

based approaches is clear from (for example) Kuhrt's study of the relationship between Ashur and Kanesh, which operated over a distance of some 1200 km and (as she says) would not have been detectable from the material remains, and from Alston's use of papyrological evidence—though, interestingly, as he acknowledges, the techniques of evaluating such evidence (and in particular the place-name data) are not dissimilar from those required for archaeological distribution maps.

'[My] aim (says Tsjetskhladze) . . . has been to pose as many questions as possible, in order to show how far we are from satisfactorily answering them and how diverse the interpretation of the evidence. It is time, once again, to rethink our views of trade in the ancient world'. One could hardly have a better defining quotation for the collection as a whole. It is, after all, precisely by such complications and challenges that a discipline is enlivened and carried forward, and the editors are to be congratulated, both on identifying so timely a theme and on assembling and coordinating so stimulating a collection of papers.

Cardiff University

JOHN PERCIVAL

AN UNQUIET GRAVE

W. CAVANAGH, C. MEE: *A Private Place: Death in Prehistoric Greece*. (Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology 125.) Pp. xiv + 258, maps, figs. Jonsered: Paul Aström, 1998. Paper. ISBN: 91-7081-178-4.

The aim of this book is twofold: first, to provide a detailed overview of burial customs in prehistoric Greece, and second, to chart the growth of social complexity and its expression in mortuary ritual. The study covers the southern Aegean from the Palaeolithic to the end of the Bronze Age, although the focus is clearly on the Mycenaean period. The book is therefore both a reference tool and an attempt at interpretation, and is divided accordingly into two parts.

The first part presents the evidence by period and by tomb type in a systematic fashion. Each chapter is accompanied by a useful catalogue of sites with bibliographical references, while good distribution maps, as well as plans of several cemeteries and individual tombs, are given at the end of the book. However, in the chapters on the Mycenaean period, the organization of the material becomes rather cumbersome: the tomb architecture, the burial offerings, and the mortuary rites are discussed separately, and each one by grave type. The result is a thorough, but fragmented picture, where regional variation as well as differences between and within communities become obscured. Furthermore, it appears that a systematic statistical analysis has been undertaken only for a small part of this large body of data, namely for some of the larger chamber tomb cemeteries in the Argolid and Attica (the results of these analyses have already appeared in a series of articles by the same authors). In this way, and despite the thorough collection of the data, the analysis perpetuates the bias against small sites and peripheral areas. A quick examination of the catalogues of sites reveals some gaps, e.g. the chamber tomb in Velestino in Thessaly, the MH (or LHI?) cremation in pit 301 in Argos (sector d), the tombs in Troizen, and the new chamber tomb in Rhodes.

The section on ritual and performance in the second part aims 'to further our understanding of how ritual operated at given periods and how it came to change through time' (pp. 106–7). There are some very interesting insights into various aspects of the mortuary rites, but it is questionable whether the discussion succeeds in

its overall aims. The rather eclectic discussion of anthropological approaches to ritual in the beginning does not add up to a coherent interpretative framework of the rôle of ritual in social life. The discussion proceeds by examining specific ritual actions (e.g. cremation, libations, etc.) through time with the result that once more the historical context is lost. One would expect that this diachronic examination would deal successfully with the changes in mortuary ritual. And yet the explanation for the transformation on which the book is focusing, namely the adoption of multiple ritual, involving re-use of tombs and secondary treatment of the dead, is circular: secondary treatment is adopted because of the need for multiple tombs, which in its turn is attributed to a social need for the expression of family identity and perpetuity (p. 116). But questions arise: How does this need come about? Why at the end of the Middle Bronze Age? Why the adoption of these specific forms and practices? Does it signify a change in the belief system? Too many questions remain unanswered.

The discussion on social structure opens with a presentation of developments in mortuary theory and concludes with Hodder's (1982) attack against systemic mortuary studies, primarily against the idea that treatment at death faithfully reflects status held in life. However, the authors' social reconstructions often lapse back to reflective inferences, e.g. in the rather simplistic use of energy expenditure as a direct measure of status, and even more so in the detection of professions on the basis of sets of offerings (p. 111). The discussion concentrates primarily on the use of different grave types and their social significance. The lack of clear correspondence between tomb types and levels of wealth leads to the somewhat weak conclusion that the use of tomb type must have been based on other factors, and not simply status (p. 125). But surely there is regional, spatial, and temporal variation not only in the use, but also in the social significance of tomb types. For instance, the concentration of both elaborate and rudimentary *tholoi* (referred to in this book as 'built tombs') in Messenia implies that the *tholos* tomb did not have the same significance as in the Argolid, where only monumental *tholoi* were built, or in Boeotia, where only one *tholos* was ever built; the series of elaborate and large *tholoi* in Mycenae implies a different set of social relations from the one and only *tholos* that usually remains in use for a short period in most other sites; *tholoi* in LHII, when they are quite widespread, must have had a different social significance than in LHIIIB2, when they are found in fewer, often palatial sites, etc. Our aim should not be to equate a tomb type with a social class, but rather to explain its changing use and variability.

To conclude: this is a very useful reference book, but its attempt at explanation remains rather shallow. Interpretation can only be achieved through a thorough contextual analysis that would compare the mortuary with the settlement evidence, would place the mortuary rites firmly in their regional context and their wider historical framework, and would bridge rather than separate the ritual from the social elements of mortuary ritual. Admittedly this could never be undertaken for the entire period covered in this book. But one wonders whether the chapters on the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, and even the Early Bronze Age are anything more than the background to the much more thorough discussion on the Middle and Late Bronze Age.

There is, however, one conclusion that can be reached from this diachronic examination: death in the prehistoric Aegean was never a private affair. The quotation in the title (from A. Marvell's poem: 'The grave's a fine and private place . . .') seems rather out of place in this context.

Faculty of Classics, Cambridge

SOFIA VOUTSAKI