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# Rosetta

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**Jörg Weilhartner and Florian Ruppenstein (eds.), *Tradition and Innovation in the Mycenaean Palatial Polities*. Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 2015. Pp. 287. €99. (Paperback) ISBN13: 978-3-7001-7791-3.**

Reviewed by Guy Middleton.

This edited volume is the published result of a conference held in Vienna, March 2013 on 'Tradition and Innovation in the Mycenaean Palatial Polities'. The purpose of the conference was to present research on new sites, recent excavations, and up-to-date views on the palatial period from researchers with a range of expertise. The volume contains ten (unnumbered) chapters and an introduction by the editors (pp. 9-17).

The contributions vary widely in theme and approach. Three chapters bring us up-to-date with specific sites. Chapters one (pp. 19-49) and two (pp. 51-85) focus on the palace site of Thebes and Magoula-Pefkakia in Thessaly, south of Volos, respectively. They each introduce the history of excavations and projects up to the present day, and highlight some of the difficulties and controversies that have arisen in interpretation. Shelmerdine discusses the highly significant find of a Linear B tablet at Iklaina in Messenia (chapter nine; pp. 243-253). The tablet is the earliest found in Greece. Its presence may indicate either that Iklaina was an important and literate administrative centre (whether or not it could be called 'palatial') before it was incorporated into the expanding Pylos state or alternatively that literacy and the use of records extended beyond the palaces into secondary centres, as in other Late Bronze Age societies in the eastern Mediterranean. These chapters provide the reader with a detailed picture of the sites and are well illustrated.

Several chapters deal with Linear B and administration. A comparative approach is taken by Rougemont in her study of Linear B administrative documents related to wheels and chariots (chapter eight; pp. 203-241). She examines Mycenaean and contemporary texts from the northern Mesopotamian palace city of Nuzi, focusing on the Mycenaean *ta-ra-si-ja* and Nuzi *iskaru* systems of production. Both systems involved the provision of raw materials to workers, who produced a good, which was then delivered to the administration. Consideration of the *iskaru* system can, she cautiously suggests, help to fill in some of the

gaps in the Linear B records. She also proposes that the *ta-ra-si-ja* system might have been used more widely than it appears, since on the Nuzi tablets it was not always recorded that an item was being produced under *iskaru*.

Hallager (chapter five; pp. 141-153) discusses the Minoan and Mycenaean sealing systems. He argues that the Linear B people's system was 'profoundly different' from that of the Minoan Linear A rather than a smooth continuation of it. Killen's short chapter (six; pp. 155-166) deals with Linear B palaeography on Inscribed Stirrup Jars (ISJs), which were exported from Crete, and how this compares with tablets from Knossos. Weilhartner (chapter ten; pp. 255-275) examines Linear B logograms, comparing them with Linear A and Cretan hieroglyphics, and with iconographical representations of objects, such as chariots, pottery, and weapons. He concludes that iconography was probably a more important inspiration than nature in the creation of new schematic logograms. Each of these chapters includes useful figures.

Nosch's chapter (seven; pp. 167-201) explores the production and consumption of textiles and their appearance in the Linear A and B textual records. She rightly emphasises the central role of textiles in human life – textile production has practical, social, and economic impacts. Based on a discussion of textile-related logograms in Linear A and B she suggests that Mycenaean practices and products were broadly the same as Minoan.

Art is the subject of Blakolmer's contribution (chapter three; pp. 87-112). Looking at relief art in particular, he examines the Shaft Grave period (MH III-LH IIA), Early Mycenaean (LH IIB-LHIIIA), and Late Mycenaean (LH IIIA2-LH IIIC) periods and sets these in the perspective of the extent of use of Minoan iconography by Mycenaeans, which he argues intensified over time. Minoan iconography was suitable for use by mainlanders and 'fitted the demands of Mycenaean authority and kingship' (p. 101).

The most wide-ranging article is by Eder and Jung, who address one of the key problems of the Aegean Late Bronze Age – the political organization of the Mycenaean world as a whole (chapter four; pp. 113-140). They argue that the Mycenaean world developed into a single unified state, a Great Kingdom, stretching as far as Mycenaean tablets, sealings and

seals are found. This, they suggest, could explain the degree of cultural and material similarities seen in the palatial period and might also make sense in the context of identifying with Greece the *Ahhiyawa* state with its Great King, mentioned in some Hittite texts. The Great Kingdom, they argue, was headed by a single *wanax* rather than there being an independent ruler at each palace centre.

Others (e.g. Kelder 2008, 2010) have reached similar conclusions to Eder and Jung and it would certainly be surprising if, through the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries BCE, there was no jockeying for position or even attempts at hegemony across at least parts of the Aegean region. It is still a stretch, however, to believe in such a sizable single megastate, when other centres such as Thebes seem important in their own right. Shifting spheres of influence over time might be a more accurate way of seeing the issue. However, we must also bear in mind that there are two quite different conceptions of the Mycenaean world running in parallel and consider our interpretations in light of each.

Overall, the volume contains papers of interest, although some may be difficult to approach without quite specialised knowledge – there is an emphasis on texts and administration rather than archaeology and material culture. The focus on tradition and innovation is a worthy one since it emphasises the dynamic nature of the Mycenaean palatial period; this certainly deserves further exploration. The volume sits well alongside Schallin and Tournavitou's recent and much wider-ranging *Mycenaeans Up-to-Date* (2015). It is attractively produced and very well illustrated throughout in black and white and colour, with maps, plans, and figures, as well as tables. There are also three useful indices: a general index, an index of Linear B tablets discussed, helpfully organised by site, and an index of Linear B words and syllabograms.

## **Bibliography**

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