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Prosopography and the State in Mycenaean Greece

The Linear B tablets of Mycenaean Greece document not only the first known use of Greek, but also the first recorded individuals of European history. These individuals remain understudied, despite being an extremely important data set for understanding Mycenaean society and administration. This paper presents the methods and results of an ongoing prosopographical study of the Mycenaeans registered in the administrative texts from the "Palace of Nestor" at Pylos, circa 1200 BC.

I argue that in many cases, instances of the same name in different contexts in the Linear B texts from Pylos actually refer to the same individual, rather than to different individuals with the same name. Traditionally, scholars have downplayed these recurring names, treating them only as the same individual when that person seems especially prominent or consistently appears in similar contexts (e.g., M. Lindgren, *The People of Pylos*, 1973). 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 are quite different in kind, since the names are typically culled from inscriptions scattered widely over time and space. In contrast, the documents from Pylos are highly concentrated in time, space and function: these texts were written over the course of less than one year by specialized scribes solely for the economic administration of the palace.

Thus, the nature of the texts compels Mycenologists to develop their own prosopographical methods. My method, advocated but not consistently applied by Leonard Palmer (*The Interpretation of Mycenaean Greek Texts*, 1963), has been to examine clusters of names that recur in discrete contexts. Beginning with identifications that are certain, other possible matches in similar contexts become increasingly likely. Thus, while individually many of these possible matches may seem unlikely, when examined globally, they form consistent patterns of interactions between separate economic and administrative spheres.

In some cases, careful analysis of the texts allows us to connect several instances of the same name to a single individual. For example, the personal name *ko-ma-we* (*Komawens*, from *komÍ*, "hair") appears in three unrelated series of tablets: on An 519, a text which names *ko-ma-we* as a military officer, the name is preceded by the patronymic *de-wi-jo* (*Derwios*, "[son] of *Derwis*"), which also modifies the personal name *pa-ku-ro2* (*Pachullos*, "Thick") on a separate text, Aq 218. Thus, these two men are certainly brothers. The two brothers' names appear together as bronze-smiths on yet another text, where they are listed on adjacent lines. Thus, it would be a remarkable coincidence if these were not the same two individuals.

Another useful approach is to examine large patterns in the clustering of names. For example, names of bronze-smiths and those of shepherds display an anomalous degree of overlap. Not only do names of smiths tend to cluster together on texts when they appear as shepherds, but the same smiths who are listed together on smithing texts also appear

together in groups on shepherding texts. For example, smiths from one particular text, Jn 431, appear in groups of two or more on four different texts that record shepherds in the palace's employ.

This prosopographical work is significant because it radically affects the way we think of these people. The individuals whose names recur in multiple texts are involved in several economic and administrative activities, often in disparate districts of the kingdom; yet people identified on the tablets as bronze-smiths and shepherds are usually thought to be low-status menial laborers. However, a prosopographical approach suggests that these are high-status individuals who have assumed various duties administered by the state in order to gain access to prestige and material wealth. In sum, this study allows us to identify Mycenaean elites and their activities. These men are effectively agents of the state; therefore, a detailed study of their responsibilities as monitored by the palatial administration speaks volumes about how the Mycenaean state actually functioned.