

BOOK REVIEW

Community Identity and Archaeology: Dynamic Communities in Aphrodisias and Beycesultan. By NAOÍSE MACSWEENEY. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011. Pp. viii + 266. Hardcover, \$75.00. ISBN 978-0-472-02765-1.

There has been a welcome trend in the archaeology of Anatolia to synthesize material from previously published excavations. Much of this is being done by Anglophone archaeologists with interpretive frameworks developed in Anglophone archaeology. The book under review is such a study. More specifically it is an engagement with M. A. Canuto and J. Yaeger's edited volume, *The Archaeology of Communities: A New World Perspective* (London, 2000).

The book is divided into three parts: 1) theoretical development of the concept of community in archaeology; 2) the Late Bronze Age (LBA) and Iron Age (IA) at Beycesultan in southwestern Turkey; and 3) the LBA and IA at nearby Aphrodisias. The structure of the volume reveals its origins as an Anglophone PhD dissertation in archaeology: theory, followed by case studies where theory is applied.

The first part of the book (Chapters 1–5) was a pleasure to read and a useful overview of the concept of “community,” as a potentially ambiguous term in the social sciences, and archaeology in particular. It succeeds in explaining how “communities” have been studied in the historical development of Anglophone archaeology through its culture historical, processual, and post-processual phases. For MacSweeney, recent theoretical developments offer an opportunity to study communities in the late prehistoric/early historic periods in western Anatolia, in particular the relationship between material culture and the self-conscious creation of identities.

The book hinges on the creation of one kind of community identity in particular: a spatially focused “geographic community” defined by a shared identification with places and territories. MacSweeney suggests convincingly: “It is the spatial and emplaced nature of the geographical community that makes it particularly appropriate for study in archaeology.” The concept of the geographic community allows MacSweeney to divide all relevant material culture from

Beycesultan and Aphrodisias into two categories: 1) material culture which is used to create a sense of “Us”; and 2) material culture which is used to create oppositions between “Us” and “Them.”

As regards the former, community identities are strongest when material culture is used to foster cohesion and downplay social differentiation. As regards the latter, oppositions between “Us” and “Them” can also strengthen community identities in situations when a social group defines itself in opposition to “the external Other.” The external Other is a non-local social entity that can be represented in the presence of non-local material culture. Alternatively, “Us”-versus-“Them” oppositions can weaken community identities, in particular when material culture is used to emphasize differences in rank/status or affinity within a given settlement.

Chapter 6 introduces the broader archaeological and historical context of western Anatolia during the LBA and IA. This is a thoughtful discussion of how western Anatolia has existed in a geographical margin between two regions that have enjoyed more academic attention: the (Classical) Aegean and the Anatolian Plateau (of the Hittite kingdom and empire). Consequently, most previous research in western Anatolia has been framed by questions that ask to what extent the societies of this region have been influenced by the Aegean or the Anatolian Plateau. As such, societies in western Anatolia have become passive responders to “historical” forces emanating out of the west and the east. MacSweeney acknowledges the salience of distant influences on material culture and societies, but asks how and why social groups in western Anatolia chose to embrace, modify or reject material culture from distant origins. These choices relate directly to the creation, strengthening or dissolution of community identities/bonds in western Anatolia.

Chapter 7 is a case study based on the LBA and IA material culture of Beycesultan, when the settlement likely existed as a regional center. Two broad trends were reconstructed: 1) towards greater community identity during periods of external threat (from the LBA Hittites) or during periods of regional instability (Early IA). This is manifest in more homogenous, more local and less stratified material culture, and in evidence for socially integrative activities like feasting; and 2) towards a weakening of community identity, in periods of relative stability and prosperity that benefitted emergent local elites, who strove self-consciously to differentiate themselves from non-elites in the same settlement.

Chapter 8 is a case study based on the LBA and IA material culture of Aphrodisias. Compared with Beycesultan, Aphrodisias was more like a village

during these periods. Similar criteria were used to distinguish phases of more community or less community, though the settlement of Aphrodisias responded to the historical circumstances of the LBA and IA in different ways to Beycesultan (indeed in opposite ways). MacSweeney attributes this to the relative size and geo-political importance of Beycesultan vs. Aphrodisias.

Reading Chapter 7 and Chapter 8, I was left wondering how much community (or lack of community) can be reconstructed from the limited horizontal extent of excavation from the two sites. At Beycesultan, excavation trenches on the LBA and IA uncovered at most three buildings from one level in a single trench. At Aphrodisias, only fragments of a single building were uncovered from each level. There is never enough data in archaeology, but this narrow data set appears to have been too easily inserted into MacSweeney's interpretive framework. Long passages/discussions with minimal or no citation in Chapters 7–8, and redundancy in argumentation were two manifestations of this.

The volume will be valued for its thoughtful treatment of communities in archaeology (alongside Canuto and Yaeger's *Archaeology of Communities*), but less so for insights into the LBA and IA settlements of Beycesultan and Aphrodisias.

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