Pit 32 defined by the “odd combinations of EH I fabrics with EH II surface treatments” (55f, 89f). The bulk of the material from the EH II Initial period derives from the so called “1982 House A” (to distinguish it from the chronologically later House A excavated by Harland). The structure stood isolated and the rich material, consisting of a large amount of pottery, especially small bowls, numerous fire dogs and terracotta whorls indicate a non-domestic use and on-site consumption of meat.

As noted by Pullen, “the differences between the EH II Initial period and the succeeding EH II Developed period are not great at first” (200). This transitional phase, preceding the full introduction of the classic EH II sauceboat, is evident both in the 1982 House A, and in Pit 56 assigned to the EH II Developed phase 1 (254f.) with its remarkable deposit of an assemblage for eating and/or drinking, long since on display in the Archaeological Museum of Nemea. The term EH II Developed (Chapter 5) is in part used to indicate the lack of a Late phase at Tsoungiza, but also to emphasize the completed introduction of classic EH II traits. Of considerable interest is the detailed account of the context relating to the monumental House A on the crown of the hill due to both its chronological and geographical relevance for the development of the so called corridor house architecture of later EH II. The discussion is the latest, but most likely not the last, in the debate on this specific type of architecture. This reviewer finds especially thought-provoking the suggestion that the early presence of an open court, which could in some sense have guided the somewhat awkward location of House A over a sharp rise in the ground, giving this open area potential precedence over any nearby structures (268, 281; with reference to similar histories at nearby Lerna).

The analysis of the EH III period (Chapter 6) relies to a very large extent on the documentation of Harland, as little remained to be re-examined by NVAP. EH III at Tsoungiza consisted of a densely built community of primarily domestic nature spanning most of the EH III period. The lack of good stratigraphic sequences, however, means that the chronological designations are heavily dependent on the pottery sequences established by Jeremy Rutter for Lerna IV. Based on the fact that that the Lerna material was extensively weeded at and after the time of excavation, while all was retained at Tsoungiza, some interesting comments on similarities and differences could still be made (such as the much lower frequency for drinking vessels at Tsoungiza than at Lerna, and the very high frequency of pattern-painted pottery at Lerna).

Among the figures and ornaments (Chapter 7) the human figurines and yoked oxen stand out, the latter already often discussed in relation to agriculture and societal complexity. Chapter 8 on textiles includes a detailed discussion of mat- and textile impressions and the interesting new suggestion of the enigmatic terracotta anchor-shaped objects being used as suspended distaffs for holding the unspun fibers while spinning in specific locations. Spindle whorls are especially numerous, and in all, textile production is credibly presented as having been a common activity at Tsoungiza. In comparison, the miscellaneous finds in metal,

stone and bone (Chapter 9) are meager (the already well-known lead seal the extraordinary exception), and the chapter comes out as a somewhat awkward, but perhaps necessary, interlude between the two preceding and the three following chapters.

Chapters 10–12 present the chemical and lead isotope analyses (by Maria Kayafa, Zofia Stos-Gale, and Noel Gale), the chipped stone industry (by Anna Karabatsoli) and the ground stone tools (a preliminary report, by Kathleen Krattenmaker). All three chapters include findings that are interpreted as indications of Tsoungiza as a geographically isolated settlement: no copper from the Cycladic islands, only already partially reduced obsidian cores recovered, and a low number of andesite objects. These results stand somewhat at odds with the early introduction of other features, such as the seal and incipient monumental architecture and this seems an interesting avenue for further research.

The two final specialist chapters, 13–14, deal with the faunal remains (by Paul Halstead) and the palaeoethnobotany (by Julie M. Hansen and Susan E. Allen). Although both materials are of moderate size, in combination the two chapters present most informative and detailed analyses of subsistence practices at Tsoungiza. Both faunal and botanical remains indicate an economy based on small-scale mixed farming. Evidence suggests on-site butchering, food preparation and consumption by both small-sized and large scale social gatherings, and a diet that beyond meat consisted primarily of barley and lentils, with addition of high percentage of figs and of acorns. There are further interesting observations made regarding tool marks on bones and a most usable appendix on species of plants remains from FN-EH III Tsoungiza.

Pullen's research on social organization and socio-economic complexity is evident in interpretative passages and longer discussions throughout the book, and makes for an interesting read. The Tsoungiza material proves to be a valuable and much needed source of information on chronological grey-zones and a tool for visualizing the workings of cultural transformations. Although a more synthesized discussion on chronology would have been helpful, the specific clarifications by Pullen makes clear (Chapter 15: Conclusion, and elsewhere) that the Tsoungiza material, unfortunately, cannot help to clarify issues of the FN/EH transition, nor that of the EH II/III transition. It is rightly emphasized instead that the two chronological transitions that have been helped are those of the EH I/II transition and the earlier phases of EH II.

The publication of the EBA village on Tsoungiza hill holds a richness of information (prolifically illustrated and above all tabulated, including appendices and concordances) that is likely to inspire in turn many further works on the nature of the EBA societies for decades to come, for many types of specialist and interpretative scholars alike. With the information presented in this publication there is at present not so much to suggest that early EH II Lerna and Tiryns, despite being located on the coast, were significantly better placed or supplied than Tsoungiza, or necessarily hierarchically superior.

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