

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction



Why Communities?

The “community” is a concept central to human society yet frustratingly difficult to define. It can mean the inhabitants of a village or a neighborhood or the members of a profession, a religion, or a political lobby group. Ethnicity, sexuality, and sporting allegiance are among the many different factors that can be at its root; and the neighborhood watch, the school fair, and the Internet forum are among the numerous ways it can be manifested. Communities, it seems, are everywhere and can potentially relate to almost anything.

The term *community* is also one of the most common buzzwords of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Like all the best buzzwords, it has come to have multiple meanings, each laden with its own sense of public sentiment and morality. Now, at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, community has come to stand for two opposite ideas simultaneously: social responsibility and civic engagement, on the one hand, and potentially subversive ethnic and religious minority groups, on the other. In either of these forms, however, the popularity of the term belies what seems to be a widespread anxiety over modernity and social fragmentation (Delanty 2003, 1).

The contemporary anxiety surrounding ideas of the community has manifested itself in many different forms. In 1990, a group of social activists in the United States launched a movement called “Communitarianism,” critiquing what they saw as the individualistic tendencies of contemporary society and explicitly calling for a revival of public morality and social responsibility (Etzioni 1993). The Communitarians, however, are only the tip of a much larger iceberg of social concern. Over the course of the 1990s, a series of surveys showed that people in America and Britain were becoming increasingly anxious about what they perceived to

be the “breakdown of the community,” as characterized by social dysfunction and the decay of civic life (Putnam 2000, 25). This popular perception has made the idea of the community a source of valuable political capital. Now, in the early twenty-first century, the term has become laden with distinctly moral overtones and is often connected with “democracy” in contemporary political rhetoric (Williamson, Imbroscio, and Alperowitz 2002, ix–xiv). In Britain, for example, an official governmental post in the cabinet was created specifically to engage with communities in 2005, a move closely followed by the institution of an independent government department for communities and local government in 2006. Over the last two decades, the community has become an emotive symbol for the well-functioning society, a panacea for all our social ills.

Perhaps paradoxically, the word *community* has also developed another, slightly less comfortable meaning in the context of post-9/11 national politics. It is now widely used to refer to ethnic or religious minorities within the nation-state. We often hear about the “Muslim community” in Britain, for example, or the “Armenian community” in the United States. In this context, the term implies an uneasy distinction of a subgroup from the main citizen body, hinting at an unspoken agenda or a set of interests that might differ from and potentially threaten those of the central state (Mai Sims 2008; Parekh 2000). These communities are often most in evidence as political forces, lobbying or agitating for a minority cause against the mainstream. This use of the word *community* as a proxy for the term *minority group* is a timely reminder that there are always two sides to community cohesion. At its very root, the idea of community is about not just a sense of solidarity but also a distrust of difference.

The last two decades, therefore, have seen the concept of the community becoming increasingly politicized in popular discourse (Amit and Rapport 2003, 13ff.; Hoggett 1997). At the same time, the community has also become a common subject within academia. As might be expected, political theorists, sociologists, and anthropologists have all engaged closely with the term in recent years, drawing from and commenting on the popular and political discourse. Social psychologists, for example, have established a quantitative measure called the Sense of Community Index, or SCI, and explored the role of social interaction in stimulating this community feeling (Chavis et al. 1986). Similarly, architects and urban designers have sought ways of using the built environment to enable and encourage community interaction (Katz 1994; Kingsley, McNeely, and Gibson 1997). At the other end of the scale, anthropological studies have examined the many different social rationales lying behind commu-

nity identity, from the shared professional and socioeconomic interests of ex-mining communities in the north of England (Dawson 2002) to the communities forged by contestation and conflict in urban America (Abu-Lughod 1994). In many different forms and in many different disciplines, the last two decades have seen an explosion of research aimed at shedding light on the intangible sense of “us-ness” shared by social groups. The result of this is that community identity is currently a particularly vibrant area of academic research. Work is focused not just on identifying either the existence or absence of community identity but also on the way that community identity can be formed and re-formed over time; on how it can become more or less salient depending on the specific social context; and on the way that it can be variously rationalized and articulated through words, images, objects, and actions.

The term *community* has also made a recent comeback within the historiographical disciplines. In archaeology in particular, communities are often talked about as social actors in prehistory and protohistory. It is in communities that hierarchies and social differentiation are first constructed, it is communities that trade with each other and engage in cultural interaction, and it is communities that mediate the experience of state emergence. Despite the increasing usage of the term in archaeology, there has not yet been a coherent attempt to define or theorize the community in an archaeologically specific way. Efforts were made to establish an archaeology of communities¹ in the early years of the twenty-first century, most notably in the 2000 volume edited by Marcello Canuto and Jason Yaeger. However, these early insights have not yet been fully embraced, nor have they received enough attention in mainstream archaeology. The term therefore continues to be used fairly broadly in archaeological literature, but without a coherent theorization to support it. A consistent archaeological understanding of the community is still yet to be developed, and a comprehensive archaeology of communities is still yet to be established.

This book hopes to go some way toward both of these goals. It considers the familiar concept of the community in a new light, before going on to formulate a coherent approach for an archaeology of communities for the first time. It does so through a combination of theoretical discussion and practical exploration using case studies. The second chapter of this book summarizes the ways in which social theory has conceptualized the community, from the first emergence of the term in the late nineteenth century until the present day. In particular, it highlights how the community is now understood as a form of social identity, actively constructed rather than nat-

urally emerging. The third chapter reflects on how archaeologists have approached communities from both theoretical and practical perspectives over the last century, discussing especially the recent attempts to initiate an archaeology of communities and the various critiques of this movement. It is argued that integrating insights from social theory can answer these critiques and that a new archaeological approach to communities can now be developed by explicitly considering “community identity” rather than the community *per se*. This approach depends on a close and careful definition of what community identity means, as well as a detailed exploration of how community identity is created, maintained, and manifested. The fourth chapter of the book suggests such a definition and attempts this exploration. In its fifth chapter, the book goes on to propose a method for the archaeological investigation of community identity, focusing on how material culture can be used to construct group identities and on the traces it might leave in the archaeological record.

In the second half of this book, the proposed method is tested and illustrated through an in-depth treatment of two sites in western Anatolia in the Late Bronze and Iron Ages (hereafter LBA and IA). The sites of Aphrodisias and Beycesultan developed along different but interrelated trajectories over this time, each showing flexible attitudes to community solidarity in a rapidly changing historical context. These case studies both illustrate and also test the theory and method developed in the first part of this book. They also illustrate the benefits of adopting such an approach. Western Anatolia is an ill-understood region, and the LBA and IA represent an ill-understood period of time. Approaching sites here through the lens of community identity will be revealed as a new way to uncover the complexity of the social landscape, a complexity usually lost in conventional narratives. The two halves of the book are therefore designed to be complementary—theory and practice, ideas and application. As is commonly the case in archaeology, neither one makes complete sense without the other, and both are needed in order to develop a mature archaeology of communities.

This book does not offer to its readers a ready-made and complete archaeology of communities. Rather, it aims to open up a wider debate and discussion on the subject. Building on the work of others, the book represents a first attempt to develop a coherent and comprehensive approach to community identity in archaeology. The approach offered here is neither foolproof nor perfect—instead, it is the first formulation of a body of theory that, I hope, will be developed much further in years to come. First, however, it is necessary to consider the range and the scope of the is-

sue at hand, the frame of reference and the context of the debate. The following section provides a brief introduction, discussing how communities have been invented, imagined, and interpreted in LBA-IA western Anatolia to date and the implications of this for our historical understanding of the region.

Illustrating the Problem: The Archaeological Invention of Communities in Western Anatolia

For decades, archaeology has taken the idea of the community largely for granted. Little explicit theorization has been afforded to the subject, yet communities appear frequently in archaeological writing—both Old World and New World, both empirical and social. Few places is this more in evidence than in western Anatolia. In this region, archaeologists have frequently assumed the existence of communities, invested these invented communities with social meaning, and built complex historical arguments based on their interpretation. This process, while common in archaeological practice more generally, is particularly problematic in western Anatolia. Inventing communities has been crucial in the development of the current historical understanding of the region, an understanding that should perhaps be called into question.

The term *community* is often used unreflectively in archaeological writing. Most commonly, it is assumed that communities are the building blocks of the archaeological landscape. Communities tend to be talked about as if they were social actors—as if the communities were unitary entities in themselves that interacted with each other, developed new social structures, and created different cultural forms. At this scale, internal divisions within the community are ignored, and the actions of individuals or minority groups are not thought relevant. The community is assumed to be a coherent entity—it is treated as an unproblematic and natural unit. In addition to this assumption of the community as a natural unit, communities are often equated with sites. It is frequently assumed that the archaeological site, imagined as a nucleated settlement, is equivalent to the physical remains of this natural social unit. Groups of people living together in close residential proximity, it is supposed, can be considered as an explicitly *social* collective, acting as a single unified social actor. The common archaeological use of the community is therefore somewhat flawed (see chapter 3 for a fuller discussion of archaeological uses of the term *community*). From sites, archaeologists commonly infer unitary

communities; and from these communities, we tend to build complex historical and social narratives. In archaeology, therefore, communities are rarely explored as concepts in their own right—rather, they make recurring cameo appearances as natural social units or the unproblematic social equivalent of the site.

Western Anatolia during the LBA and IA provides a vivid example of this trend. Information about this period in western Anatolia is patchy, with a disrupted archaeological record and very little historical documentation. The region lies at the interface of what are widely considered to be two distinct political and cultural spheres: the central Anatolian plateau to the east and the Aegean to the west (fig. 1). Throughout their long history, the people of western Anatolia have never been a full part of either sphere but have instead maintained strong connections with both. In antiquity, the region is usually characterized as being a border zone—an intermediate area caught between the East and the West, the Aegean and the Anatolian plateau, Europe and the Orient, the classical world and the Near East (see chapter 6 for a fuller discussion of this).

This characterization of western Anatolia rests, however, partly on the archaeological invention of communities in the region. In general, western Anatolia has been the object of scholarly interest primarily as a place “in-between,” an area in which to study the interaction of competing and overlapping spheres of influence. Such studies are usually effected by taking communities/sites as a convenient unit of analysis and assessing the extent of Eastern or Western influence on each one. These communities/sites are then assigned places along a cultural spectrum—ranging from the wholly Aegean, through the Aegean-influenced and the plateau-influenced, to the wholly plateau-focused (e.g., Briant 1996, 682–83; Bryce 2006, 77–86; C. Gates 1995; Lloyd 1956, 6ff.; Ma 1999, 43–101; Marchese 1986, 24; Mcqueen 1996, 39; Mee 1998; Neimeier 1999; Seeher 2005). The shifting allegiances of individual communities within this border zone, either eastward or westward, are therefore seen as the means of analyzing border-zone dynamics and of shedding light on the wider interaction between the Aegean and central Anatolia. In LBA-IA western Anatolia, therefore, it has been frequently assumed that the archaeological site is directly equivalent to a socially meaningful community and that this community has a coherent and unitary nature. By making such assumptions, it has become possible to use these communities as passive indicators of external influence and to map the overlap of the central Anatolian and Aegean spheres. The existence of communities in western Anatolia has therefore been widely assumed, and this archaeological

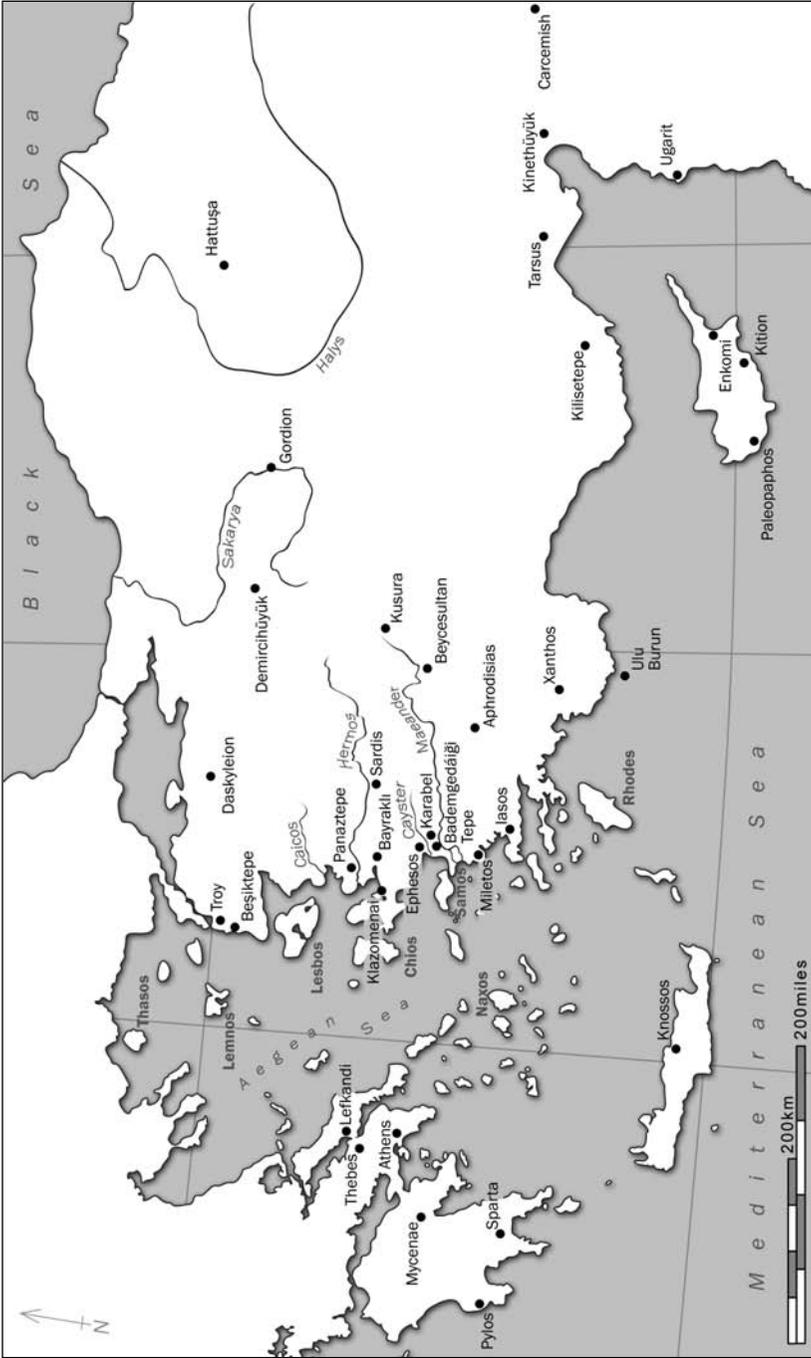


Fig. 1. Map of sites in western Anatolia and the Aegean

invention of communities has contributed to the common characterization of the region as in-between.

It is, of course, extremely important to consider the traces of cultural interaction at different sites within LBA-IA western Anatolia. However, the assumption that these sites necessarily constitute communities ignores individual and group agency within these settlements. Community cohesion is seen as automatic, rather than a specific type of social strategy. Individual choice and the actions of minority groups are excluded from analysis, as is the potential for material culture to be selectively adopted and adapted. Instead, the communities/sites are cast as passive recipients of external cultural influences, the extent of which can be measured and cited as evidence for "in-betweenness." The peripheral nature of western Anatolia is both a starting assumption and a natural conclusion of this process. The invention of communities is therefore both a result of and a contributing factor to the current characterization of western Anatolia in archaeology as a border zone.

Assuming the straightforward existence and unity of communities permits us only a narrow understanding of western Anatolia as a region. A broader and more nuanced view can be sought by reassessing the archaeological approach to communities and by investigating the complex and changing dynamics of community identity. While the social dynamics within a settlement may indeed have encouraged a conscious sense of community identity at particular times and in particular historical circumstances, there may equally have been times when the concept of the community was not so important. In addition, individuals and groups resident in the settlement would have struggled to shape this community identity (where it was extant), in different and sometimes contradictory ways. If these points are taken into account, it becomes evident that the material from LBA-IA western Anatolia therefore holds a far greater potential than simply to plot the extent of Eastern and Western cultural influence on a border zone. It can shed light on a much more complex set of social and geographic dynamics, where cultural traits and social practices were actively used by individuals, groups, and communities in response to a rapidly changing social and historical context. Adopting an approach focused on community identity will help to tease out some of the strands of this complexity, offering new perspectives on old questions.

First, however, it is necessary to revisit the concept of the community itself to establish what we mean by a community, to define the significance of community identity, and to understand the interweaving links between geographic locality, community identity, and material culture.