

Abstract #: 3631

HEGEMONY AND FRAGILITY: THE CASE OF MYCENAEAN GREECE

Guy Middleton¹

¹ *Newcastle University*

Whilst a series of high profile studies (eg. Kaniewski et al. 2019; Kaniewski and Van Campo 2017) have maintained a rigid fixation on finding evidence for climate change that can then be blamed for the c. 1200 BC collapse of the Mycenaean palace societies, a number of recent studies on collapse have shifted the focus away from the identification of external causes and towards a recognition of the inherent structural fragility of many ancient states and empires (Scott 2017; Yoffee 2019; already Kaufman 1988). Fragility studies force us to acknowledge that complex societies and political units can and do collapse without any impact from climate change or indeed any external drivers – collapse can take place within distinct culture zones and/or political units for purely historical and particular reasons. This is clearly the case, for example, with some of the Classic Maya polities (Demarest 2014), and ‘empires’ within Mesopotamia (Yoffee and Seri 2019).

Rather than focusing on external causes and constructing narratives of apocalyptic collapse, a much more simple and local explanation for the Mycenaean collapse c. 1200 BC may be more plausible. That is, that in competing with each other and seeking to extend hegemony and influence, the activities and ideologies of the palace states and their rulers resulted in mutual and eventually self-destruction, resulting in an end to the palace-system and its culture. In addition, it could be plausibly suggested that the social fallout from this period may have been an increasingly egalitarian social ideology.

Keywords

Collapse, Late Bronze Age Greece, Fragility, Hegemony, Conflict

Note/comment