

DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

The main objectives of the proposed projects are related to one of the most interesting and intriguing problems of the early history of the East Mediterranean: the collapse of the Mycenaean civilization, the beginning of the so called "Dark Ages" in the Aegean region, and the contemporary decline of the Bronze Age civilizations in the Near East, the processes and events which took place shortly before and after 1200 BC. An additional "attraction", often attached to these problems, is the group of people who were partly responsible for the disturbances in the Near East, and who are known under the enigmatic name of "the Sea Peoples". Their origin and character not only belong to the most debatable issues among the archaeologists and historians working in the Mediterranean, but also stimulated enormous number of non-academic hypothesis and fantasy explanations of the phenomenon. This project, however, though addresses the problems partly contemporary to the Sea Peoples' appearance in the ancient written sources, concerns the changes in settlement patterns and social organization in the South Aegean only, namely on Crete and the Dodecanese. Its main aim is to reconstruct the response of people who fought for their survival to a suddenly appearing crisis, followed by a dramatic collapse of the political and social order of the Mycenaean states. The victims of the system's collapse - the ordinary people, inhabitants of Crete, survived the most difficult time by moving their habitation sites and the entire settlement systems to hardly accessible places. The proposed project will try to solve the problems which were not researched at all or were only briefly touched upon and remarked as the side result of some excavation and survey projects. Among these are the continuing use of economic hinterland, and the places especially important for communities' identity (e.g. cult places and cemeteries), despite the discontinuity of the habitation places themselves. In other words, how much of the old system, dated to the 13th century BC, was preserved in the new locations, founded around 1200 BC? What was the 1200 BC refugees' attitude to their earlier material and spiritual heritage, which in a geographical sense had to be abandon? Another important problem, covered by the project, is the evolution of the settlements and their economic hinterlands during the centuries which followed the settlement breakdown. Why, after the most dramatic decades of the collapse, the inhabitants of refuge places did not try to move back to the old villages and fields, to the cemeteries of their grandparents, to the worship places of their ancestors? Why they did not try to restore the old economic systems? How much of that development was determined by still unstable historic conditions and how much by changes in political structure and social organization of the refuge communities in a new environment?

The main reason for this project proposal is the lack of research of the aforementioned problems, especially evidence-based research. The few general studies on the collapse in the South Aegean are of a speculative character, without archaeological evidence being properly identified and analysed. Especially frustrating is the lack of academic communication between the scholars who are interested in the studies of the last decades of the Mycenaean kingdoms and those who focus their research on the post-1200 BC collapse settlement pattern. To achieve all the above mentioned goals, first and foremost, an intensive field-work, orientated towards searching for new evidence, is scheduled in Crete and the Dodecanese. Archaeological reconnaissance, landscape and topographic studies, supplemented by extensive surveys, will help to identify new evidence and to verify the information concerning the earlier published evidence. Especially important will be field investigations concerning "the darkest" periods of the south Aegean "Dark Ages", namely pre-1200 BC crisis, and post 1100 BC settlement development. The character of the changes around 1200 BC has been relatively well researched during the last few decades. Chronologically different, but following each other, settlement systems will be analysed and compared, and then translated into a new reconstruction of daily life of those communities. The scheduled field-work will extend (chronologically and geographically) my earlier work, carried in Crete for the last 30 years, which was published not only in academic books and papers, but also presented in popular magazines, lectures and TV programs (e.g. History Channel "Secrets of the Aegean Apocalypse", *Antike Welt* 4/2015, National Geographic- Polish ed.7/2003).