

Alsop, Joseph, From the Silent Earth A Report on the Greek Bronze Age (Harper & Row: New York) 1962 Introduction by C. M. Bowra

Introduction, p. x

He ((Mr. Alsop)) lacks the obstructing prepossessions and distorting loyalties of professional scholars and is not afraid of allowing his independent imagination to work freely on his material. He makes many apologies for speaking as an amateur, but not only is he much better informed than he allows us to think, but he has the great advantage of being uncommitted to any set of theories of any school of scholarship. He takes this lost world as he finds it, and applies his passionate curiosity to it.

p. xii The small scale of the Mycenaean fortress indicates that ancient wars were fought by a corps d'elite, as Homer indicates, and the whole population of Mycenaean was probably smaller than that of modern Athens.

p. xiii Mr. Alsop need not be shy of venturing into fields where other amateurs have ventured with triumphant success. He has consulted the best authorities, visited the important sites, thought deeply and carefully about what could have happened, and applied to it his own large knowledge of history.

p. 3 Pylos mainly proved that Greek civilization had always been Greek. But since a considerable majority of scholars and historians had believed the precise opposite for more than a century, the proofs that were found at Pylos came as something of a shock.

The irreverent pleasure of seeing the experts confounded, as they were by Pylos, is one of the many reasons for being an archaeological buff, which I am. In the rather short time since the landscape of the remote past began to be uncovered by the field archaeologists' spades, the experts have been confounded with remarkable regularity. The reason is always the same. Modern historians, who pride themselves on being scientific, have all the scientists' suspicion of the unproved and the traditional; and this is often a mistake. Thus the ancient tradition of China's Shang dynasty, during which Chinese society first took recognizable form, was never doubted from the lifetime of Confucius until the nineteenth century. Then science-minded Western historians sternly dismissed the Shang rulers as mere creatures of legend. Whereupon the last Shang capital was unearthed at Anyang, on the Yellow River; and the same royal names preserved in the traditional king lists were found inscribed on oracle bones by the Shang kings' official scapulomancers. In the same fashion, no one ever questioned the Rig-Veda's description of the Aryan conquest of India, when Nehru's Indo-European forebears poured down through the Minalayan passes to sack the walled cities "of the black men," until the science-minded Western historians condemned the whole account as mere mythical moonshine. Whereupon the unknown pre-Aryan civilization of the Indus-River Valley was unearthed at Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa; and these great cities of the forgotten past were found to have perished in just the way the Vedic bards described. In these two cases, the truth was re-established by a single swift stroke of discovery.