PROLOGUE

The Mycenaeans are well-known to scholars, even to a general public. Less familiar are the early cultural developments that set the stage for the emergence of their palaces, their fortified citadels, their engineering projects, their hierarchical societies, and their literate bureaucracies. The focus of this book is on those formative stages between ca. 1600 and 1400 B.C., as seen through the lens of sustained archaeological research over the past thirty years at the Palace of Nestor in the southwestern Peloponnese of Greece.

Our lives move in unpredictable directions. In this book I try to give the reader a sense of one archaeologist's experiences, my own, and how seemingly unrelated chapters in my scholarly career can contribute to a larger picture, in unanticipated ways. It is impossible for me to demonstrate this without adopting an autobiographical approach, one that runs through each chapter. Nor can I avoid jumping from one topic to another that at first glance may appear unrelated. The progression of archaeological research is not always linear. I have tried to signpost the way clearly so that the reader can follow the twists and turns in the road that awaits.

Research at Pylos has not always reflected a consistent strategy and unified vision, focused on a single problem or period of the past. Instead, several loosely coordinated research projects launched since 1990 have each yielded important information. Each project has something to add to a view of the Mycenaean polity at Pylos in its formative stages. That portrait can now be painted in greater detail than is possible for any other Bronze Age polity in Greece, including Mycenae itself, if we tie together results from excavations, intensive archaeological surface surveys, and scientific analyses. The evidence all told sheds light on those who lived and died in Pylos, the environment that sheltered them, and their debt to the earlier Minoan civilization of Crete.

I also mean in this book to convey to readers something of the way in which archaeology creates knowledge, how that knowledge accumulates, and the manner by which our understanding of archaeological finds changes through time—and is shaped by our own experiences in the academy and in the field. It is impossible to do that without some discussion of the loci of knowledge production in the university, where students are trained and where traditions are passed along intergenerationally. Equally significant are the social networks in which all archaeologists are embedded. Readers will consequently hear quite a lot about the University of Cincinnati, where I was educated and where I have spent most of my academic career, as well as various colleagues and teachers of mine. Cincinnati itself has been for a century, and remains, a major center for the production of knowledge about the prehistory of Greece, and it was also the home of Carl Blegen, one of the founders of the discipline of Greek prehistory (see figure 1). If there are those who object to my approach, so be it. I am unapologetic, since it is within such a habitus that archaeological research, perhaps all team research, operates.

A few words about what this book is not. First and foremost, it is not a comprehensive overview of the Early Mycenaean period. Nothing is cut and dried; nothing ever complete in the field of archaeology—which is an important point to make. As the ancient Greek pre-Socratic philosopher Heraklitos of Ephesus put it, "everything flows" (ΠΑΝΤΑ ΡΕΙ) and we never step into exactly the same stream twice. Nonetheless, information at Pylos is more complete than elsewhere, and it is for that reason that I believe it is a case study now worth examining in depth. Perhaps one day it will be possible to do the same for other major Mycenaean centers. Then will be the time to rewrite Oliver Dickinson's enormously influential *The Origins of Mycenaean Civilisation* and examine more globally the role that contact with Crete played in the emergence of Mycenaean states in southern Greece.

When I arrived for graduate school in the Department of Classics at the University of Cincinnati in 1972, Carl Blegen was omnipresent, though he had died in Athens the previous year.[1] Blegen regularly spent spring and summer in Greece, according to terms set after a shrewd negotiation in 1927 when he was first hired. Blegen was world renowned, first as the archaeologist who clarified the date of Homer's Troy through his excavations in Turkey in the 1930s, then as the excavator of the Bronze Age Palace of Nestor at Pylos (1939 and 1952–1970). Homeric Pylos, home of King Nestor in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, had long eluded would-be discoverers. Blegen and Konstantinos Kourouniotis, director of the National Archaeological Museum of Athens, at last found it on the Englianos Ridge, near the modern agricultural center of Chora, and not at modern Pylos on the famous Bay of Navarino, in 1827 the scene of an important battle in the Greek war for independence (see figure 2 and figure 3). That port town had usurped the name in the nineteenth century.

In 1972 Blegen's Troy and Pylos colleagues were still alive and living in Cincinnati, including his close friend and co-author, architect Marion Rawson. Marion sometimes came to events in the Department of Classics, and several of Blegen's former students were my professors.

FIGURE 1. Carl Blegen supervising excavations at the Palace of Nestor at Pylos, 1939. Courtesy of the Department of Classics, University of Cincinnati. All rights reserved.

FIGURE 2. The Palace of Nestor and the Aigaleon mountain range in the distance, the boundary between the Hither and Further Provinces of the kingdom of Nestor. Courtesy of the Department of Classics, University of Cincinnati. All rights reserved.

FIGURE 3. The Bay of Navarino, scene of the defeat of the Ottoman navy in 1827, and the island of Sphaktiria in the distance at the left. Courtesy of the Department of Classics, University of Cincinnati. All rights reserved.

Blegen considered his excavations at Pylos to be almost completely published. He and Rawson had composed a monumental, two-volume description of the architecture of the palace and finds from the debris left by its destruction ca. 1180 B.C. A second book by Mabel Lang, a professor of Greek at Bryn Mawr College, presented many of the palace's fragmentary wall-paintings, and a third, by Blegen, Rawson, Lord William Taylour, and William P. Donovan, described Mycenaean cemeteries nearby and discoveries predating the Palace of Nestor. A fourth volume was announced, a definitive publication of clay tablets incised in the Mycenaean (Linear B) script, still the largest such archive from the Greek mainland.[2] Its discovery had led to the decipherment of that pre-alphabetic representation of the Greek language.

Not only had Blegen's accomplishments proven monumentally important, but he was single-minded in his determination to make them public.

The room where Blegen and Rawson assembled their reports still held their filing cabinets when I arrived, but was eerily devoid of life. Now the building itself has been demolished to make way for one designed by a "signature" architect, part of a campus-wide initiative in which the city of Cincinnati takes pride.[3] By 1972 fieldwork at Pylos was a closed book, literally and figuratively, and one that my Ph.D. advisor, John L. (Jack) Caskey, was not interested in reopening. Caskey had gone to Troy as a graduate student, but not to Pylos. In the 1950s, as director of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, he organized his own excavations in the Argolid at Lerna and by the 1960s was investigating Ayia Irini, a peninsular prehistoric settlement on the Cycladic island of Kea, an Aegean Sea outpost of the Minoan civilization. It now is one of the best-known Bronze Age sites ever explored in the Greek islands.[4] Kea is small (only a bit over 100 sq km in area) and is the nearest of the Cycladic Islands to Attica and Athens. Jack invited me to join his team, and I wrote my Ph.D. dissertation about massive stone defenses built around Ayia Irini ca. 1700 B.C.

FIGURE 4. The acropolis of Ancient Mycenae, as seen from near the valley of Nemea. Surface artifact collection by members of the Nemea Valley Archaeological Project in foreground. John F. Cherry. Courtesy of the Department of Classics. All rights reserved.

Cincinnati was famous then, as now, for the contributions of its archaeologists to the study of the Greek Bronze Age, the two millennia (ca. 3200–1100 B.C.) prior to the invention of the Greek alphabet in the eighth century B.C. As a student in the classroom, I studied prehistory on both sides of the Aegean Sea, Greece as well as Turkey, in addition to ancient languages, literature, and history—but I never imagined Pylos lay in my future. The Palace of Nestor was far away, conceptually and geographically—and Blegen had "been there, done that."

After receiving my doctoral degree in 1977, Jeremy Rutter, now emeritus professor at Dartmouth College, suggested that I study the Early Mycenaean period at a site called Korakou, which overlooks the Corinthian Gulf near the Isthmus of Corinth. In 1915 and 1916 Blegen had explored this deeply stratified mound, and it was the subject of his Yale dissertation.[5] A few years later, in 1983, James Wright of Bryn Mawr College asked John Cherry, then at Cambridge University, Eleni Mantzourani of the University of Athens, and me to join him in organizing a large-scale interdisciplinary research program focused on the valley of Nemea. In Classical times, Nemea, together with Olympia, Delphi, and Isthmia, was the site of Panhellenic games held at its Sanctuary of Zeus.[6] Participation in that project brought me deep into the Homeric world for the first time, close to the capital of Agamemnon, the king of Mycenae, who, according to the ancient Greek cycle of heroic epic poems, had led the allied Greek contingents to Troy to recover Helen.

Most days I could see the prominent hills of Zara and Profitis Ilias looming over Mycenae's citadel, as our teams trudged through fields in search of new archaeological sites (see figure 4). Wright and Mary Dabney were resuming Blegen's excavations at a prehistoric village called Tsoungiza, a stone's throw from the Panhellenic sanctuary. I was in hog heaven, practicing the kind of anthropological archaeology I had read and dreamt about in graduate school.

THE "NEW ARCHAEOLOGY" AND ME

In the 1970s a war was raging between the New Archaeology, which espoused the testing of social and economic theories through deductive reasoning, and more traditional approaches to prehistoric archaeology.[7] More about that conflict is addressed later in this book. For now, it suffices to say that New Archaeologists were often dismissive of archaeologists of previous generations who had spent their time defining archaeological cultures—namely, recurring assemblages of similar artifacts, characteristic of particular past times and places. The latter had even argued that such cultures could be used to trace movements of Bronze Age peoples, such as migrations and invasions, from one place to another, in instances where an assemblage of artifacts appeared to have been replicated in a second location. New Archaeologists, in contrast, preferred to explore reasons why ancient societies evolved without bringing new peoples onto the stage. They found the notion that ideas simply "diffused" from one place to another, like atoms in a liquid or gas, to be simplistic and ill-defined. Why a given human population was disposed to accept innovations was of greater interest and demanded detailed knowledge of the inner workings of ancient societies. New Archaeologists were also skeptical of scholars who tried to equate archaeological cultures with modern or ancient ethnicities.[8]

Blegen was old-school. So was Jack Caskey, who saw little good in the New Archaeology. Lerna, the prehistoric mound in the Argolid that he had explored, was a landmark excavation.[9] There Caskey had been able to define stages in the prehistory of southern Greece, ranging from the Neolithic, the New Stone Age, marked by the introduction of agriculture and animal husbandry, through the Bronze Age, a period two millennia long, when alloys of copper largely replaced stone for tools and weapons, prior to the widespread use of iron for these purposes in Classical Greece. Major changes in material culture at Lerna between one phase of the settlement and the next, in Caskey's view, marked the arrival of new peoples. His central conclusion was that Greeks first arrived in Greece toward the end of the third millennium B.C.[10]

I was skeptical of Caskey's methods and conclusions, but I could not immediately see how the New Archaeology could be applied to the Mediterranean world. New Archaeologists, led by their guru, Lewis Binford, had developed ideas and methods in reference to their own research in North America, Mesoamerica, and, to a more limited extent, the Middle East—all traditional haunts for American anthropologist-archaeologists.[11] Greece and Italy, left out of the picture, remained squarely in the hands of Classical archaeologists who mostly pledged allegiance to conservative traditions.

Caskey discouraged his students from taking classes in anthropological archaeology, although in other ways he was progressive. At Lerna he had commissioned experts to study human skeletal remains, animal bones, and botanical residue. It

was only modern archaeological theory, not the natural and physical sciences, that he found silly—in particular Binford's claim that no aspect of the past, even ancient thought and belief, was unknowable—provided the right hypotheses were formulated and tested. He probably would have found some of the conclusions in this book silly too.

Caskey's objections made the New Archaeology all the more appealing for me and my friends, of course. We began to read Binford's publications surreptitiously, and then, one day, Gloria Pinney, a fellow graduate student, now emerita professor at Harvard, plunked a book called *The Emergence of Civilisation* on my desk, freshly arrived by mail from Blackwell's Bookshop in Oxford. The author was Colin Renfrew. Gloria announced: "This is the most important book ever written in your field." Here at last was a blueprint for applying the New Archaeology to topics of interest to me, but I never suspected that only a few years later I would be working for Renfrew in the Cycladic islands.[12]

That good fortune fell from a concatenation of events, set in motion in 1975 by a chance encounter in Athens with Robin Torrence. Robin was a Ph.D. candidate of Binford's in Albuquerque, but teaching at the University of Sheffield in England. Her significant other was John Cherry, a graduate student at the University of Southampton, where Renfrew was professor of archaeology. Robin and John both went to the island of Melos as members of an interdisciplinary group re-excavating the iconic prehistoric settlement of Phylakopi, which had last been studied by members of the British School at Athens in 1911. Renfrew invited me to Melos to study prehistoric pottery from Phylakopi, on John's recommendation. I was only too eager to accept.

INTENSIVE SURFACE SURVEY ARRIVES IN GREECE

Concurrent with excavations at Phylakopi, Cherry had been exploring the history of settlement and land use on Melos with a technique then new to Greece: "intensive surface survey."[13] He and a team of students had walked systematically through fields in randomly selected parts of the island, inspecting the surface of the earth for the presence of fragments of ancient pottery, stone tools, and walls. By so doing, they were able to document where people had lived in the past and to identify patterns that begged for explanation. Why was the population of Melos sometimes dispersed in smallish communities? Why, at other times, was it concentrated (or nucleated) in larger towns? They found that when, in the Bronze Age, contacts with Crete and the Greek mainland were most intense, the only city was Phylakopi. Did people move there for protection? To be close to those in power? To engage in trade with the outside world?

The size of populations and the distribution of people in landscapes was critical for Renfrew's application of the New Archaeology to Greece. After Cherry finished

on Melos, he and I agreed to test some of his and Renfrew's conclusions about the development of social and political complexity in the Aegean with a similar intensive survey on Kea, which we began in 1983.[14] It was also about that time that Wright asked us to survey the valleys around the Sanctuary of Zeus at Nemea and the passes leading to Mycenae.

IN THE LAND OF KING NESTOR

Pylos finally entered my life in 1989, when we were completing our work at Nemea. I then had no desire to excavate there. James Wright and Jeremy Rutter had considered doing that after Nemea. I went to Pylos instead with John Cherry, Susan Alcock, and John's daughter Ceridwen to assess the potential for a surface survey. Our interests lay in finding new sites in that area and gathering detailed information about ones previously reported by others. The settlement around the Palace of Nestor was an important target, as were towns that had been capitals of districts in the kingdom of Nestor in the thirteenth century B.C.

I have never since left Pylos for long. After the intensive survey that we called the Pylos Regional Archaeological Project (1991–1996), efforts turned to reorganization and study of finds from Blegen's excavations (1997–2011), excavations in conjunction with the erection of a new roof over the Palace of Nestor (2011–2013), and, most recently, full-scale excavations on the acropolis and in the surrounding settlement and cemeteries (2015–2022).[15]

The discoveries from Blegen's own campaigns have had such a profound impact on study of the Greek Bronze Age that Pylos is now a name coupled in textbooks with Mycenae and Knossos. What graduate student ever imagines that he or she will have the opportunity to direct research at a site so famous, let alone find treasures there like those discovered by Heinrich and Sophia Schliemann at Mycenae? Yet that is exactly what happened on the first day of our excavation season in 2015 and again on the first day of our season in 2018, and these treasures—the grave of the "Griffin Warrior" and two previously unknown monumental tholos (beehive) tombs—have provided much fodder for this book. This new material in many ways is changing and may continue to change our understanding of the origins of Mycenaean states.[16] Blegen had not found it all.

THE ARGUMENT OF THIS BOOK

This book is a case study in the origins of a Mycenaean state, not a comprehensive overview of the subject. My particular focus is on what was happening in the Early Mycenaean period in only one part of Greece, the area within the boundaries of what later became the Hither Province of the kingdom of Nestor. The book is based on six public lectures that I gave at the University of California at Berkeley as Sather Professor in the winter of 2019.[17] In so doing, I joined, with trepidation,

several distinguished predecessors who have had the opportunity to deliver Sather Lectures about Mycenaeans and Minoans. The Sather Professorship has held a special place in the field of Bronze Age Greek studies since it was established at Berkeley in 1914, as I will discuss in chapter 1. Although the terms of the position have changed several times, since 1920–1921 the professor's principal duty has been to present such lectures and then submit them for publication by the University of California Press.

The Early Mycenaean period was a time of drastic changes that distinguished it from the preceding Middle Bronze Age of mainland Greece.[18] On Crete, the first palaces had arisen not long after 2000 B.C., and the islands of the Aegean, including Aigina in the Saronic Gulf, came into regular communication with Minoan Crete. But the Greek mainland was sluggish and it was not until about 1600 B.C. that we find the first elements of what we can recognize as greater social and political complexity. Distinguished scholars admit that previously "life must have been fairly grim, and it is difficult to escape the conclusion that this was a period when most people were desperately poor."[19] Oliver Dickinson already concluded in 1977 that "the essential development" in the time of the Mycenae shaft graves, which overlapped the transition from the Middle to Late Helladic period, was "the emergence of a ruling class who . . . must have extended their control over quite considerable territories in order to command the resources to support their new splendor."[20] I see the Mycenaean society that they created as a cultural construct—a powerful force that was capable eventually of engulfing and incorporating large parts of southern Greece. The interactions of peer polities led by their elites played an important role in that process—at times hostile, other times peaceful.[21]

Some researchers have insisted we focus on social, political, and cultural changes in the Middle Bronze Age that led to the formation of Early Mycenaean polities and the later Mycenaean states. I agree, but these developments for the most part are not recognizable before the final stage of the Middle Bronze Age, which itself was introductory to the Early Mycenaean period. It is then that rich burials become widespread in southern Greece—a phenomenon that has been attributed to actions taken by aggrandizing leaders of unstable, fluid, and competitive factions.[22] It was then that a shadowy ruling class emerged.

It can no longer be assumed that all those who shared Mycenaean culture were Greek speakers or that Mycenaean culture was an inevitable expression of any latent Hellenic identity. Some years ago John Bennet and I argued "that the elite of the Palace of Nestor chose—in some circumstances—to emphasize the military character of the Pylian regime, probably to individuals not involved in the immediate palace bureaucracy or resident at Pylos."[23] We concluded: "On the broader canvas, an analysis of the representation of warfare in the Palace of Nestor read against the process of expansion of the Pylian state offers considerable insight into the ideological and coercive means by which early Aegean states created from a

heterogeneous base a subject population that shared both in material culture and ideology—in short, how 'Mycenaeans' were made."[24]

I here describe some of the most striking developments that occurred during the Early Mycenaean period at Pylos. Military aspirations of mainland elite figure large in this book, but so do ideologies and concepts borrowed from the Minoan civilization. I suggest that already at the beginning of the Late Bronze Age, both forces were contributing to shaping a Mycenaean identity at Pylos and elsewhere in southern Greece, in communities where Mycenaean palaces would later arise. This contention, as a general proposition, is not an entirely new idea. Yet there has been a scarcity of supporting evidence, in part because Early Mycenaean settlements in critical locations such as Mycenae were destroyed by later building and because many significant mortuary remains, such as the Vapheio Tholos at Sparta and the first Grave Circle at Mycenae, were investigated over a century ago and not published with a view to our modern need for detail.[25]

Pylos was also in the Early Mycenaean period a major node for the exchange of ideas between Crete and the Greek mainland, more than has been generally understood. Minoan technologies were transferred to the Greek mainland, along with Minoan beliefs, perhaps even aspects of political systems, and the agricultural underpinnings of Mycenaean society were likely also established.

In the last two decades, our picture of Early Mycenaean Pylos has achieved great clarity. Pylos is now an ideal place to develop a model that may usefully be applied and evaluated in other parts of the Mycenaean world. I will suggest that Messenia, like the Argolid, was a place where a "Cretan graft" was first "set on the wild stock of the mainland"—in the words of Blegen and his best friend, Alan Wace, director of the British School at Athens from 1914 to 1923, and of its excavations at Mycenae.[26]

Chapter 1 considers the historiography of the terms *Mycenaean*, *Mycenaean civilization*, and *origins of Mycenaean civilization*. What did our predecessors mean by these labels when they invented them? How should we understand them today? It is obviously important to be clear what we are talking about when we use the term *Mycenaean* and explore the beginnings of a Mycenaean state.

Within the broader context of the history of exploration in the Pylos area, chapter 2 considers what the Pylos Regional Archaeological Project's fieldwork in the 1990s tells us about patterns of settlement at the time of the origins of the Mycenaean state. I add a personal touch by rehearsing my own experiences in rural landscapes while growing up in a Midwestern American countryside.

In chapter 3, I turn to a more recent past, the centuries when most of what is now the Greek nation-state belonged to the Ottoman Empire. The chapter is based on a study of Turkish cadasters that recorded agricultural holdings in the Pylos area in A.D. 1716. Although far removed in time from the Mycenaean Age, these land registries suggest what types of agricultural organizations may have existed three millennia earlier in the same landscape. I argue that a form of tenant

farming or sharecropping was already operational in the Early Mycenaean period, as it certainly was in Ottoman times.

Chapter 4 focuses on what we have learned about Early Mycenaean Pylos by mining Blegen's old excavation archives and by studying finds that he left unpublished.

Chapter 5 reviews both old and new evidence for Mycenaean burials around the Palace of Nestor. Ancient graves tell us much about the social and political structuration of the world of the living in Early Mycenaean Pylos.

In chapter 6, Sharon Stocker joins me in a discussion of relations between Crete and Pylos, in particular how Minoan ways of doing things and Cretan beliefs were adopted at Pylos in Early Mycenaean times. We suggest that the process of "Minoanization" at Pylos played a significant role in establishing the office of the *wanax*, the Mycenaean king.

Finally, in an epilogue, Stocker and I weave together interpretative threads from earlier chapters, our goal being to show how at the start of the Late Bronze Age foundations were laid for the emergence of a Mycenaean state at Pylos.

For those unfamiliar with the prehistory of Greece and the Palace of Nestor, I also include two brief introductions to these topics in advance of chapter 1.