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Athens and Jerusalem in the Third Millennium: Culture, Comparison, and the Evolution of Social Complexity

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Abstract

This paper sets out a systematic approach to using comparative methods in the archaeological study of complex societies. Three scales of comparison are indicated—micro, meso, and macro—corresponding roughly to the site, regional/cultural, and historical/evolutionary levels. While there is obvious overlap, each level has appropriate sets of methods and expectations, and each needs to be integrated in a sequential or hierarchical fashion. Examples of these levels are taken from early third millennium Greece and the Levant. A larger goal is to illustrate how comparison of superficially similar pre- and proto-historic cultures may aid in the study of dramatically different historic societies.

The Art of Comparison: What and Why?

The emergence of complex societies and their characterization remains a central concern of archaeologists working in the Old World and elsewhere. While no longer the nexus of activity that it was in the 1960s and 70s (e.g. Adams 1966; Johnson 1973; Wright 1977), these issues continue to be addressed with an ever-increasing variety of theoretical and methodological approaches. The study of complex societies both delved deeply into individual societies and proposed quite broad evolutionary schemes. In between were geographically and explanatorily middle range studies, such as World Systems and intersocietal interaction approaches positing functional linkages over space (e.g. Algaze 1993). Comparative studies of city-states, states, and empires have also attempted to discern regularities, although authors are frequently uncomfortable with dealing with such ideal types (Nichols and Charlton 1997; Feinman and Marcus 1998; Alcock *et al.* 2001). More recently archaeologists have emphasized such factors as 'order, legitimacy, and wealth', linking ideology and political economy to ask how complex societies reproduced themselves as civilizations (Baines and Yoffee 1998; Richards and van Buren 2001). At the broadest level is now Trigger's (2003) major, comparative analysis of seven early civilizations from the standpoint of sociopolitical organization, economy, and cognitive and symbolic dimensions. All these approaches might be said to operate at conceptual levels and marshal evidence as necessary.

One component of early American anthropological and then neo-evolutionary explanation (Sanderson 1990: 37-41, 211-12; Trigger 2003: 16-28), comparative analysis contributed greatly to organizing data on social organization and subsistence strategies, among other aspects. Classical evolutionists extrapolated 'from contemporary primitives to ancient society' by arranging 'the varieties of contemporary institutions in a sequence of increasing antiquity' (Harris 1968: 151). Comparative cross-cultural methods were developed more systematically by cultural anthropologists and ethnographers in order to test models of cultural evolution and more limited hypotheses regarding causal relationships between conditions, variables, and generalizations (Ember 1991; Mace and Pagel 1994). Since the emergence of neo-evolutionary approaches, archaeologists have used comparative methods both to develop sweeping evolutionary typologies and to test specific hypotheses (Service 1962; Fried 1967; Ember and Ember 1995; Peregrine 2001). As shown below, comparison is related to but separate from the problem of analogy in archaeology.

The *ur*-texts of neo-evolutionary anthropology and archaeology followed Steward in distinguishing general and specific evolution, but it might be argued that the focus was not comparative in the strictest sense (e.g. Sahlins 1960; Spencer 1992; cf. Tschauner 1994). Nor was it truly evolutionary, in the Darwinian sense. The functionalism of processual or 'New Archaeology', with its themes of cultural laws, taxonomy and typology, efficiency, adaptation, progressivism, and uniformitarianism, de-emphasized specific evolution and derided culture history. One result was abstracted and rarefied cross-cultural comparison, really a form of *categorization* or, put another way, *generalization* for the purpose of creating theories that emphasized typological change (Trigger 1989: 294-303, 312-19).

In contrast, post-processual archaeology was frankly relativist and particularist, which made comparison difficult if not impossible. In the Old World the comparative approach never gained much currency in archaeology, beyond the initial work of Julian Steward, and the seminal study of Robert M. Adams (Steward 1955; Adams 1966). Work subsequent to Adams' focused primarily on the 'state' and its presumed precursor, the 'chiefdom', and comparisons were intended to refine evolutionary types or processes (e.g. Johnson 1982; Wright 1978; 1984; Rothman 1994a). Some of the most useful comparative approaches on the Old World have been adopted by New World scholars offering comments in edited or conference volumes, or by scholars who worked in both areas (e.g. Kohl 1987a; Johnson 1989; Fish and Fish 1991; Redman 1991; Feinman 1994).

Comparative approaches have long been noted to have clear shortcomings, or potential shortcomings, of their own. Anti-evolutionists like Nisbet argued that comparison juxtaposes totally unrelated variables in pursuit of chimerical developmentalist logic (Nisbet 1969). Trigger (2003: 9-10) also notes that cultural relativists who believe individual human societies are irreducibly different must therefore regard them as literally incomparable. Even neo-evolutionists like Binford (1967) objected to comparison from the law-making perspective of logical positivism. Additional objections may be raised. Purely typological exercises, such as trait lists, may usefully condense complex features for reference. But even in the hands of Childe such lists tended to overemphasize specific cultural features and to make highly dynamic processes static. The problem of static compartmentalization with ill-specified causal links also limits systems theory approaches. Typological approaches can thus be doubly reductive, removing features from context and then making them static (Yoffee 1993).

A second potential shortcoming relates to the form, but also to intent, in the selection of comparanda. Apples and oranges alike can be disadvantaged, sometimes deliberately, by inept or invidious comparisons. Intent is the overarching question. What is to be gained by comparison? Without social typologies or nomothetic paradigm-making as goals, what can comparisons tell us and where can they lead? Which comparisons are appropriate and which inappropriate? Is *analogizing*—inferring characteristics from one example to another—truly *comparative*, an examination to discover similarities and differences? The fundamental issue is whether the true goal of comparison in archaeology should be to formulate and test high level theories of change or to penetrate more deeply into the structural, operational, and evolutionary features of different societies by using others as a guide. This issue, of course, also is a subset of the larger question of archaeology's purpose. Trigger's explicit goal is to test theories of sociocultural change against empirical evidence, but at broader level his focus is on 'what their similarities and differences can tell us about factors that influence human behavior. This requires determining what kinds of similarities were general or specific, and whether some early civilizations shared certain features but not others' (Trigger 2003: 14). Such a macro-scale undertaking necessarily glosses over lower level variability (and smaller, secondary societies), in pursuit of a baseline to all social complexity.

Working from the perspective of history, Kocka (2003) distinguishes heuristic, descriptive, analytical, and paradigmatic comparisons. Heuristic approaches allow scholars to identify new problems or questions. Descriptive comparisons clarify cases by juxtaposition with others. Analytical comparisons are necessary for asking questions about causality, while paradigmatic comparisons distance scholars from their own cases, 'deprovincializing' them. But Kocka also offers several vital cautions. The first regards the increasing (and inevitable) reliance on secondary sources as a scholar moves further away from an area of specialization. A second is the necessity to isolate units of comparison from each other and from internal continuities and entanglements. And a third is the inability to compare totalities. Comparison 'implies selection, abstraction, and de-contextualization' (Kocka 2003: 41).

Comparison: How?

There is no 'right' way to do comparison, although there may be some wrong ways. Ideally comparisons should be of sufficient breadth and depth to avoid problems of over-specificity or a-contextuality. Furthermore, comparisons designed as part of a generalizing framework should form a hierarchical 'sequence of investigations', linking different scales of analysis (Butzer 1982: 211-12). While it impossible to compare all aspects of two or more societies, Shelley's (1999) important discussion of 'multiconstraint theory' in archaeological analogy also demonstrates that analogical robustness increases with the number of 'sources' that inform the study of a 'target'. Connecting sequential or hierarchical investigations also requires a common-sense bridging capability. Proceeding from specific to general attributes may help avoid distortions and selection biases introduced by primary emphasis on abstract theory, ideal types, or conceptual (hence, semi-metaphoric) approaches (Lustick 1996).

The appropriateness of any given comparison, however, is a serious consideration. There is a virtually infinite number of variables, states, and propositions that could potentially be compared, but once again the question of apples and oranges intrudes. These are problematics shared by disciplines with comparative interests, such as archaeology and anthropology, history and historical sociology (e.g. Skocpol 1979: 36-40). An obvious caution regarding language and definitions must be made (Joffe 2003). The historian Lewis B. Namier (1952: 3) commented that 'while ideas outlive reality, names and words outlast both…there were bishops in the fourth century, and party names were in use in eighteenth century England; yet conclusions must not be drawn from either fact without a thorough understanding of what those terms then covered'.

Three broadening levels of comparisons are proposed. The first may be called *micro-scale* comparisons, aimed at sites and their material and organizational features. These range from purely functional levels of determining an object's purpose through the study of domestic and productive groups, and specialized political, religious, and social institutions, with an eye towards changing composition, wealth, and activities. Other 'local' questions include the organization of craft production, the spatial segregation of activities, and the differential distribution of products, reflecting the political economy and as elite control.

Next are *meso-scale* comparisons, aimed at the regional through the 'cultural' level. Here political and economic integration may be assessed through analyses of administrative and bureaucratic practices such as writing, sealing, and storage (although to be sure these may be addressed at the micro-level as well). Settlement patterns studies of intra- and interregional interaction yield evidence on patterns of economic organization and integration. Interregional interaction has been explored with particular creativity, as the elite ideological role of 'trade' has been realized. Other types of meso-comparisons require higher order preliminary analyses. For example, questions of energy expenditures, or agricultural strategies, yield insights regarding the organization of society and production, as do studies of consumption and exchange. The traditional comparanda of cities, states, institutions and authority, technology, and religion, may also be discussed profitably at this level, along with gender, class, and ethnic dimensions.

Thirdly, there are *macro-scale* comparisons, designed to address broad temporal and cultural issues of evolutionary pattern and process. Obviously, the further afield comparisons range in terms of space, time, and abstraction, the greater the levels of inference and speculation, another aspect of a very old problem in archaeological analyses (Hawkes 1954). At this scale comparisons function far less precisely. Greater pieces of time and space are broken off and examined to compare the pace and scale of development, the position of different civilizations within world-histories and world systems, and other cross-cultural generalizations. Evolutionary theorizing is appropriate at this scale and may include typologies, but these are again dependent on lower level conclusions. Success or failure at these ethereal levels depends on the solidity of the archaeological and historical foundations; they may even be impressionistic and speculative. But the terms and sources of macro-level comparisons can be highly problematic and must be subject to controls. As Namier (1942: 69) put it: 'One would expect people to remember the past and to imagine the future. But in fact, when discoursing or writing about history, they imagine it in terms of their own experience, and when trying to gauge the future they cite supposed analogies from the past: till, by a double process of repetition they imagine the past and remember the future'.

Finally, there is the matter of contrast. Comparison on its own implies a search for order. As noted above, even Trigger's *magnum opus* seems to privilege an implicit preference for regularity over diversity. The desire for harmony and the concomitant dread of disorder, as Tilly (1984) notes, are 19th-century paradigms, born of bourgeois fears and natural science confidence, carried over into 'social physics'. The search for 'disorder' is obviously not alien to archaeology, as the recent vogue for 'heterarchy' has shown (e.g. Ehrenreich *et al.* 1995), although the response to variation has frequently been the proliferation of categories. Yet contrast, as a means of *highlighting* variation, should be regarded as fully equal to more orderly orderings. Both by design and by accident, contrasts reveal jagged contours, unexpected workings, and counterintuitive flows. These should force a continual rethinking of even our most cherished categories. Recent work on 'the city', 'the state' and 'empires' illustrate this most useful breakdown of cherished but often outdated types, and the emergence of more contextual interpretations (Kohl 1987b; Nichols and Charlton 1997; Feinman and Marcus 1998; Alcock *et al.* 2001). Overall, comparisons should be heuristic and tentative, rather than conclusive and categorical. Archaeology's shifting approaches to regularity and diversity reflect, if nothing else, its basis as a social enterprise.

Comparanda: Who and Why?

The comparanda in this study are Greece and the Levant during the third millennium BC, but the deliberately provocative title is intended to hint at broader issues. The Early Bronze Ages of Greece and the Levant have been selected in an attempt to shed light on emerging phases of complexity in two Mediterranean societies, with long-noted similarities in geography and subsistence (e.g. Smith 1900: 55). Each exhibits an 'ecological mosaic', interregional contrasts in geography and resources which encouraged symbiosis (Adams 1966: 52). In both areas small-scale complexity emerged during the third millennium BC 'Early Bronze Ages' after long and relatively stable village phases. Their small-scale complexities involved increasingly agglomerated and nucleated settlement—sometimes fortified—economies increasingly involved with interregional trade, the reorganization of local agricultural and pastoral production, administrative technologies, and the emergence of socio-political elites and institutions, which have been interpreted by some as 'state' level organizations. By the mid-third millennium BC, both regions may also have been in tentative contact, but from the second millennium BC onward they were tied together with increasing intimacy.

An important contrast, however, lies in the contacts between Asia and Egypt, mediated through the central and southern Levant, which included the transfer of domesticated plants and animals. Greece had no such neighbor but from the Neolithic was decisively oriented toward the sea. These contrasts also point to another issue, namely that Greece and the Levant are themselves comprised of important subunits with different characteristics.

Given these and other agreed upon similarities and differences, what is to be gained by comparison? Both societies have been extensively investigated and reams of data are available, in itself a practical drawback to in-depth comparisons. Judicious comparison could heighten understanding of features of both societies and help strengthen the Mediterranean as a unit of analysis in Old World archaeology (e.g. Horden and Purcell 2000). But the diversity of data density and geographic variation means that comparisons will be focused on subunits, which under certain conditions may be representative of larger culture areas.

Analysis of the Levant and Greece also broaches an issue indirectly alluded to in the title of this paper, namely two very different 'end' points of social evolution in the Old World. Athens and Jerusalem have stood as totems of rationalism and spiritualism, societies that made 'Axial' breakthroughs of dramatically opposing sorts (Eisenstadt 1986). What are the prehistoric roots of these later contrasts? In a sense, the question may be restated in concrete terms of the Bronze Age 'origins' of Biblical Israel and Classical Greece. These are not, of course, the only goals possible from the proposed comparison, but the apparent Bronze Age similarities and Iron Age contrasts are at the very least an invitation to further investigation, provided some procedures can be established. And regardless of whether such an explanatory effort is

Figure 1. Map of major Levantine sites mentioned in the text.

ultimately satisfying, the necessity to reconnect ‘prehistory’ and ‘history’ is an important commonality in the study of richly documented culture areas like those of the Mediterranean.

Comparing Early Bronze Ages: The Levant and Greece (Figures 1 and 2)

In this section I will address the three broadening levels of comparisons discussed above. For reasons of brevity and control, certain features of only two periods will be considered here, the Early Bronze (EB) II in the Levant (c. 3100–2700 BC), and the Early Helladic (EH) II in Greece (c. 2650–2200 BC). Both of these are the first ‘urban’ or ‘town culture’ periods in their respective areas but, as their respective time spans indicate, they are not contemporary or organically connected.

Micro-Comparisons

In the southern Levant (Figure 1), the prevalent architectural module during the EB II period is the broadroom house, sometimes called the ‘Arad’ house after the type-site where such structures were first isolated and identified. These are rectangular structures entered through a single door along the long wall, typically lined with benches for use as storage, workspace, and sleeping (Ben-Tor 1992). At some sites smaller rectilinear storage structures and platforms were appended to the main building to form enclosed courtyards. The broadroom also formed the template for both religious and social architecture.

There is strong evidence of planning at most urban sites in the southern Levant. Such sites are occupied by dense agglomerations of houses, many of which share common walls. The construction of fortifications and

Figure 2. Map of major Early Helladic sites mentioned in the text.

water systems required extensive planning and deliberate execution. Fortifications are known at some three dozen sites and appear to have been constructed throughout the period. The wall systems are standardized and suggest a common design template (Kempinski 1992). It has been suggested that their primary functions were as labor capturing devices, and as signals delineating urban and non-urban space, and urban power (Joffe 1993: 68-73). There are few unambiguous 'administrative' structures, all of which are based on the broadroom module, as well as little evidence for community institutional structures.

Overall, however, there is little architectural or other evidence of internal variation in southern Levantine society suggestive of socio-economic stratification or even significant functional differentiation. The architecture suggests that the primary social and economic units were moderately extended kinship groups. Though now much discussed, it must be emphasized that the evidence for storage during the EB II indicates accumulation of 'cash crop' surpluses, primarily Mediterranean crops, within households, not storage of a range of staples by institutions intended as a meaningful community risk-abatement strategy (Rosen 1995; cf. Genz 2003; Philip 2003: 106, 112-13). A few possible examples of this appear in the subsequent EB III period (Mazar 2001).

In the northern Levant, where early third millennium chronology remains a problem, only small architectural exposures have been recovered, for example at sites such as Sidon and Beirut (e.g. Badre 2001–2002; see generally Philip 2002). At Byblos, however, there is sufficient evidence to consider some of the relevant issues, with the caveat that some features may have been influenced by the onset of large-scale Egyptian contacts during and after the late Second Dynasty (see conveniently Saghieh 1983). Two architectural features stand out at Byblos, even in these early phases: (1) a tradition of religious buildings, some of which were used into the second millennium BC, and (2) domestic structures with large rooms appended to one side or arranged as central halls. The many religious structures suggest strong institutions that could command labor surpluses and enable the removal of metallic wealth from circulation, as seen in the many deposits of statuary in and around sacred precincts. These deposits created more demand for conversion of surpluses into metal, and reinforced existing socio-economic relationships.

The domestic structures provide insights into the nature of these relationships. As Saghieh pointed out, large reception halls are still common features in Lebanon where rich landowners receive guests, followers, and peasants (Saghieh 1983: 37-38, n.6, 131). The architectural evidence suggests either large extended kin groups or a patron-client system. The degree to which religious institutions were autonomous is unclear, but they were likely patronized by the wealthy. Overall, the internal relations of production and external relations of exchange suggest much more hierarchical structures and complex notions of capital in the northern Levant than in the south.

In EH II Greece (Figure 2), most architecture is rectilinear, and consists of square or rectangular rooms with narrower storage rooms on one or more sides. Larger rooms frequently have central hearths and off-axis doorways (e.g. Lithares—Tzavella-Evjen 1985: fig. 5). The lack of standardization and the agglomerative nature of houses are especially interesting given the highly uniform characteristics of the megaron, which would become the dominant architectural form in the succeeding EH III period.

The most distinctive architectural form of the EH II was the so-called 'corridor house', two-story structures consisting of narrow rooms surrounding large central halls that generally stand alone. Several have gabled roofs, with terra cotta or schist tiles. Shaw and others have suggested that corridor houses derive from the smaller domestic architecture (Wiencke 1989; Shaw 1987; 1990: 198-90; Rutter 1993: 761-62; cf. Hiller 1986: 87). The most famous is the 'House of Tiles' at Lerna, measuring some 25 by 12 m, with two large halls and two smaller rooms. Fragments of a similar building were found in an earlier EH II phase below the 'House of the Tiles' (Wiencke 1986a). Similar examples have been found at a number of sites, including Thebes and Aegina. Other types of monumental structures, most notably the enigmatic *rundbau* at Tiryns, are also known (Pullen 1986; Felten 1986; Kilian 1986).

The social basis of EH II monumental architecture has been much debated, with suggestions ranging from 'palace' to 'administrative center' to 'elite residence' (see generally Shaw 1987: 78, 1990: 192). While the large halls clearly have a public or social function, in the 'House of the Tiles' there are interior rooms that could not be accessed directly. Sealings and small vessels, however, were found in a room directly accessible from the outside. Wiencke (1989: 504) suggested that corridor houses were the residence and headquarters of the 'chief'. Pullen (1994: 46; cf. Pullen 1986: 82) also argues the same on the basis of the sealings, suggesting that they represent a mechanism for the control of contributions and disbursements by a redistributive authority. Weingarten (1997), however, believes Lerna was in fact a trading post founded to serve Anatolian traders.

The layout of the buildings suggests reception halls where rich landowners could meet guests, clients, and peasants, as in the Byblos examples. The presence of many small serving vessels, including the famous sauceboats, in the smaller storage rooms at Lerna, suggests that feasting or ceremonies involving drinking were conducted in the structure (Joffe 1998a). This supports a model of communities with leading corporate groups or lineages rather than 'complex' chiefs with administrative functions.

Many EH II sites are fortified with simple heavy walls, but with only Lerna and perhaps Aegina showing elaborate designs. Konsola (1986:13) suggests that some may have served as retaining or demarcation walls. As alluded to above, the social basis of fortifications is open to wide interpretation, the key question being the degree of labor mobilization and social control necessary for construction. Fortifications, particularly of small sites such as those in the EH II period, do not necessarily indicate sophisticated political development or 'urban' economics.

In summary, on the admittedly slender evidence offered here, the northern Levant and Greece appear to show some similarity in terms of internal socio-political and perhaps economic organization, extended corporate groups or lineages. In the southern Levant the same basic structures were present but were less elaborate, with no clear evidence of individualizing tendencies. At the intra-site level, while there is an 'urban' character in the southern Levant, there were constraints that limited the centralization of functions and the accumulation of power by individual units. But in the northern Levant and Greece, where sites are often so small as to be suspiciously non-urban, individualizing units do emerge.

Meso-Comparisons

One way of investigating regional integration is through administrative and bureaucratic practices and the organization of production, consumption, and distribution by elites or technicians. At present no evidence indicates literacy anywhere in the Levant or in Greece during the third millennium BC. There is, however, extensive use of seals and sealings in both areas. Sealing practices in both the northern and southern Levant differ in significant ways from those of contemporary Mesopotamia. Both cylinder and stamp seals in the Levant are impressed exclusively on the shoulders of vessels, with no evidence of their use on bullae, tags, or tablets (Ben-Tor 1978, 1985; Mazzoni 1985, 1992; Teissier 1987; Joffe 2001; Greenberg 2001). This stands in further contrast to Egyptian practices of stamping clay bullae, including in the colonial enclave in the southern coastal plain during the EB I period (see now Kaplony 2002). The decorative nature of the Levantine sealings calls into question whether they were administrative at all (Ben-Tor 1985: 3). The primary motifs during the EB II and EB III periods were geometric, processions of animals, and apparently ritual scenes of humans. At best these may signal origins, ownership, or destination, but not volume, contents, or transactions. Furthermore, there is no indication, either iconographically or contextually, that sealings functioned within an organized accounting system.

The pottery of the EB II southern Levant shows a high level of stylistic homogeneity but several distinct technological and production traditions. The highly standardized and technologically sophisticated 'Metallic Ware' tradition in the northern areas of the southern Levant was probably centered on production sites near Mount Hermon (Greenberg and Porat 1996; Greenberg 2000). The great majority of seal impressions are found on Metallic ware vessels, and Greenberg has proposed that these two features functioned together to enhance the social ideology of uniformity during the EB II (Greenberg 1999). He is unclear whether this ideology is centered on a geographic or social elite, but believes that it was a 'hegemonic influence' on the Galilee and surrounding regions and exhibited 'colonizing tendencies' toward areas to the south. Such uniformity fractured decisively in the subsequent EB III period with the reemergence of highly localized ceramic styles and production traditions, including the Anatolian-derived Khirbet Kerak ware (Philip 1999).

Aegean sealing practices provide an important contrast with those of the Levant. Only stamp seals are known. Their distribution is limited, with most sealings deriving from Lerna, although several actual seals have been found elsewhere (Heath 1958; Wiencke 1969; Pullen 1994; Aruz 1994; Weingarten *et al.* 1999). But Aegean seals diverge profoundly from their Levantine counterparts in terms of context and function. Stamp seals impressions are used to decorate ceramic hearth rims and vessels (Caskey 1990; Pullen 1994). At Lerna they are also found on clay bullae within a corridor room of the 'House of the Tiles', and on sealing boxes, jars, baskets, and possibly doors (Wiencke 1989: 505; Pullen 1994: 43-46; Weingarten 1997: 149-50). These diverse practices indicate inchoate record-keeping and access control systems conspicuously absent in the Levant. EH II seal usage, however, finds parallels in earlier and contemporary Mesopotamia, southwestern Iran, Anatolia, and Egypt, at sites such as Late Neolithic Sabi Abyad (Akkermans and Duistermaat 1997) or Ubaid period Tepe Gawra (Rothman 1994b; see also Ferioli and Fiandra 1990).

Lerna is not the only site with seals and sealings (but it does have the largest corpus), and the presence of the same seal impression on pithoi at Lerna, Tiryns and Zygouries may be the work of 'traveling artisans' or 'craft specialists' (Rutter 1993: 33, n.46). Yet Lerna is only 1.5 hectares in size (Konsola 1990:469). This makes it an unlikely urban center, and with an extremely small resident population it is unlikely to have been the residence of a powerful 'chief'. There is a wide range of settlement sizes during the EH II, but no systematic collation and analysis of EH Aegean settlement size data currently exists. Sites such as Manika, at over 80 ha, appear to have had an urban character (Sampson 1986; Davis 1992: 716-18). Various scholars have posited two, three, and even four tiered settlement hierarchies for the period (Konsola 1990; Pullen 1994: 47-48; cf. Cosmopoulos 1991; Renard 1995: 12). Rutter (1993: 763, n. 66) is skeptical of these extended hierarchies and suggests a primary distinction between larger and smaller sites. But Sampson also points to Manika's 'Aegean' character, with the presence of Anatolian and other types of pottery, rich graves, and abundance of metals (Sampson 1993: 159-61).

Some urban-rural hierarchies existed, but these were highly localized (Mee 2001). At present no pan-regional pattern of hierarchy is evident. There also appears to be a reduction in the numbers of settlements in the subsequent EH III period (Wiencke 1989: 497-99, n. 24). The conclusions here are that intra-regional integration was uneven, and inter-regional integration sporadic, at best. The EH sealings should therefore be interpreted in a minimalist fashion, that is as precocious but highly localized efforts at administration, token gifts given in patron-client relationships, or even as lower order signs of personal identification and communal storage. These were situated, however, in a larger context of progressive integration around an 'Aegean' cultural norm that valued trade and trade goods and promoted limited homogeneity, and which shattered completely during EH III in favor of smaller groups (Rutter 1993:29).

Settlement patterns are poorly known in the northern Levant, but in the southern Levant two basic trends are evident during the Early Bronze II. The first is the clear presence of multi-tiered settlement hierarchies which, although regionally varied, indicate complex socio-economic and political integration. Large urban sites range from 10 to over 25 ha. The second is an overall reduction during the third millennium BC in the number of settlements, from a high of almost 500 during the EB I, to only 300 during EB II. This trend continues into EB III, when fewer than 200 sites are known (Joffe 1993: 73-79; cf. Greenberg 2003). Pottery evidence also suggests a high degree of inter-regional integration in the northern and southern Levant, with respect to standardization in ceramic technology and trade in raw materials (e.g. Schaub 1987; Mazzoni 1987; Greenberg 2000).

Other sorts of data could be used to elicit further comparisons between the Levant and the Aegean. On the one hand, craft production and elite control are strongly developed in the Levant, but only weakly so in the Aegean (Wiencke 1989: 505-507). On the other, mortuary variability is minimal in both the Levant and the Aegean. But in both culture areas there are clear indications of long-term reuse of burial locations, probably by kin groups (Pullen 1986: 82; Ilan 2003). Plastic and decorative arts are virtually unknown in the Levant, but are much more highly developed in the Aegean, and to an astonishing degree in the Cyclades (Wiencke 1986b; Broodbank 2000). Trade networks are extremely well developed in the Levant, both internally and internationally, but metallic convertibility is limited to the north (Marfoe 1987; Joffe 1993: 66-67).

In Greece, stylistic homogeneity developed during EH II, interpreted by Rutter (1993: 23) as a 'ceramic aesthetic' indicative of ideological conformity, but there remained limited specialized production and little systematic exchange of pottery beyond immediate production sites. The continued difficulty in coordinating different stratigraphic sequences also attests to the lack of integration (Manning 1995). But trade networks for utilitarian materials such as obsidian and metals expanded, in part due to short haul sea travel. Maritime trade was also of primary importance to Early Cycladic elites, who benefited from the symbolic value of distant travel and from whatever commodities were transported (Broodbank 2000: 262-72; Manning 1994). The importance of maritime trade continued to increase and Renfrew (1972: 451-55) long ago described the EB (EH) II Aegean as having an 'international spirit'. It is therefore no surprise that the first palaces were established on Crete by the turn of the second millennium BC. This latter development, and the generalized north-south declivity, is an example of divergent evolution within the 'Aegean' world (Halstead 1994; Manning 1994).

We are left, in the end, with a highly contradictory impression; significant intra- and inter-regional integration in the Levant, but no evidence of administration or bureaucracy, while in Greece, little evidence of significant integration beyond the immediate site level, but provocative local indications of administration. These observations help to inform larger scale generalizations.

Macro-Comparisons and Long-Term Implications

Having made a few limited comparisons, we may try to examine some larger contours of social evolution in the Levant and the Aegean. Similarities and contrasts are apparent in the pace, scale, and directionality of development. Southern Levantine communities evolved from the village level EB I, to the small-scale urbanism of EB II and III, between c. 3600–2350 BC. During EB III the southern Levant saw at least one instance of a 'true' palace at Tell Yarmouth, a 'ruling machine' that served as the center of social, economic, and political activities under the leadership of what must be assumed to be a single regime or dynasty (de Miroschedji 2002). The number of settlements declined across this period but urban sites themselves became larger, more heavily fortified, and more internally complex before 'collapsing' during the EB IV. This leads to the question of whether southern Levantine towns and urbanism functioned in any significant way as risk-abatement mechanisms or whether the burden of survival throughout the third millennium BC (and later) was always on the household and its underlying social formations. Settlement and population in the northern Levant appear to have risen gradually throughout the third millennium and to have reached its peak during the Early Bronze IV. In Greece there is an apparent reduction in the numbers *and* size in settlements from the EH II to the EH III. Rather than the continued accumulation of power within sites by elites, there appears to have been fragmentation, with competing elites emerging in the latter period.

What were the larger forces or principles at work in long-term change? In the southern Levant, as in Greece, settlement trends suggest centrifugal tendencies, cultural, and ultimately behavioral patterns which limited and dissipated power. The major motivations behind this adaptation are likely to have been the marginal subsistence regimes and fragmented physical environments of both culture areas. Yet even at the end of the second millennium BC, when the rest of the Mediterranean world was thrown into a kind of chaos, the northern Levant was less deeply affected. Were tendencies in the northern Levant centrifugal or were they centripetal, characterized by the accumulation and centralization of power?

What seems likely for the northern Levant is a long-term balance between the two rather than short-term oscillations. In social terms this entailed institutions and ideologies of power sharing and flexibility to make short-term adjustments in subsistence and organization. Resource distributions doubtless played some role in these adaptations. Land and labor, the twin peaks of southern Levantine settlement and society, were supplemented by much greater resource variability in the north. The availability of marine protein and 'secondary products' such as shells and shellfish (including murex for dying), dried fish, fish oils and bones, provided additional subsistence and economic buffers. Sea trade also continued at the 'household' level, with fishermen exchanging products en route, and at the 'specialized' level, with dedicated traders, pirates and nomads. The presence of metal resources in surrounding mountains, and availability of a nomadic option in the steppes, all constituted an entirely different basis for society in the northern Levant. Such resources permitted palaces to develop, already by the third millennium, strong craft production components (Mazzoni 2003). This set up cycles of resource demand, craft production, competitive display, and disposal that maintained ideologies of elite domination, labor dependence and trade relations.

What do later cultures in the eastern Mediterranean owe to their third millennium predecessors? Is there an connective or evolutionary logic? How are centripetal and centrifugal adaptations, and functionalist interpretations, to be located in the evidence for historical institutions and ideologies? One question is the role of social storage in the development of palaces during the second millennium. Palaces were well developed in the northern Levant and the Aegean, but much less so in the southern Levant. No palace anywhere in the Middle or Late Bronze Age southern Levant (or, for that matter, Cyprus, which conspicuously lacks such structures) compares even remotely with Ugarit or Knossos, with their dozens of rooms, hundreds of officials, and vast material wealth. Both large and small palaces in the eastern Mediterranean were linked by extensive trade in luxury goods and metals that maintained an elite vernacular of consumption and resulting local economies of extraction.

Other local dimensions, however, were significantly different in the smaller palaces. There are, to be sure, southern Levantine palaces such as Hazor, Megiddo, Kabri and

Aphek, but they are rather minor affairs, some of which almost seem in decline from their moment of birth. When they were not fighting with one another, the few palaces served as Egyptian surrogates by extracting as many surpluses as possible from much beset agricultural producers. At the same time the *Hab/piru* whittled away at palatial power, which was expediently propped up by Egyptian imperial forces (Greenberg 1955). These were a widespread phenomenon of rebellious villagers striking out against weak urban authorities, urban out-migrants, and semi-nomadic elements, all of whom constituted a hybrid social identity or quasi-ethnic element and a periodic threat to urban elites. But in the end, without a social rationale beyond self-promotion, palaces could not survive. The shocks to the larger palatial system brought about by disruption of metal production, sea trade, and 'Sea Peoples' brought about the collapse of palaces in the Late Bronze Age southern Levant (Liverani 1987; Sherratt 1998; Joffe 2002).

In the northern Levant and the Aegean, palaces were the most important socio-economic institutions of the second millennium. The outward form of the palace may have been imported from the Near East to the Aegean (e.g. Cherry 1986; see also Manning 1994) but a primary social function of Aegean palaces was social storage, to buffer the community against economic harm. This was accomplished directly, through storage of grain, and indirectly, by banking on livestock (Halstead 1992; 1993; 1994; 1995). Northern Levantine palaces may also have served as buffers, but their primary focus was as the administrative organ of a small city-state and as its leading corporate entity, involved in the organization of all aspects and levels of production, consumption, and exchange. It may be suggested that the 'House of the Tiles' and similar third millennium Greek structures were in a sense ancestors of the second millennium palaces, loci of storage and communal activities, but with only minimal administrative or political functions. The second millennium palace was an exploitative political overlay above a communal organ, an elite strategy that usurped the community logic of sharing in the name of efficient redistribution. For their part, northern Levantine palaces weathered the shocks at the end of the second millennium and reemerged under the leadership of newly 'ethnicized' Phoenician and Aramean elites (Joffe 2002). The middle ground of retitled, palatial/corporate city-state leadership remained a viable form for the northern Levant.

In the southern Levant towns and villages were more enduring and more culturally significant than palaces. Second millennium palaces were not important managerial or risk abatement institutions. Rather they were low-level 'dynastic' impositions on small-scale urbanism that extracted surpluses for their own purposes, or for field representatives of the Egyptian empire. Risk abatement was primarily accomplished through villages and horizontal relationships such as kinship. The elites themselves were neither managerial, nor empowered by supernatural authority. Their rationale was minimal, except inasmuch as they were likely elaborate exploitative constructs atop existing kin and clan structures, that allegedly provided services—if only imperial mediation—in return for allegiance.

Once these structures collapsed at the end of the Late Bronze Age, social organization, the need for risk abatement, and subsequent developments, were returned to the villages and kinship structures. From these, new concepts of ethnic organization, based on three basic components—descent, dialect, and deities—developed. The new ethnicities, with their local gods, local scripts, and highly particular ethno-poetry, were the basis for subsequent political arrangements of 'ethnicizing states' in the southern Levant (Joffe 2002). The small-scale polities of Israel, Judah, Moab, Ammon, and later Edom, all drew on these components to reconfigure 'tribes' into states. These ethnic identities at the beginning of the first millennium BC were hardly rigid, and possessed only a generalized sense of territoriality. The creation of 'disembedded capitals', however, established three-way connections between royal elites and their patron deities and specific urban sites (Joffe 1998b). For Israel and Judah at least, boundaries, and a political and sacred geography were formed, but by the second half of the first millennium, the territorial rupture of the Babylonian exile forced another adaptation. The concept of identity was founded, first and foremost in a universal god freed from territorial foundation. Identity and tribal affiliation were no longer dependent on place.

Greek concepts of locality and identity developed differently but remained focused on central places and sacred geography. François de Polignac and others have suggested that this 'Athenian model' probably did not prevail throughout Greece but that a more complex geography of urban cults and sanctuaries outside cities contributed to the territorial boundaries of emerging eighth- and seventh-century city-states (de Polignac 1995; D'Onofrio 1997; see also Morgan 2003). This also fed the emergence of various Hellenic identities. Hall (1997a; 1997b; see also Morgan 2001) has suggested such identities were more fluid and crystallized later than once thought but also points to the privileged idea of the polis in the formation of community identities. Primary allegiance was, as in Mesopotamia, to the city-state. Each polis also became invested with greater conceptual specificity in terms of various ethnic elements, such as local dialects and scripts, law, currency, deities and myths of descent, as well as cultural notions of citizenship and aristocracy. To be Athenian was something very different from being Spartan or Corinthian, in terms of political and cultural values. Overall, the importance of locality in Greece is a thread that runs from the Bronze Age through the classical period in a far deeper way than in the southern Levant.

Can we, in the end, posit a developmental relationship between social storage and the 'rational' forms of democracy and the polis? Are formalized concepts of equality and citizenship the ultimate buffering strategy (see Ferguson 1991)? Is there a parallel relationship between southern Levantine 'centrifugalism' and Biblical anti-royalism and anti-urbanism, and ultimately the universal god? Are these 'horizontal' adaptations another sort of buffering strategy, ultimately based not on space but in time? At these abstracted levels the utility of comparison is expended; little more may be said without in-depth analyses.

Conclusion

Comparative methods help brush away dust and dogma that impede analysis of any one culture area. Comparing highly specific aspects of material culture, production, the organization of sites and space, and broad temporal patterns of change, all have potential to extract varying types of insights regarding disparate societies. Connecting prehistory and historic periods also forces archaeologists, increasingly accustomed to thinking in smaller and smaller temporal units, to expand beyond individual sites, regions or periods and functionalist explanations. The resulting 'historicization' of later prehistory should be welcomed, along with the converse, the application of intensive archaeological methods common to prehistory within historic periods.

Ultimately, however, the contribution of comparative methods and an historical perspective may be as much attitudinal as anything else. Whatever else it may be, social evolution is uneven, untidy, and barely predictable. Obsessed with logic and order, we have attempted to impose patterns on the past based on our own logic. If there is anything to be gained from comparative analyses, and the study of the past in general, it is continued recognition of deep variability in the past and the inadequacy of our present interpretive capabilities.

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