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KEEPING IN TOUCH IN A CHANGING WORLD

NETWORK DYNAMICS AND THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE AEGEAN AND ITALY DURING THE BRONZE AGE – IRON AGE TRANSITION (CA. 1250 – 1000 BC)

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SUMMARY

This PhD thesis sets out to examine network dynamics and the connections between the Aegean and Italy during the Bronze Age – Iron Age transition (ca. 1250 – 1000 BC). More specifically, it seeks to understand how these connections were able to survive the so-called ‘12th-century crisis’ and continued to thrive during the ensuing Postpalatial period. Until recently, the period following the destruction of the Aegean palaces around 1200 BC was treated as an era of general decline and deterioration. However, it is increasingly realized that the impact of the destructions greatly varied between regions. It has been observed that the sites that had continuous occupation were often situated along the coast, still engaging in overseas contacts. This implies that for survival in the “crisis years” it was crucial to remain connected. Yet it is difficult to grasp how, in their turn, these connections survived the 12th-century crisis because the organization of Aegean external relations is poorly understood. For the Palatial period, it is generally assumed that the Aegean palaces fulfilled a primary role in maintaining external relations. However, this does not explain how contacts continued after the destruction of the palaces ca. 1200 BC. Drawing on network theory, this research starts from the position that aside from the palaces, there must have also been other highly connected nodes (‘hubs’). It is hypothesized that these nonpalatial hubs played a key role in the survival of Aegean external relations during the Postpalatial period.

In order to test this hypothesis, the connections between the Aegean and Italy have been selected as a case study. More specifically, two regions in the Aegean and one in Italy are chosen for further study in order to make the data more manageable and to allow for comparative analysis. The Argolid constitutes the primary case study, as this ‘palatial region’ has not only shaped our thinking regarding connectivity around 1200 BC but has also yielded one of the greatest quantities and varieties of Italian-type artifacts in the Aegean. In the Aegean, Achaia has been chosen as the comparative region, since it too offers ample evidence for Italo-Aegean relations during the Bronze Age – Iron Age transition but comprises instead a ‘nonpalatial region’, which allows us to test the hypothesis that the Italo-Aegean network partly owed its robustness to nonpalatial hubs. For the Italian case study, the focus lies on southern Italy. In this area, evidence for connections with the Aegean is particularly strong and seems to continue throughout the Postpalatial period. In each of the three case studies, the evidence for Italo-Aegean relations is systematically subjected to a multi-scalar contextual analysis conducted at the local, regional, and interregional scale. After analyzing each of the three case studies separately and subsequently comparing and contrasting them with one another, this research arrives at the following synthesis.

In each of the three case studies, the evidence indicates that Italo-Aegean relations were already in place before the palatial destructions. In the Aegean, this evidence consists of the ‘Urnfield’ bronzes, including Naue II type swords, ‘northern’ type spearheads and violin-bow fibulae, as well as the so-called ‘Handmade Burnished Ware’ (HBW) – which both first appeared in LH IIIB:2. In southern Italy, in contrast, the evidence already occurred at least from LH I – II onwards in the form of Aegean-style ceramics. At the time the first ‘Urnfield’ bronzes and HBW started to appear, the Argolid and Achaia were already involved in other interregional networks. The Argolid participated in an eastern-based network in which *orientalia* circulated, as well as a ceramics-based network which connected this region to the

other two case studies and beyond. Indeed, the evidence for Italo-Aegean relations in southern Italy relates mainly to this preexisting ceramics-based network, which tied the region not only to the Argolid and – to a lesser extent – Achaia, but to other Aegean areas such as Crete as well. With the appearance of the ‘Urnfield’ bronzes and HBW in LH IIIB:2 we observe the addition of new Italo-Aegean contacts to this already complex configuration. In all of the three case studies, the exchange of finished goods did not comprise the dominant mode of contact. Instead, most of the ‘Urnfield’ bronzes, HBW and Aegean-style ceramics were produced locally. In contrast to previous researchers, I argue that these three phenomena do not point to a single mode of contact. In the Aegean, the available evidence presents a convincing case for the presence of Italian immigrants on the one hand (HBW), as well as for the involvement of local elites in interregional exchange networks pertaining to metalwork on the other hand (‘Urnfield’ bronzes). In southern Italy, local elites participated in these metal-based networks as well, but simultaneously took part in ceramics-based networks that may or may not have involved immigrant or itinerant craftsmen from the Aegean.

In the Aegean, a comparison between the two case studies revealed both similarities and differences in network dynamics. In Achaia and the Argolid, two stages in network dynamics could be defined, based mainly on the typochronological distribution of the ‘Urnfield’ bronzes found within each region. The first stage started with the first appearance of the ‘Urnfield’ bronzes and encompassed the period right before and after the fall of the palaces (ca. LH IIIB:2 – LH IIIC Early/Middle). The second stage encompassed the later Postpalatial period (ca. LH IIIC Middle/Late – SM). While these stages demonstrate a degree of similarity between the two Aegean case studies, at the same time it is possible to recognize differences in the degree of interconnectivity and the organization of the Italo-Aegean network between the Argolid and Achaia. Southern Italy followed its own regional trajectory throughout the period under study that both compares and contrasts with the trajectories of the Aegean case studies. The absence of fine-grained dating for the Aegean-style ceramics makes it impossible to distinguish stages in network dynamics for southern Italy at the regional scale. However, while for the Italian case the ‘Urnfield’ bronzes were not examined in detail, changes in the distribution of different bronze types from the RBA to the FBA in southern Italy resembled the two stages in network dynamics witnessed in the Argolid and Achaia.

One of the fundamental contributions of the present research is that it found no evidence in the Argolid for palatial involvement in Italo-Aegean relations. While this may in part be a result of certain biases in the dataset, simultaneously the data did reveal the involvement of various nonpalatial hubs, such as the NW Quarter and Cult Center in Mycenae and the Lower Citadel in Tiryns. The observation that the network also comprised of nonpalatial hubs is an important element for explaining how it maintained its robustness during the 12th-century crisis. In contrast to previous reconstructions, this thesis demonstrates that the destruction of the Aegean palaces did not particularly impact Italo-Aegean connectivity. In fact, the 12th-century crisis did not incite substantial changes in Italo-Aegean network dynamics in the three study regions, nor did it change the dynamics of preexisting networks in these areas. As mentioned, the Italo-Aegean network emerged during the late Palatial period as an alternative network alongside the preexisting networks of *orientalia* and ceramics. In the Argolid, the new Italo-Aegean network was organized in a similarly centralized way as these preexisting networks. The notable difference is that in the case of the new Italo-Aegean network, only nonpalatial hubs could be identified at the local scale, while the palaces evidently functioned as hubs in the network of *orientalia* alongside the nonpalatial hubs. In Achaia, both the more developed ceramics-based network and the incipient Italo-Aegean network appear to have been elite-dominated. However, it should be noted that local elites generally did not comprise nodes in both networks at the same time. Despite these regional differences, both in Achaia and the Argolid the preexisting networks and the newly formed Italo-Aegean networks

initially continued unchanged after the fall of the palaces. This continuity is also reflected in southern Italy, where we see a shift to local production of Aegean-style ceramics – which, however, had started already long before 1200 BC.

The analysis of the three case studies further reveals that the initial hypothesis of a scale-free network in which nonpalatial hubs guaranteed the robustness of the network after 1200 requires modification. Although this structure can be recognized in the Italo-Aegean network of the Argolid during stage 1 at the regional and local scale, at an even smaller analytical scale the nonpalatial hubs comprised of a multiplexity of overlapping elite and nonelite network communities. This multiplexity could not be identified in southern Italy and Achaia, since the networks in these regions only involved local elite groups as a single network community and elite individuals as nonpalatial hubs. Despite this difference, the Italo-Aegean network in southern Italy also exhibited a scale-free topology, whereas in Achaia the scale-free topology was not yet fully formed prior to 1200 BC. Although we are dealing with three different regional network structures, in each study region Italo-Aegean connectivity survived the 12th-century crisis. What is more, in each region the connections between the Aegean and Italy followed their own trajectory in network dynamics in the Postpalatial period.

These dynamics may be characterized primarily as a switch between ‘old’ and ‘new’ phases of interregional connectivity. In all, four phases of connectivity can be identified during the Late Bronze Age – Iron Age transition. The first phase involves the ceramics-based ‘intra-Aegean’ connectivity, whereas the three others pertain to phases in connectivity witnessed in the spectrum of ‘Urnfield’ bronzes in the Aegean and Italy. It is important to highlight that for the entire duration of the Bronze Age – Iron Age transition, the shift from ‘old’ to ‘new’ phases of connectivity was gradual. What is more, these phases not only tended to overlap but also followed a nonlinear trajectory, with any given region being ahead of the curve in one phase but lagging behind in the next or *vice versa*. This nonlinearity can be understood as the result of the cumulative actions of local nodes in the network, whose agency regarding interconnectivity influenced the network dynamics of their region as a whole. This dialectic between the local and global underlines the importance of a multi-scalar approach to network dynamics. It is only by taking into account both the network structure as a whole and the dynamics taking place in its constituent parts that it becomes possible to understand how the connections between the Aegean and Italy were able to survive after 1200 BC.