

Dissertation committee

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Recent studies of the Mycenaean state have challenged the view, articulated most strongly by Moses Finley (1957) and further elaborated by John Killen (1985), that the palace played a central and dominant role in Mycenaean economy and society (e.g., Halstead 1992, Galaty and Parkinson 1999). Such studies, while they have provided valuable perspectives, have also tended to model the Mycenaean state as monolithic, static, incapable of change – hence the popularity of systems collapse as a model to explain the ultimate failure of the Mycenaean states – and more or less disconnected from the non-palatial system.

A better model of the Mycenaean state is to view it not as a material entity, but as a relational field. As Edward Sapir (1931) puts it, any social system “is only apparently a static sum of social institutions; actually it is being reanimated or creatively reaffirmed from day to day by particular acts of a communicative nature which obtain among individuals participating in it.” Also relevant in this regard is the “structuration theory” of Anthony Giddens (1979, 1984, 1987), which deals with the problematic relationship between individual and structure. In short, Giddens argues that agency and structure are mutually dependent. Thus, “structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize” (Giddens 1984: 25), as actors reproduce in and through their actions the very conditions which make their actions possible.

Conceiving of the Mycenaean state in this way helps us overcome the often un-useful dichotomization of Mycenaean society, and forces us to focus on individual agents and strategies. This is indeed possible, because in the Linear B tablets we have amply attested the first individuals of European (pre-)history. The present study will examine the Mycenaean state as an institution reproduced through the intentional acts of agents and their unintended effects, and moreover as an arena in which agents compete for power and influence. Such a model allows us to understand better the interactions between the palatial and non-palatial spheres, since each individual interacts to a greater or lesser extent with both (cf. Yoffee’s 1977 study on the Old Babylonian state). In keeping with the recent observations on the regionality of Mycenaean administrative structures (Shelmerdine 1999), I will focus on the polity in Messenia, centered on Late Bronze Age Pylos.

My approach is broadly in line with some recent anthropological approaches to the state (Blanton 1998) and the current realization of the importance of “agency theory” in archaeology (Dobres and Robb 2000). The robust archaeological data sets and detailed textual studies of Aegean

archaeology allow for a refinement of approach to agency in prehistoric states, and can therefore make important contributions to the field. This is particularly true of Mycenaean archaeology in Messenia, where over fifty years of intense archaeological work has been carried out, predominantly by Greeks and Americans.

Chapter 1 discusses the theoretical basis for the investigation, as outlined above; Chapter 2 sketches out the state of our knowledge about Mycenaean society and the functioning of the Mycenaean state, based on the Linear B tablets and archaeology (Shelmerdine n.d.). I will necessarily focus on Messenia in LH IIIB, the period of the preserved texts, but data from other regions, especially the Argolid and Crete, are relevant for comparative purposes, as is the historical framework of the rise of the state in Messenia (Bennet 1999, Shelmerdine 2001).

Chapter 3 deals with a close reading of the activities of the chief agent of the Mycenaean state, the *wanax*. Recent research has emphasized that the ritual and ceremonial role of the Pylian king (Palaima 1995a, Wright 1995). As such, the *wanax* is characterized as the community's link to divine protection, particularly since the evidence shows that he presided over a number of official religious ceremonies, particularly sacrifices/feasts. The feast does two things: first, it represents the *wanax* as the individual chiefly responsible for the proper ritual functioning of the community, thus ensuring the approval of the gods; second, the feasting ritual constitutes a theater in which the *wanax* acts as the benefactor of the entire populace. I will suggest, based on the identification of the king's personal name (*e-ke-ra₂-wo*, */Ekhe-lawon/* or perhaps */Egkhes-lauon/*), that some feasts were 'paid for' by the private *persona* of the king; these probably established and solidified relationships of dependency and debt that could be construed as more personal than the official obligations of the Pylian state, particularly as feasting was almost certainly the prime redistributive mechanism of the state. These rituals therefore not only reproduced the structure of Mycenaean society, but also (re)created the conditions which allowed the elite to maintain its hegemony.

Chapter 4 deals with the issues raised by the prosopographical method which underlies many of the inferences I wish to draw. In short, I wish to show that in many cases, instances of the same name in different contexts in the Linear B texts at Pylos refer to the same individual, rather than indicating that there were multiple individuals with the same name. The traditional method (Lindgren 1973) has been to downplay these recurring names, treating them only as the same individual when that person is especially prominent or consistently appears in similar contexts. The claim has been made that the recurring names are actually just popular names (i.e., those names which also appear at other Mycenaean sites), but my statistical studies show that this claim is suspect. While recent studies in historical Greek prosopography have tended to be cautious in this regard, the data used in Greek – or even ancient Near Eastern – prosopographies is quite different in kind, since the names are

typically culled from inscriptions which are scattered widely over time and space. At Pylos, on the other hand, we are dealing with a set of documents which are highly concentrated in time, space and function (Palaima 1988, 1995b, Bennet 2001). My method, advocated but not consistently applied by Palmer (1963), has been to examine clusters of names which recur in discrete contexts. Beginning with identifications which are almost certain, other possible matches in similar contexts become increasingly likely. Thus, while individually, many of these possible matches may seem unlikely, when they are examined globally, they form consistent patterns of interactions between separate spheres.

Chapter 5 applies this method to the largest set of personal names in the Pylos tablets, the bronze-smiths of the Jn series (Lejeune 1971, Smith 1990-91). These smiths are commonly believed to be low-status, part-time workmen under the direct control of the palace, but comparative studies suggest that even within a single category of craft specialist we should expect a variety of statuses among the craftsmen, including elite statuses (Costin and Wright 1998). A prosopographical analysis strongly suggests that some, but by no means all, of the smiths are involved in other palatial activities; in particular, they are often involved as agents in the maintenance of palatial flocks of sheep and goats, as officers in military arrangements, and as landowners in the religious district of *pa-ki-ja-na*. Scholars working within the ‘systemic’ paradigm of the Mycenaean state have attempted to reconstruct a remunerative system whereby the palace awarded craftsmen with flocks, land, etc. for their service (e.g., Gregersen 1997). However, this is not consistent with the data, since at most 30% of the named smiths recur elsewhere in the texts, and their holdings tend to be spatially dispersed through the polity. An agent-centered approach allows us to model the activities reflected in the tablets as active strategies of individual craftsmen to involve themselves in the palatial economy, in order to enhance their own access to material advantages and social status. The distances between each individuals’ holdings may, in turn, be a conscious strategy enacted by the palace, since states typically attempt to fragment the power base of non-palatial elites, in order to prevent their control of concentrated, localized power. It is hard to imagine how else we might conceive of smiths, e.g., producing bronze artifacts in the region of the Navarino while keeping flocks in Nichoria. So, these individuals reproduce the spatially diverse holdings of the state itself, and we may legitimately view them as palatial agents. There is therefore a fluid interaction between the “palatial” and “non-palatial” sphere, mitigated by individuals who participate to greater or lesser extents in the palatial economy, and the palace’s control of production is mediated through individuals, probably local elites.

Chapter 6 examines other applications of my method to the analysis of the Mycenaean state, in particular the elites. For example, the important palatial agents called “collectors” have

traditionally been treated as a group, so that the attributes and activities of each individual within the group are seen as a reflection of the status or function of the office (Shelmerdine n.d.). However, this obscures much variability; for example, the four “collectors” at Pylos all have in common their participation in the organization and control of flocks, but their activities outside this economic sphere are radically different from each other (e.g., Bennet 2001). This, combined with the fact that they lack official titles (but see Lindgren 1973), suggests that we ought think of them as influential individuals intimately attached to the administration. One may compare the “collectors” to the officials designated as *e-qe-ta* (/heq^uetai/, “followers”), who are often considered among the highest elites of Mycenaean society, but who are on the whole not nearly as involved with the palatial administration; the exception is an individual named *Diwiewus*, “Zeus-priest,” whose important role in contributions (*dosmoi*) to Poseidon in the Es series (and probably in the collection of sacrificial oxen on Cn 3) corresponds to the semantic field of his name, religion. This is one example of the variability that exists, quantitative and qualitative, in the administrative role of individuals, even at the highest levels of Pylian society. This strongly suggests that these officials actively negotiated their status within the administration on an individual basis, presumably because such important managerial positions gave them access to prestige, both symbolic and material.

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