

Reviews of Books

V. R. d'A. Desborough, *The Greek Dark Ages*, London, Ernst Benn Ltd, 1972, pp. 388.

A third book has recently been added to the series of great books that Vincent Desborough, a well known expert in the study of the Greek Dark Ages, has given to the public. The first book was his *Protogeometric Pottery* (1954), which has become a fundamental and indispensable manual for every scholar dealing with the problems of the protogeometric period. In this work, he laid the chronological basis for the various pottery industries of the period and distinguished the particular local characteristics of each group; he was also able to find relations between them, defining Athens as a centre exporting in all directions. In 1962, there followed the second book of Desborough's, *The Last Mycenaean and their Successors*. It extends in time back to the last years of the Mycenaean Age and discusses the problems of the rise of the Sub-Mycenaean style. In both books we admire the great pottery expert, who succeeds, however, in going beyond the limits of mere dry specialisation in order to emphasize the essential features, the similarities and differences of each period, and finally proceeds to historical conclusions which are fundamental for the Dark Ages. It is said that he often allows himself to be influenced by prejudice, and that he creates theories. But who among intellectuals or scientists does not create theories, even if they may, in the course of time, be found to be wrong? A propos of this, I quote what Desborough himself says in his introduction (p. 12): «Occasionally I have suggested an answer to a question; no doubt these answers will in course of time be found to be wrong or misguided, but it is my hope that they will lead others to deeper research».

In each new book or article Desborough takes into consideration and discusses not only the new material that excavations have brought to light, but also any new aspects to, or refutations of his theories. This is what he does in the book under review, *The Greek Dark Ages*. It completes his previous works, which must be known to the reader if he wishes to understand the importance and contribution of this new study. He describes the new material discovered since 1962 in various Aegean sites, and discusses afresh the possibilities of interpretation in the light of the new finds.

The period covered by the book is slightly over two hundred years, from about 1125 B.C. to about 900 B.C., that is, from the end of the Mycenaean to the beginning of the Geometric period. The book is divided into six Parts: I. The Background to the Dark Ages (The Mycenaean World), II. The Early Dark Ages, III. The Late Dark Ages, IV. The Material evidence, V. Later literary accounts, and VI. The Human factor: Interpretation and Hypothesis. The subdivision of the above parts into smaller units (chapters), the rich illustration of the text with 39 figures and 60 plates, the six topographical plans, the Bibliography and Site Index at the end, but especially the clear and dialectic style, which always characterizes Desborough's way of writing, make the book not only useful but also pleasant to the reader, although it is relatively large (388 pages) and sometimes extremely analytical.

The plates and figures which are mixed with the text are somewhat difficult to use. The absence of scale on them is a drawback, especially when on the same figure or plate are illustrated several objects without any indication of their size. Two typical examples are Pl. 41 on page 191, where the fibulae appear as big as the dagger and the vases, and Pl. 44 on page 194, where the spear head is bigger than the amphorae.

As stated in the Introduction (p. II) the recent book by A. M. Snodgrass, *The Dark Age*

of Greece, Edinburgh 1972, should be considered as complementary to Desborough's work. In the course of discussion we will refer to Snodgrass if we think that the comparison contributes to a better understanding of any particular subject.

The essential characteristics of the Mycenaean civilisation before its decline, just before 1200 B. C., are swiftly and clearly described in the first chapter (pp. 15-25). After the middle of the 13th century B.C. the Mycenaeans on the mainland did not feel too secure, for all their prosperity. Most of the citadels were being fortified at this period; their purpose was defensive. Among these defensive constructions, Desborough includes also the wall at the Isthmus of Corinth, whose characteristics are not so clear. Chr. Kardhara thinks that we are dealing simply with a retaining wall (AA4 IV, 1971, 85 f). Just before 1200 B.C. a number of settlements were destroyed or severely damaged (Mycenae, Tiryns, Pylos, Gla, Krisa, Teichos Dymaion in Achaea, a settlement near Sparta). At about the same time or at the beginning of the 12th century, many settlements in Laconia, the Argolid and Corinthia, Attica, Boeotia, Phocis and Locris were abandoned. On the other hand, there are settlements that are still occupied in the 12th century B.C. or founded for the first time, some of which flourished (e.g. Teichos Dymaion, Perati, Lefkandi in Euboea, Kephallenia, Emborio on Chios, Naxos, Crete, Cyprus, Tarsus in Cilicia). All these various factors suggest, according to Desborough (p. 21), that there was an invasion or series of invasions, affecting the central and southern mainland only; these invasions caused, as Desborough thinks, a mass exodus of the survivors from their age-old towns and villages. The fact, however, that the invaders left no material trace of their occupation is curious indeed; there is no sign of change in the culture and customs of the Mycenaeans; what remains is purely Mycenaean in character.

Further on, Desborough discusses the various interpretations proposed to explain the catastrophe. His main objections to the first (that the upheaval was caused either by local uprisings of a previously subjected element, or by wars between kingdoms) are the following: a) The widespread nature of the destruction (but is the destruction really so widespread?) b) The fact that the most powerful kingdoms were the worst affected (in this case I would rather say: «powerful kingdoms were also affected») c) The high degree of consequent depopulation. In relation to the latter, let us not forget that Desborough's argument for depopulation depends for the most part on the surface survey, whose results are sometimes misleading. On the other hand, there are, as it seems, more regions than we think, most of them unexplored, on the mainland and the Aegean islands, which were occupied throughout the 12th century B.C. The second theory, advanced by Prof. Rhys Carpenter, is that there was no invasion, but a sharp climatic change. To this Desborough objects that a) it fails to account for the earlier nervous state of mind which led to the building of fortifications b) there is as yet no proof that such climatic conditions did hold, at least in some areas.

Desborough finally presents his own interpretation (pp. 23-25). He suggests that destruction caused by invaders had taken place in various Mycenaean centres. He calls these Dorians, following the literary tradition. He admits, however, that they did not settle in many areas of the mainland, as the archaeological picture suggests. This view of a catastrophe around 1200 B.C. caused by invaders who did not settle in the occupied regions leaves many questions open. It tries to explain simply the possibility of an invasion which left no signs on the culture of the Mycenaeans. The idea of a raid from barbarian Europe, followed by the withdrawal of the attackers to their base, was put forward by Miss N. K. Sandars (*Antiquity* 38 (1964), 259 f.). In a thorough discussion of all the above proposed explanations, Snodgrass rejects them (*The Dark Age of Greece*, 312). Desborough also suggests that the catastrophe had the following effects on the way of life of the Mycenaeans: a) Failure to return and reoccupy many towns and villages, b) Loss of writing, c) Deterioration in

craftmanship and building technique, d) Fragmentation of pottery styles, e) Disappearance of the central political power, f) Breaking down of the elaborate bureaucratic system. But all these events characterize the decline of every civilisation, not only of the Mycenaean; they are the result of a general tendency in settlements, after a period of prosperity, to decay and run down; they are due to internal, not to external processes, as, for example, a catastrophe caused by invasion—especially if the invading forces withdraw without trace, except for the doubtful destruction level in certain settlements, which may be interpreted in a different way. There are cases of destruction in Greek history which left behind them a destruction level even more obvious than the Mycenaean one, but they did not necessarily result in the decline of the civilisation, on the contrary, they were followed sometimes by the flourishing of the cities or regions which suffered the most.

After this catastrophe caused by the «invaders» and given time and peaceful conditions, there might have been a partial recovery, according to Desborough, as we can judge from the appearance of at least three highly individual and spirited styles of pottery towards the middle of the 12th century B.C., in the Argolid (Close Style), in the central Aegean (Octopus Style, derived from Crete) and at Lefkandi in Euboea (Fantastic Style, with human and animal representations). After the recovery there was disaster again, in many cases as a result of a second invasion, according to Desborough, for example at Emborio and Miletus. In other regions (Mycenae, Iolkos, Lefkandi) it is impossible to tell, says Desborough, if these disasters were also the result of invasion. He comes to the conclusion that in the second half of the 12th century the conditions of the known Mycenaean sites are the same as previously and worse (there are here exceptions too). It is not necessary to comment again on the effects of this second «invasion», we simply note that, in spite of disaster, destructions and mass exodus of the population, the lowering of standards does not prevent us from recognising again with astonishment and satisfaction that what remained was predominantly Mycenaean in character. Snodgrass (*op. cit.*, pp. 365 and 378) examines and finally excludes the possibility of mass immigration from outside Greece between the early 12th and the middle of the 11th centuries B.C. The gradual depopulation of Greece in the 12th and 11th centuries is not attributed by him to emigration from Greek lands, it is taken as a symptom of economic disaster; but the communities of the 11th and 10th centuries kept themselves alive and shook off the unhealthy effects of depopulation.

We extended the discussion of the first Part of Desborough's book, although it is only the background to the Dark Ages, but we did so because his conclusions are of fundamental importance for what is going to follow, and most of them reappear in the next chapters.

In the first section of Part II, three major styles of the first period of the Dark Ages are dealt with: a) Sub-Mycenaean, b) Late Cypriot III B and c) Sub-Minoan. In the previous book of Desborough's, *The Last Mycenaeans and their Successors*, Sub-Mycenaean was defined as the characteristic ware of the cist-tomb cemeteries in Salamis and the Athenian Kerameikos. He now admits (p. 33) that since 1962, the publication of material from the Argolid, Ancient Elis, Corinthia, Thebes and Lefkandi has shown that variations of this pottery were current in these districts as well. He discusses nine main types of Sub-Mycenaean vases, all wheel-made, with occasional subdivisions (neck-handled amphora, belly-handled amphora, amphoriskos, stirrup-jar, lekythos, jug, trefoil-lipped oinochoe, bowl and cup), in relation to their origins, background and nature. Every shape, without exception, appears to be descended from the preceding Mycenaean pottery. He considers Lefkandi as belonging to the latest stage of Sub-Mycenaean; he dates it a) on the basis of the relatively large number of unusual shapes b) from the fact that there are only two stirrup-jars and c) from the appearance of dress-pins of iron (p. 68). All three arguments are not yet very convincing.

It is better to wait for a full publication of the Lefkandi material (from the settlement and the cemeteries) before we come to *final* conclusions on the date. We must take into consideration that it is on the one hand possible to make regional distinctions—as in Lefkandi which is very well represented with hundreds of vases—but on the other hand difficult to recognise development or progressive variation, from the chronological point of view, within one regionally distinctive group.

Desborough accepts here (p. 41) that the earliest Sub-Mycenaean Style of the Argolid precedes that of Athens, as Deshayes (*Deiras*, p. 251) and Styrenius (*Submycenaean Studies*, p. 160) have already proposed. He also remarks (p. 64) that the ultimate stage of the Athenian Sub-Mycenaean Style is somewhat apart, quite distinctive, and improvements and fresh ideas in it lead up to the introduction of the Protogeometric Style. Improvement was partly in design and partly decorative. But above all, he says, there was the new Athenian invention: the multiple brush and the compass. On this last point concerning the «new Athenian invention», which was already proposed in the previous books of Desborough's and which Snodgrass also accepts (*op. cit.*, p. 47), I would like to make the following remarks: The use of compass and multiple brush may have taken place elsewhere in Greece spontaneously and not through Attic influence. N. M. Verdelis had already proposed in his book *Ὁ Πρωτογεωμετρικὸς ρυθμὸς τῆς Θεσσαλίας*, 1958, that the Thessalian pottery school developed in total independence of the Attic. Desborough (*Last Myc.*, p. 44) did not agree with him, since Verdelis' opinion required an independent adoption of the fast wheel, the compass and the multiple brush by Thessalian and Attic potters. The compass alone had been known to the potters of the Bronze Age. The multiple brush was long known among vase-painters of other parts of the ancient world, and several motifs on Mycenaean and Sub-Mycenaean pottery evidence its use in the Aegean also. Snodgrass says (*op. cit.*, p. 47) that the PG painters may have borrowed the use of the multiple brush on pottery from Cyprus. The combination of compass and multiple brush does not seem to be a revolutionary and exclusively Athenian invention. When a potter knows and uses the compass, the simultaneous use of the multiple brush together with it, is simply a next step not requiring special capabilities of the potter. Does it really seem too much to believe that these could have been hit on spontaneously by the Protogeometric potters in two or more centres?

Desborough's general conclusions in this chapter are the following: In its early stages Sub-Mycenaean pottery seems to be isolated, but towards the end there are a number of signs, in vase-type and decoration system, which show that the revival of Athenian pottery was due to contact with Cyprus just at this time.

The above conclusion leads to an analysis of the Late Cypriot III B pottery (nine vase shapes are again discussed), which is contemporary to Sub-Mycenaean, but superior to it in technique and of better quality, and to an appreciation of the general situation on the island (p. 49 ff.). From this analysis he is able to demonstrate (since the Cypriot series is reasonably securely dated) that the end of the Sub-Mycenaean Style, when it was ready for transformation into Protogeometric, at least in Athens, came about the middle of the 11th century, at a time when L.C. III B was also nearing its end and moving toward Cypro-Geometric I. In relation to Sub-Mycenaean central Greece, Cyprus can be called almost flourishing, according to Desborough (p. 57), who also thinks that it was almost certainly from Cyprus that the knowledge of the working of iron (this metal was known in Cyprus before 1150 B.C.) was introduced to Athens and Lefkandi, at the same time as we get the influence of Cypriot pottery. These two major developments in the pottery and in the use and working of iron need not mean, says Desborough (p. 78), more than that some Cypriots had made their way to the Sub-Mycenaean area or that the Sub-Mycenaeans themselves in the late phase renounc-

ed their mainland isolation and started to look to the sea. This late phase (1075-1050 B.C.) is considered by the author as a turning point in the Dark Ages.

The discussion of the Cypriot pottery shows that its style had earlier been influenced not only by Mycenaean features, but that there were also some elements indicating links with Crete. So Desborough proceeds to a discussion of the contemporary Sub-Minoan style (p. 57 ff). Again, the analysis of the nine vase types current in the Sub-Minoan serve to illustrate the similarities and differences of Sub-Minoan, Sub-Mycenaean and L.C. 111 B. In Crete the analysis is mainly based on settlement material (Karphi, Kastri) and not on tomb offerings as in central Greece and Cyprus. Sub-Minoan pottery was in use in Crete throughout the 11th century.

From Crete, Desborough returns again to the central Sub-Mycenaean area, and deals with it in greater detail, site by site (Athens, Salamis, Lefkandi, Chalkis, Thebes, Corinth, Mycenae, Tiryns, Argos, Asine, Ancient Elis) and discusses the material other than pottery (p. 64-77). The early and late phases of the Sub-Mycenaean period last, according to him, from c. 1125 to c. 1050 B.C. (early phase: 1125-1075, late phase: 1075-1050), but he rightly remarks that we cannot be always sure to which phase the evidence of a particular site may belong.

In the next chapter (p. 80-105) Desborough continues with a consideration of the Sub-Mycenaean areas surrounding central mainland Greece. He divides the areas into sections: a) the central Aegean, b) the central and south Peloponnese, c) the Northern Crescent (north-west Peloponnese, islands, north-west Greece, Thessaly and Macedonia), d) the districts between Thessaly and Boeotia. He discusses the evidence from all these districts of the «Peripheral Area» both with regard to their earlier history and to the situation throughout the period when Sub-Mycenaean culture was current.

Having thus completed the circle of all sites belonging to the Early Dark Ages (1125-1050 B.C.) Desborough comes to the last and most important chapter in Part II of his book: «The Origin of the Sub-Mycenaean Culture» (pp. 106-111). A vital question that he discusses is, whether the Sub-Mycenaean culture was a spontaneous local growth, or was partly introduced by new arrivals—and if the latter, from where. He is inclined to accept north-west Greece (Epirus district) as an area of possible origin for the culture. He recapitulates the main features of the Sub-Mycenaean, which he interprets as a result of a new element in the population: the arrival in the second half of the 12th century of newcomers from north-western Greece, who fused with, and dominated, the surviving element. These main features are: 1. Abandonment of earlier Mycenaean habitation sites and selection of different ones, 2. Location of burial grounds above and within Mycenaean settlement areas, 3. Abandonment of the practice of multiple burial and turning to individual burial in cist tombs or earth-cut graves, 4. Abandonment of the previous adornments of dress, and introduction of new or modified articles: the long dress-pins and the arched fibulae, 5. Occasional presence of objects of northern origin, 6. Absence of weapons from earlier burials, 7. Retention of the preceding Mycenaean ceramic style, however simplified and debilitated.

The pottery of the north-west was hand-made, but for Desborough this does not present problems. It would have been natural, he says, for migrants from that area to adopt the wheel-made tradition they encountered in the Argolid, Boeotia and west Attica, without necessarily implying that the newcomers expelled the existing inhabitants. I would not want to discuss at length Desborough's arguments which support his «north-west» theory; this has already been done successfully and convincingly, I think, by Snodgrass, *The Dark Age of Greece*, pp. 314 ff, who discusses fully the case for a purely local development of the Sub-Mycenaean culture. As Desborough himself admits: «There is no doubt that the hypothesis of the arrival of newcomers from north-west Greece needs a great deal more solid

evidence to support it before it can be accepted as providing the impetus for the Sub-Mycenaean culture» (p. 111).

Part II is completed by a thorough discussion of the situation in Crete (pp. 112-129). He thinks that between 1150 and 1100 B.C. a further group of people from Greece or the Aegean migrated to Cyprus, in sufficient numbers to have a considerable effect on the island's civilisation. Before the end of this century, Sub-Mycenaean culture established itself in central mainland Greece. All this, he says, increases the likelihood that people from the dying Mycenaean world went to Crete in an attempt to find new homes there; this may have been at least one of the causes of the unrest in Crete, resulting in the decision of some Minoans to move eastwards to Cyprus. He chooses the presumed date (c. 1100 B.C.) of the minor exodus to Cyprus as symptomatic of the start of the Dark Ages. Finally, a possible link with Sicily and Italy emerges from his discussion of the Karphi material (swivel-pin of a fibula). He points out (p. 128) that one of the main features of Karphi is its sanctuary and cult statues, and that «one may hazard the possibility that the principle *raison d'être* of the community was the sanctuary».

Part III deals with «The Late Dark Ages» (pp. 133-240). The middle of the 11th cent. has been taken as a turning point between Early and Late Dark Ages. The new Protogeometric style which emerged at about this time was the characteristic feature of Athenian life for the following century and a half. The chronological limits of the PG style given by Desborough are from c. 1050 to c. 900 B.C. The date of the start is related, as already discussed, to the connexions with Cyprus that immediately preceded it, The Cypriot material being itself approximately dated by cross-reference with other areas in the East Mediterranean, esp. Palestine, with its established Biblical chronology, thus giving a similar approximate date to the Athenian PG pottery. Three main stages of development have been recognised within this style:

Early PG: 1050 —

Middle PG: — 1010 B.C.

Late PG: 1010 — 900 B.C.

Desborough considers Athens as the most outstanding town of this period and therefore deals with it first (pp. 135-158). The time of transition to PG style which marks the end of the Sub-Mycenaean was one of experiment and consisted of three main elements: a) well-established traditional vase-types, b) the Cypriot element recognisable in a number of new types of vases, c) the technical innovation, the faster wheel and the dividers with multiple brushes on one arm, considered as entirely individual to the Athenian potter (cf. however above p.336f.) In the opening stages of the new style the Cypriot influence was rejected, all Cypriot types of vases dropped out, except for the belly-handled amphora, and the following characteristics appear: a) new technique of vase-making, the shape being considered worthy of careful and aesthetic execution, b) mechanical decoration consciously related to the shape, c) application of fine and lustrous glaze, d) more careful preparation of clay. He then gives a short description of each of the main types of vases and of their development, for the purpose of comparison with the preceding Sub-Mycenaean, Sub-Minoan and L.C. III B styles. The description of vase-types is followed by a general summary of the style (156f). Two major shapes which did not survive Sub-Mycenaean were the sirtup-jar and the amphoriskos. Beside the traditional vase-types, several new ones were introduced (pysix, kantharos etc.). To the last stage of PG belongs the introduction of the meander. The main importance of Athens is to be seen in the influence over the other communities, and in the following chapters Desborough tries to show the truth of this. The other communities discussed are divided into the following groups: a) Attica, Aegina, Keos (159 f), b) Argolid and Corinthia (161f),

c) Dodecanese (172 f), d) Western Asia Minor (179 f), e) Euboea, Thessaly and Tenos, Andros, Skyros, Boeotia, Phocis, Macedonia (185 f), f) The central Aegean (221 f), g) Crete (225 f), h) The Western Aegean and Laconia (240 f).

In Part IV, Desborough discusses «The Material Evidence». Here he does not examine each region separately, but on the basis of the material evidence he considers the whole period of the Dark Ages and the whole Aegean, where the Dark Age culture appears, in an attempt to draw certain general conclusions concerning: A. Settlements (261 ff), B. Tombs (266 ff), C. Sanctuaries and Cult Places (278 ff), D. Pottery (288 ff), E. Dress and Dress Accessories (294 ff), F. Armour and Weapons (306 ff) and G. Metals (133 ff).

A) In relation to *settlements* the archaeological picture is very fragmentary, but anyhow the material available leads to the following conclusions: 1. There is only one case of a complete and relatively large settlement, that of Karphi in Crete. 2. There is no evidence of any fortification wall built during the Dark Ages (that of Old Smyrna is early Geometric). Peaceful conditions as well as lack of power and technical ability may account for the absence of fortifications. 3. There were few settlements and most of them extremely small. 4. We have nowhere, except in Ithaca, at Grotta on Naxos, and possibly at Iolkos, continuity of settlement between the latest Mycenaean and the early Dark Ages. There is one exception, Minoan Crete, where settlements reflect a break not at the outset of the Dark Ages, but earlier towards the beginning of the 12th (except Karphi). 5. Many of the Dark Age sites are those previously occupied by Mycenaeans, even though not exactly on the same spot.

B) Concerning the change from multiple to individual *burial*, Desborough (p. 269) prefers the theory of newcomers from north-western Greece, as we have seen above. He thinks that it is altogether likely that the Sub-Mycenaean cemeteries of Salamis and the Kerameikos involved immigrants. We prefer the alternative of a local revival of an old tradition. He rightly remarks (p. 275) that it is dangerous to use *tomb evidence* by itself, either in its various subdivisions or even as a whole, especially when making positive inferences. He also accepts here (p. 276), against his previous opinion (*Last Myc.*), that differences of opinion among experts, concerning the analysis of the skeletal remains, make any conclusion about racial origins unwise.

C) Concerning *sanctuaries and cult places*, Desborough remarks (p. 284) that on archaeological grounds it is extremely difficult to establish continuity of religious practices from Mycenaean times into and beyond the Dark Ages. He concludes however that in view of the extreme scarcity of material assignable to our period, it would be rash to assume any large-scale discontinuity, especially when one bears in mind that many communities must have included people of Mycenaean origin. In Crete, however, the Dark Age links with the Minoan past are manifested in most aspects of material remains, and his analysis (p. 284 f) makes it clear that cult continuity was one of the major features. He also suggests that the goddess with upraised arms was the type which the Cretans took with them when a number migrated to Cyprus c. 1000 B.C.

D) Concerning *pottery*, Desborough supposes (p. 291) that it provides proof of intercommunication simply in the nature of trade or visits for other purposes. As he says, none of these must be thought to involve any migration, with the exception of Miletus and Lefkandi. He rightly concludes that the evidence of pottery is fundamental, but one must be careful not to build too much on it.

E) The evidence for *Dress* depends on such objects as were not perishable. The most important of these are the long dress-pins. This evidence supports the idea of a significant innovation in female dress, the peplos. For two of the pin-types, the short roll-top pin and that with a flat and slightly widened upper shaft, a Near Eastern origin is suggested. This

is also so in the case of the two rare types and of one of the variations of type B. The arched fibula was probably a creation of the early Dark Ages, within the central Sub-Mycenaean area, although an introduction from the north is not excluded. The ring with oval angled bezel reflects the Mycenaean tradition. The ring with double spiral terminals has a northern ancestry.

F) Gold is likely to have come from the east Mediterranean (Nubia was one of the chief sources). There were also sources in Thrace and Macedonia. Silver mines are to be found in in Thrace, Macedonia, the Cyclades and Laurion. In the Mycenaean period, there is no evidence that any of these deposits were known and that the metal was not normally imported from the east Mediterranean or elsewhere. Local sources seem to be equally unknown in the Dark Ages. However, the process of silver extraction was probably known to the metalsmiths of the Argolid and Attica (Thoricos). Bronze was imported, in the form of ingots, from the east Mediterranean, presumably from Cyprus. Until 1200 B.C. iron was a precious metal, because the knowledge of how to work it was confined to the smiths of the region of Kiz-zuwatna, a province of the Hittite empire. Iron-working will have been introduced to the Aegean from the east, the immediate source being Cyprus, where iron objects have been found datable to the early 12th century as well as thereafter.

In Part V Desborough deals with the «Oral Tradition» (p. 321 ff). The art of writing had long been lost and was recovered only during the 8th century, but it is certain that there existed a substantial body of memories of the past, the oral tradition. The earliest collection of this material was the Homeric epic. In the work of Hesiod, Herodotus, and Thucydides we find references to past events. What was known, or believed, can be divided in two categories: a) Movements of peoples, and b) Lists of Kings, the chief of which was the Spartan catalogue. The evidence, however, does not stand up to close analysis and many inconsistencies are exposed. Their dating is also uncertain. Desborough comes to the conclusion (p. 325) that later Greek History can tell us virtually nothing of the conditions prevailing in the Dark Ages; there were kings and movements of people—that is all.

In the last, and very important, Part VI of his book (p. 329 ff), Desborough tries to recapture the atmosphere of the Dark Ages, to see the Greek World as a whole, during a period of over two centuries. However, as he himself says, there is much that still remains to be discovered, and few archaeological judgements can be claimed to be final. All is sheer hypothesis from the archaeological side. «When all has been said, one still seems to be so far from understanding, from recapturing the peculiar flavour of the Greek Dark Ages» (p. 352). But despite «the haze of hesitancy and supposition that characterizes this book» certain truths remain.

Athens

PETROS G. THEMELIS

G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War*, London, Duckworth, 1972, pp. XII+444.

Ste. Croix wrote *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* in the deliberate hope, as he himself admits in the opening paragraphs of his book, of rejecting certain well-known false suppositions, which historians have maintained about the causes of the Peloponnesian War.

Ste. Croix begins his narrative by staunchly refuting the unjustifiable view predominant among historians: namely that Athens was the real aggressor in the Peloponnesian War, and that her imperialistic actions forced Sparta into a war in which she had no desire to engage.