

A. Robinson, *The Man Who Deciphered Linear B: The Story of Michael Ventris* (Thames and Hudson, London and New York 2002 ISBN 0-500-51077-6) in *American Journal of Archaeology* 107 (2003) 296-297.

whole archaeological design. The studies stress how sampling and implementation are as fundamental as feasible. While the collected data produce valuable complementary ethnographic evidence, recovery methodologies that ensure basic quality and completeness of the sample assemblage, are available to the excavators at relatively low additional cost.

Most authors sketch the peculiarity of their investigative approaches, stressing aspects that are unique to the analysis of their archaeological materials, and warning about those anthropogenic and natural sources that might induce alterations on the constituents of the finds. As an example, recent advances in forensic anthropology and taphonomy show that recovery and documentation of skeletal remains can offer much more information than knowledge on age, sex, stature, and pathologies (e.g., D. Collins Cook in "Physical Anthropology in the Field: Recognizing Cremation, Defleshing, Exposure and Secondary Burials," 43–6).

Regarding inorganic materials, the archaeological record can imply organizational relationships of contemporary crafts and industries. The authors suggest that systematic sampling and geological analysis of the site are important, especially if the data are to be exploited to infer reliable insights into spatial and diachronic patterns of technology and social developments. Sarah J. Vaughan, in "Contributions of Petrography to the Study of Archaeological Ceramics and Man-made Building Materials in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean" (117–25), cogently recommends that the analyst must be familiar with the geological setting and the materials resources of a site. Analytical results are greatly reduced when local geological conditions have not been fully explored before samples are brought to the laboratory and the excavation is closed.

Even when multidisciplinary advances in archaeological science and archaeology are predictable, it is important to develop and maintain an integrated and systematic framework for archaeological science, as archaeologists strive to blend contributions from different disciplines. From this viewpoint, the importance of this collection of papers is straightforward: they contribute complementary schemes of classification, specific to each discipline and they hint at standardized and integrated advances in methodology. The papers continually present not just measurements and other raw data, but also sampling procedures, methodologies for gathering results, and developments in technical terminology, as well as current references.

This collection, a useful source to archaeologists concerned with the Near East and the Aegean, is recommended especially to those specialists engaged in teaching field investigations.

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THE MAN WHO DECIPHERED LINEAR B: THE STORY OF MICHAEL VENTRIS, by *Andrew Robinson*. Pp. 168, figs. 44, tables 2. Thames and Hudson, London and New York 2002. \$19.95. ISBN 0-500-51077-6 (cloth).

Andrew Robinson, author of *The Story of Writing* (London 1995) and an unproduced film script on the life of Michael Ventris entitled "The Boy Who Beat the Experts," gives us now the full life of the man who deciphered Minoan linear script Class B. Ventris succeeded by using his distinctive intellectual gifts, his willingness to learn from others, his need for play, and his commitment to methods of architectural problem-solving known as "group working." Robinson explains (160) that his book is not written primarily for scholars, but his account of how work on the decipherment proceeded in the crucial years between 1947 and 1952 is clear, insightful, accurate, and honest—and human. Of already published accounts, I recommend M. Pope, *The Story of Archaeological Decipherment*, rev. ed. (London 1999) and E.J.W. Barber, *Archaeological Decipherment: A Handbook* (Princeton 1974). Both do proper honor to Alice Kober's contribution to the decipherment. Both set the Ventris decipherment alongside other decipherments of ancient scripts. Readers also should explore Robinson's recommendations for further reading on Ventris's personal life and architectural work (160–4). Any truly scientific account of the decipherment will be formidable even to specialized scholars. It will require detailed exegesis of Ventris's "Work Notes" and the letters and papers and publications of his closest collaborators (Alice Kober, Emmett L. Bennett, Jr., and Sir John L. Myres).

Having been over the same ground and in contact with many of the same informants—including Prudence Smith, Oliver Cox, and Andrew Robinson—for my own work on Ventris, Kober, and Bennett (cf. T.G. Palaima et al., eds., *Unlocking the Secrets of Ancient Writing* [Austin 2000]), I can attest that Robinson has made judicious use of the archives of Ventris and his contemporaries at Cambridge University, the Ashmolean Museum, the Institute of Classical Studies, and the Program in Aegean Scripts and Prehistory. Robinson's achievement here is best understood by Oliver Cox, Ventris's personal friend and architectural partner, and by Bennett, the professional scholar whose spirit of work and play—and isolation—brought him into close rapport with Ventris. Robinson makes clear that Ventris's decipherment methods were not entirely logical. Ventris simultaneously used imaginative thinking, group working, and eventually the precise techniques of analysis that he literally learned from Kober and Bennett. By example, he also induced wary scholars to share their ideas openly with one another.

The myth that the decipherment was logical and inevitable grew up naturally in Ventris's own succinct post hoc discussions and was canonized in John Chadwick's *The Decipherment of Linear B* (Cambridge 1958). But Chadwick was never part of Ventris's "Minoan Scripts Work Group" and was writing when the Ventris decipherment was under attack, often unconscionably personal, by scholars ignorant of the mechanics of syllabic scripts and

the history of writing (153–8). Robinson helps us to see the decipherment for what it was: a magnificent human intellectual feat by a genius who inspired awe and affection and who sought and ably used the help of others.

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EXCAVATIONS AT FRANCHTHI CAVE, GREECE. Vol. 12, DEPOSITIONAL HISTORY OF FRANCHTHI CAVE: SEDIMENTS, STRATIGRAPHY AND CHRONOLOGY, by William R. Farrand (with a report by Thomas W. Jacobsen). Pp. x + 135, figs. 20, pls. 8, tables 6. Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2000. \$49.95. ISBN 0-253-21314-2 (paper).

Franchthi Cave is without a doubt among the most important prehistoric cave sites in southeastern Europe, providing rich and detailed windows on Upper Paleolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic peoples and their environments in the southern Argolid. Beyond the wealth of archaeological and paleoenvironmental information yielded by the site, its importance grows with the steady stream of high-quality monographs that have appeared at an average rate of almost one per year since T.W. Jacobsen and W.R. Farrand published the first fascicle in 1987 (*Franchthi Cave and Paralia* [Bloomington]). William Farrand was one of the first practitioners and innovators in the field of geoarchaeology, and has consistently set the standard through a series of ground-breaking studies of cave sediments in France, southwestern Asia, and now Greece. His fascicle on the geoarchaeology of Franchthi Cave is thus a most welcome addition to the Franchthi library.

The monograph contains seven chapters and three appendices. The first four chapters provide background information about the organization of the Franchthi project (written by Jacobsen), excavation history, geological setting, and "lithostratigraphy." Lithostratigraphy is a bit of a mouthful, but Farrand is at pains to provide as objective a description as possible without recourse to the biostratigraphic or ethnostratigraphic (a.k.a., cultural, historical, or typological) determinations of his colleagues. Each material type has its own story to tell; those hoping for a unified stratigraphic scheme will have to wait a little longer. Creation of a lithostratigraphy for the site must have been a Herculean task. Having joined the project only for the last excavation season (1976), Farrand had to contend with illegible and mobile unit labels on sections, field notebooks of variable quality and completeness, and the ubiquitous problem of correlating what was dug with what was drawn in section. Farrand used sedimentological analyses in the laboratory and radiocarbon dates to corroborate independently and test the validity of his lithostratigraphy. Many of the significant strata and sections are illustrated with photographs; further plates and especially color photographs would have

been welcome. Nonetheless, the result is a convincing scheme of 15 strata for interpreting the sedimentary history of the site.

In chapter 5 Farrand presents his sedimentological analyses; he clearly describes his sampling and analytical methods, and focuses interpretation around issues of sediment source and postdepositional modification. Farrand's analyses of sediment sources show that deposition in the cave was episodic, even catastrophic, as when an estimated 1800 metric tons of cave roof collapsed in the center of the cave beneath one of the "windows" at or near the end of the Neolithic occupation of the cave. Earlier episodes of bedrock collapse capped the top of Upper Paleolithic as well as Mesolithic occupations at the cave. While these rocky strata with little fine matrix resemble the *éboulis sec* formed in caves by freeze-thaw processes in cold climates, a genesis of such deposits in the southern Argolid is not plausible, even during the rigors of the last glacial maximum approximately 20,000–15,000 years ago. Farrand suggests earthquakes as the most likely cause of these rockfalls. In a rare moment of speculation, Farrand further suggests that the observation and memory of such geological catastrophes may have discouraged local people from using the cave for a number of generations, thus accounting for the apparent breaks in occupation that followed on each major rockfall episode. Human activities provide other important sources of sediment and their modification. Farrand suggests that land-snail shells are an important index of human activity at the site (making the assumption that *Helix figulina*, at times hyperabundant, was a food resource) as well as source of sediment. In fact, many of the sand-sized particles in some strata derive from crushed snail shells, leading Farrand to run many of his granulometric analyses a second time on decalcified samples. Farrand thus uses a range of lines of evidence to begin to reconstruct the tempo and intensity of human activities at Franchthi Cave.

Farrand integrates the rich radiocarbon record from Franchthi with the lithostratigraphy and sedimentology in chapter 6. The 60 absolute dates (59 radiocarbon, one thermoluminescence) make Franchthi one of the most intensively dated prehistoric sites in Greece. Farrand uses the dates to show that his inter-trench stratigraphic correlations are correct. More significantly, he uses these absolute dates in conjunction with other indicators of depositional hiatuses to reconstruct sedimentation rates. The results are remarkable, showing that sedimentation rates varied from a quiet trickle of only 4.2 cm/100 years to a veritable deluge of 250 cm/100 years. High sedimentation rates are associated with other indicators of intense human activity during the lower and middle Mesolithic occupations; this correlation is not surprising, although the magnitude of the increase is. On the other hand, sedimentation rates during the formation of the snail-shell middens of the Upper Paleolithic were not particularly high. This observation raises further questions with regards to how and why such snail-shell middens were forming. If the episodic nature of human activities at Franchthi had not already become clear, Farrand provides a telling illustration at the end of the chapter (fig. 6.4); most of this timeline is taken up by hiatuses in deposition/habitation, regardless of whether one