

A Network Explanation for the Primacy of the Euboean Gulf Coasts
at the End of the Bronze Age

The Euboean Gulf coasts in Central Greece boast a number of settlements important for the light they shed on the early Mycenaean (LH I-III A; Mitrou) and late Mycenaean (LH III C Middle; Kynos; Lefkandi) periods. During the acme of the Mycenaean culture, the palatial LH III B period, these settlements were overshadowed by the palaces of Thebes and Orchomenos in Central Greece. In this respect they are typical for a number of ‘provincial areas’ that thrived after the collapse of the palaces: not exactly peripheral, they nevertheless followed a markedly different trajectory from the palatial “core areas.”

This paper explores possible reasons for this, examining the material evidence in the light of network theory. Aspects of network theory make clear how the process of ‘marginalization’ of coastal settlements was directly related to a reorientation and restructuring of networks: finds from tombs at Chalkis, for example, suggest that the maritime, north-south network of which the coastal settlements formed a part, was broken up between LH IIB and IIIA2 and replaced by a land-based, east-west network linking sites like Chalkis to Thebes. The great condensation of exotic prestige goods in Thebes suggests that this east-west network was far more centralized (with Thebes functioning as its major hub) than the earlier coastal network; these imported exotic goods form at the same time an explanation for the reason for Theban expansion into the Euboean Gulf area, tapping into its maritime routes. The extreme centralization of the palatial network meant that with the collapse of the palace, the palatial network itself collapsed as well, resulting in a serious decline in settlement in the interior of Boeotia.

The collapse of the palatial network allowed the earlier decentralized coastal network to be rebuilt, resulting in a “Euboean koine” characterized among other things by its elite warrior-

sailors as depicted on pictorial pottery from coastal sites like Kynos and Lefkandi. That this coastal network coopted established long distance links with the southeastern Aegean and beyond is suggested by similarities in pottery techniques and pictorial subject matter. These long distance links are also manifest in the variety of exotic goods found at Perati and Lefkandi.

The manipulation of networks is thus directly related to the ascendance of the palace of Thebes, the attendant decline of the coastal areas along the Euboean Gulf, and the subsequent flourishing of these coasts, and network theory has the power to elucidate problems of ascendance and decline of sites and entire regions.