

that Greece was not cut off from the rest of the Mediterranean, as has been suggested, but that the decrease in population led to a correlating decrease in buying power and demand for objects. Chapter 6 fleshes out Murray's conclusions from the earlier chapters, presents her synthetic view of trade during the LBA and EIA, and summarizes her three main conclusions: (1) Mycenaean palatial elite members were not reliant on imports to create or legitimize their status, (2) Greece was not isolated during the period of transition from the LBA to the EIA, and (3) the trading model that emerged in the eighth century BC was extremely different from that of the LBA in scale and structure. Murray outlines these points in her brief conclusion.

This volume masterfully deals with complex issues and large volumes of data. Not only does this book add a much-needed update to the discussion of trade and society during this important transitional period, but it will change the ways in which scholars address the issues of this period.

*Societies in Transition in Early Greece: An Archaeological History.* ALEX R. KNODELL. 2021. University of California Press, Berkeley. xv + 363 pp. \$34.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-520-38053-0. \$0.00 (open access e-book), ISBN 978-0-520-38054-7, <https://luminosoa.org/site/books/m/10.1525/luminos.101/>.

Reviewed by Christopher Witmore, Texas Tech University

Alex Knodell has delivered an inspiring, sophisticated, and scrupulously researched study of central Greece, set within a comparative context of the evolution of complex societies across multiple scales. That this book seeks to take part in a wider dialogue regarding the transformation and emergence of complex societies is only part of why it should appeal to readers of *American Antiquity*; its more subtle importance lies in the model it offers for future “archaeological historical” syntheses of macroregions, whether in the Mediterranean, Mesoamerica, or the Mississippian Southeast. The fact that this open access book rises to meet the terms of its convictions empirically, conceptually, and visually (with a rich suite of informative, full-color maps) makes it stand out for this reader, as it surely will for many other archaeologists.

One may glean something of the book's key concepts from its title—*Societies in Transition in Early Greece*. For Knodell, “societies” capture a diverse and changing array of human aggregates. Of importance here is the notion of “community.” What this term arguably loses in range and elasticity it

gains in forcing archaeologists to think with the things that remain of past societies as ingredients within assemblages consisting of more than single sites and without the conceptual baggage that accompanies top-down considerations of “states.” Importantly, by juxtaposing diverse social configurations in different regions, Knodell avoids wrapping everything around a minuscule minority as the engine of change. “Transition” evokes the book's long-term perspective on the formation of—and metamorphoses within and between—societies over a 700-year swath of pre- and protohistory (ca. 1400–700 BC). Although “Early Greece” refers predominantly to the macroregion of central Greece—Thessaly to Attica, Phokis to Euboea—the book also has much to say about early Greece at large and within the Mediterranean as a whole. Overall, this synthesis takes the form of “an archaeological history”—the subtitle—which plays out in the book's structure and focus, given its concern with key “social” changes from a landscape perspective.

The book unfolds over the course of six chapters sandwiched between an introduction and conclusion where the author's aims and objectives are clearly stated. Chapter 2 sets out the key concepts of landscape, interaction, and complexity. Chapter 3 confronts hegemony in the Late Bronze Age through a comparison of archaeological remains from different regions. Although it adds to the consensus that Mycenaean palaces were independent, centralized regional polities, Knodell suggests that they are of limited territorial scope without sufficient time to form stable institutions. The chapter, therefore, explores a range of sociopolitical formations and opens a window into the diversity of political landscapes in the Mycenaean world. Chapter 4 pushes back against notions of collapse and pervasive degradation in the Postpalatial Bronze Age (ca. 1200–1050 BC). Over the course of roughly six generations, central Greece witnessed the reorganization of settlement, with a shift in orientation from agrarian plains to the sea, and with the rejection of palatial systems and the reconstitution of political authority, which took on diverse forms, including attributes more local than regional and more informal than institutional. Chapter 5 takes readers into the transformation of village societies in the prehistoric Iron Age (ca. 1050–800 BC), with shifts in settlement locations, a general decline in architectural scale and settlement size, and changes in burial practices that reveal a fascinating picture of regional diversity. Chapter 6 addresses the eighth century BC, during which increasing site numbers contribute to intensifying interaction, competition, mediation, and territorial articulation. The emergent world of increasingly routinized mobility is aptly tied to longstanding networks centered on Euboea. Overall,

Chapter 6 paints a variegated picture of expanding village communities with “multiple emergences of complex social forms” (p. 193) prior to emergence of the polis. An appendix presents the names and numbered locations of all 401 sites mentioned in the text, along with the regions in which those sites are located, and archaeological components and occupational spans of each. Although more than seven photographs would have been welcome, their absence is perhaps warranted given the 32 full-color maps, which form necessary complements to the overall narrative.

*Societies in Transition in Early Greece* engages with a remarkable range of evidence and ideas, and its concepts and questions are carefully defined in light of the purposes they serve. Indeed, throughout the book, Knodell routinely evades the excesses of interpretation by taking a more pragmatic stance tempered by the nature of the archaeological data, and he is open to a variety of perspectives, displaying a deep understanding of a spectrum of possibilities related to the emergence of social complexities. Modestly, the author describes the book as “a contribution to the archaeology of settlement in central Greece in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age” (p. 19), but it is so much more. Knodell avoids reductivist arguments and oversimplified abstractions to offer a multiscalar picture—as refreshing as it is compelling—that will serve as a solid example of good practice, from which any archaeologist interested in diverse and changing social complexities from a landscape perspective can benefit.

*The Life and Death of Cities: A Natural History.* GREG WOOLF. 2020. Oxford University Press, New York. xviii + 512 pp. \$34.95 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0-19-994612-9.

*Reviewed by* Ryan Boehm, Tulane University

In this wide-ranging synthesis, Greg Woolf seeks to place ancient Mediterranean city building squarely within the broader frameworks of comparative urbanism and the environmental sciences. This is a welcome endeavor given that Classicists traditionally have been reluctant to engage in cross-cultural approaches to urbanism (particularly the robust scholarship on ancient urbanism in the Americas), and overviews of early cities in other disciplines tend to exclude the Mediterranean (one notable exception is Norman Yoffee’s edited volume, *Early Cities in Comparative Perspective, 4000 BCE–1200 CE*, 2015). More novel still, Woolf boldly proposes that cities should be understood as “natural” (hence the subtitle)—that is, as

analogous in evolutionary terms to the ways that other socially complex species have come to shape their environments (termite mounds are a favored example).

*The Life and Death of Cities* presents this far-reaching narrative across four parts, ranging chronologically from the earliest origins of cities to the fall of Tenochtitlan, and geographically encompassing the Near East, China, the Americas, and beyond. But the heart of the book is dedicated to the emergence and development of cities in the Mediterranean. In the first part, Woolf presents a lucid tour of the evolutionary dimensions of early sedentism and the transition from “a world of villages” (p. 54) to the earliest cities. The causes of what V. Gordon Childe famously termed the “Urban Revolution” that gave rise to cities 6,000 years ago remain obscure. Why did humans depart from several hundred thousand years of non-urban, relatively egalitarian existence to live in hierarchical cities? Central to Woolf’s argument is that this was in no way inevitable. After all, any narrative of the forward march of civilization is belied by the false starts, collapses, and lack of a single urban prototype that characterize the global history of cities. In Woolf’s formulation, humans are “accidentally urban” (p. 24), but they are also preadapted to be successful in an urban environment. The particular evolutionary qualities of humans that allow them to thrive in cities also means, according to Woolf, that when cities do come about, they tend to out-compete other forms of organization. This, in turn, helps explain why many cities are so long-lived and resilient.

Following a nimble exploration of the rise of Mesopotamian urbanism in Uruk and its subsequent diffusion across the ancient Near East, the core of the book is dedicated to cities in the Greco-Roman world. The book promises a “more sober account” (p. 13) of Classical urbanism, hewing more closely to the archaeological and documentary record that elucidates the lived experience of cities than to the literary accounts of urban elites. A recurring theme—drawing in particular on Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell’s *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (2000)—is that the particular challenges presented by the ecology of the Mediterranean kept most cities small in size and population, a salutary reorientation away from the exceptional cases of Athens, Rome, and Alexandria. Woolf argues that these natural checks on urban growth meant that cities always remained somewhat precarious and that the exceptions, the megalopoleis, were only created and sustained by exceptional imperial powers. In elucidating these themes, Woolf ranges widely. Although the book admirably avoids the limitations of the “case