

MYCENAEAN SOCIETY AND KINGSHIP: *CUI BONO?* A COUNTER-SPECULATIVE VIEW

In his recently completed dissertation, Dimitri Nakassis analyzes theoretical approaches to understanding how states form and how they operate.¹ He points out that most archaeological definitions of 'state' rely on Weber's classic definition of a 'state' as "a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of force within a given territory,"² while Bourdieu (1999) emphasizes the state's claim on both physical and symbolic violence.³ Power, which is just another way of talking about the ability to use compelling and coercive force, is the first element of John Cherry's classic definition of 'state' in an Aegean context: "a *powerful, complex, permanently instituted system of centralized political administration*"⁴ (italics mine).

I take the opportunity of the Epos conference to consider three important recent (in the last decade) negative appraisals of Mycenaean rulers and the Mycenaean palatial system as a whole (Deger-Jalkotzy,⁵ Sherratt,⁶ and, the most extreme and philosophical, Kopcke⁷). These are chosen for four reasons. First, they have had a cumulative weight in that the most recent appraisal by Kopcke relies on Deger-Jalkotzy's and Sherratt's appraisals. Second, these three studies are methodologically diverse and use different perspectives, methods and critical assumptions to arrive at their negative conclusions about the Mycenaean palatial system and how its kings and elites exerted their power. Third, they all have some bearing upon the evidence offered by the epic tradition. Fourth, oral song tradition (*epos*) and public performance literature derived from it served key cultural functions in ancient Greek society from the Bronze Age down through the classical period. Through epic, drama, and other forms of socialized song the Greeks themselves made judgments about the Mycenaean period and used many different visions of the Bronze Age past to reflect upon important contemporary issues. Discussing how three important modern scholars view the same period gives us the opportunity to understand how human beings in the remote past felt about the world around them. It also will help us to think about how we should evaluate the 'success' or 'failure' of systems of human social organization.

Kopcke's article begins with a reference to a Platonic dialogue (see below). I take this as an invitation to engage in constructive dialogue with the arguments employed by Kopcke, Sherratt and Deger-Jalkotzy in the positive sense in which this form of inquiry was employed by Socrates and Plato, in search of things that should not escape our notice, i.e., things that were *a-lethes*, what the Greeks called 'true.' In what follows I italicize key elements of Deger-Jalkotzy's, Sherratt's and Kopcke's reconstructions that are vital to our understanding of Mycenaean rulers and the palatial system over which they presided. I.e., all italics are mine, unless otherwise noted.

- 1 D. NAKASSIS, *The Individual and the Mycenaean State: Agency and Prosopography in the Linear B Texts from Pylos* (Ph.D. University of Texas at Austin 2006) 1-41.
- 2 H.H. GERTY and C. WRIGHT (eds), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (1946) 78.
- 3 P. BOURDIEU, "Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field," in G. STEINMETZ (ed.), *State/Culture: State Formation after the Cultural Turn* (1999) 56.
- 4 J. CHERRY, "The Emergence of the State in the Prehistoric Aegean," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* (1984) 23.
- 5 S. DEGER-JALKOTZY, "On the Negative Aspects of the Mycenaean Palace System," in E. DE MIRO, L. GODART and A. SACCONI (eds), *Atti e Memorie del Secondo Congresso Internazionale di Micenologia* (1996) vol. II, 715-728.
- 6 S. SHERRATT, "Potemkin Palaces and Route-Based Economies," in S. VOUTSAKI and J. KILLEN (eds), *Economy and Politics in the Mycenaean Palace States* (2001) 214-238.
- 7 G. KOPCKE, "Mycenaean Kingship—A Speculative View," in R. ROLLINGER and C. ULF (eds), *Commerce and Monetary Systems in the Ancient World: Means of Transmission and Cultural Interaction* (2004) 170-180.

Deger-Jalkotzy works as an ancient historian thoroughly familiar with material remains and the Linear B records. She concentrates on how the Mycenaean palatial states in different regions look archaeologically at two critical stages: first, developing out of the Middle Helladic tradition and later, transitioning into the IIIC post-palatial period and Dark Ages. As an ancient historian, Deger-Jalkotzy tries to assess “*the high achievements of the Mycenaean palace system in the field of economical, social, political and governmental organization and administration*” “within the evolution of the political institutions and the governmental structures of the Greeks” (p. 715).

Looking at the broad sweep of Greek prehistory and history is, I believe, absolutely necessary. It lets us see what was empirically possible for the Mycenaean Greeks, under the conditions imposed by the Greek environment, to achieve in terms of ‘state’ formation and structures. Taking a broad view will minimize any tendency to exaggerate presumed or real strengths and weaknesses. Deger-Jalkotzy also takes into account, in a general and undefined way, myths and epics.

In Deger-Jalkotzy’s opinion (p. 728): “[T]here can be no doubt about the *high cultural achievements* of the Mycenaean palaces and of *their great contribution to Greek art and to Greek civilization* in general. It may be added that the Mycenaean palace system was the *first experiment* of the Greeks with *big power policy*. It was at that period that Mycenaean expansion reached its zenith and that the Mycenaean palaces took over the leading economical and possibly also political role throughout the Aegean. They *entertained relations with the states and empires of the Ancient Near East* and presumably with the peoples of the ‘High Barbary,’ too. Their far-reaching economical and political activities were made possible by *their creation of a social and governmental system which may be called a state even in the sense of modern jurisprudence*.” Kopcke and, to a lesser extent, Sherratt disagree with the points I have italicized in this paragraph.

For her last conclusion, Deger-Jalkotzy relies on her own earlier exacting analyses of the Linear B evidence for social structure, land ownership and use, and ‘Herrschaftsformen’ (cited on pp. 715-716, nn. 2-3). This gives her work the kind of authority that Kopcke’s and Sherratt’s lack: the ability to work carefully and firsthand with the documentation of the Linear B texts.

Still, Deger-Jalkotzy arrives at a negative assessment of the Mycenaean ‘state’ in line with Sherratt’s and Kopcke’s: “[T]he Mycenaean palace system was bound to fail because it rested on principles which were not in keeping with the Greek conditions.” *Epos* and myth, in her opinion, reinforce her conclusion: “The Greeks themselves seem to have preserved a *quite ambiguous attitude towards this great era of their past*. Their myths and epics tell about the wealth and glory of a remote antiquity. But the ruins of the Mycenaean palaces were also contaminated with stories about *hybris* and *abuse of power*, about *all sorts of scandal*, about *deceit and murder*. Of course, these tales cannot be taken as a historical tradition. But they may well have transported the message that *the Mycenaean palace system was not a suitable kind of government for Greeks*.” [All italics mine.]

I think that there are alternative ways of viewing the realities underlying both of Deger-Jalkotzy’s opinions here: (1) the suitability or not of the Mycenaean palatial system to Greek conditions; and (2) how *epos*, by which I mean here the major poems attributed to Homer and Hesiod, and their derivatives in communal works like Greek tragedy, view the Mycenaean past.

I think it is important to distinguish between the basic vision in later epic of the Mycenaean period and Mycenaean kings and how that vision is used for purposes of enculturation in the 7th-, 6th- and 5th centuries BCE.⁸ The epics themselves and the tragedies that use myths about the past transmitted social messages related to contemporary concerns. To use two simple examples, no one would mistake Euripides’ *Bacchae* for an accurate appraisal of how Euripides and the Athenians ca. 406 BCE viewed Mycenaean religious attitudes toward the cult of Dionysos, now securely attested at Pylos and Khania in the Linear B records. Nor is Euripides’ *Trojan Women* a historical commentary on Mycenaean excesses in warfare.

⁸ See now on the evolution of kingship and power figures from prehistory into history, the important collection of papers: S. DEGER-JALKOTZY and I.S. LEMOS (eds), *Ancient Greece from the Mycenaean Palaces to the Age of Homer* (2006); and I. MYLONAS SHEAR, *Kingship in the Mycenaean World and Its Reflections in the Oral Tradition* (2004).

As for *hybris* and abuses of power, no period of later Greek history and virtually no historical *polis* is without abundant individual examples. I use below the historical examples of the Peisistratid dictatorship and the Athenian empire. We can extend this further using the wise dictum of Lord Acton: “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men.”⁹

Hesiod’s *Works and Days* gives us his criticism of the shortcomings of *basileis* in Boeotia ca. 700 BCE in comparison with the kingly ideal. Because the religious sensibilities of Mycenaean kings is an issue for Kopcke, we should note that Hesiod views proper kingship to occur when kings behave reverently in connection with divine power and authority and transmit divinely ordained justice into the human realm.

We may also note the use of contemporary political subtexts in tragedies like Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*¹⁰ and Sophocles’ *Ajax*¹¹ and *Oedipus Tyrannus*.¹² In general I think that the image of the palatial past, as it is imbedded in the Homeric epics—acknowledging that this is complicated by rival notions of whether we are dealing with dictated or evolutionary texts and just when the texts were ‘written down’ and just what periods they are representing (cf. Stephen Reece for a comprehensive overview of theories of the genesis and fixing of the epics¹³)—is positive (*pace* Kopcke even on Achilles’ selfishness).

Hesiod emphasizes the savage and war-like nature of the Age of Bronze. He sees its bellicosity as a main reason for its demise. But he affords his age of heroes, i.e., those who fought for the cattle of Oedipus around Kadmean Thebes and those who went off to fight at Troy, the exceptional honor of a god-granted after-life in the Islands of the Blessed. And in his view, even the belligerent Bronze Age was superior to the bleak conditions that prevailed for the average farmer citizen in the late 8th century BCE.

Deger-Jalkotzy makes two very compelling points that any assessment of the Mycenaean palatial system and its rulers must confront:

1. during the high period of Mycenaean palatial civilization, considerable portions of what we later consider the core areas of Greek *polis* culture on the mainland (i.e., east central Greece and the Peloponnese) like Achaea and Elis were “provinces in the disparaging meaning of the word” and did not share in the material benefits of high palatial culture (pp. 726-727).

2. “by LH IIIC Middle all provinces of Mycenaean Greece enjoyed prosperity and... economic enterprise and foreign relations were open to them all” (p. 728).

These are harsh indictments against the “extremely centralistic and monopolizing character of Mycenaean palatial government.” In Deger-Jalkotzy’s view, while the palatial system existed, large areas were marginalized and did not share in the material advantages of the palatial system. Roughly fifty years after the palaces disappeared, a widespread general (albeit lower level of) prosperity prevailed, but no centers during this immediately post-palatial period reached the level of power and wealth of the former palatial centers.

Of what then is the palatial system found guilty? It is held responsible for standing in the way of achieving the greatest and most stable good for the greatest number. This is a standard empirical definition of political prosperity or happiness, Greek *eudaimonia*. It represents a compromise definition of effective political systems of the kind that Aristotle uses in evaluating different forms of *politeiai* in his *Politics*. Recall that Aristotle viewed kingship as the best form

9 We see such abuse now in the direction of American foreign policy by neocon thinkers, even those, like Victor Davis Hanson, who have a professional grasp of the ancient historical data, but misuse it for hybristic purposes. Hanson offers in May 2006 his opinion that the Iraq War that he supported vigorously and publicly has been, with some reservations, a noteworthy success: <http://www.victorhanson.com/articles/hanson052606.html>.

10 See most recently, A.M. BOWIE, “Religion and Politics in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*,” *Classical Quarterly* 43:1 (1993) 10-31, for the handling of political changes through the medium of tragic performance, and for the broad range of modern opinion on how to interpret an ancient tragedian’s own attitudes about those changes.

11 For a recent reiteration of the long-held view that the historical figure of the Athenian statesman Cimon is somehow behind Sophocles’ treatment of the Homeric hero Ajax, see J. BEER, *Sophocles and the Tragedy of Athenian Democracy* (2004).

12 See the classic study by V. EHRENBERG, *Sophocles and Pericles* (1954).

13 S. REECE, “Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*: From Oral Performance to Written Text,” in *New Directions in Oral Theory. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* (2005) 43-90.

of government if the king would rule justly. Aristotle eventually views democracy as the best feasible form, because its aberrant forms are not as harmful as aberrant forms of kingship. This kind of reasoning, in fact, is very similar to Deger-Jalkotzy's answer to the question in my title: *cui bono?*, i.e., for whose good is it?

I shall come back to these main points and others that I have stressed with italics, at least to explore their underlying assumptions and to view them from a different vantage point. But first, let us consider the other two assessments of Mycenaean palatial culture and how they differ from Deger-Jalkotzy's.

Sherratt (pp. 214-215) studies the very essence of Mycenaean palatial culture, the self-definition of the palace centers, in order to arrive at a better model for explaining just what the Mycenaean palatial system was and how it worked. Her insights are compelling and complementary to Deger-Jalkotzy's. Sherratt first calls attention to the "*curiously shallow-rooted nature of some of the most characteristic features*" of the Mycenaean palaces: the use of Linear B writing to keep records, figured frescoes, and the architectural layout of the palace centers. She asks us to consider why such features did not persist after the collapse of the palatial system at the end of LH IIIB.

Why did writing not survive in some form? This is a good question, especially if we assume that some fair number of the identifiable tablet-writers (whether identical with palatial administrators or not) we know operated within the palatial orbit at Pylos, Thebes and Mycenae in the three principal well-documented high-level Mycenaean palatial territories, themselves survived the destruction of the palaces.¹⁴ The best answer I can give is that writing was used to make possible all the positive social, economic and cultural improvements of the palatial period. It was a tool used for sophisticated system-management. When those complex palatial systems disappeared, writing, in this predominantly oral culture, disappeared also. But it seems to me somewhat misguided to criticize the Mycenaean palatial system for the eventual loss of writing, when they had developed writing to a level of sophistication far beyond its attested uses in, say, Minoan culture.

Why did the core palatial form not survive, with modifications, "in the residences and organizational centres of new social leaders or ex-palatial subjects"? This is also a good question, again given the presumed survival of *te-ko-to-ne* (carpenter-builders) and *to-ko-do-mo* (wall builders) and other building artisans recorded in the Linear B tablets. Likewise, why did elites not continue to want, and artisans continue to paint, frescoes of palatial quality in LH IIIC? We shall formulate an answer to these questions below.

More important in many ways than the lack of survival of these features into the immediate post-palatial period is Sherratt's observation that these three key features (writing, architecture, and fresco stylistics and programmatic) were static throughout a period of "*possibly up to two hundred years*." Please keep this point about time period in mind.

Sherratt proposes that "these cultural symbols were used...flat-footedly and superficially in the cause of palatial self-definition and self-presentation" within "a rigid, inflexible and essentially static notion of what constitutes a palace." This leads to her perceptive follow-up question as to whether what I would call here the existence and persistence of a standardized 'tool kit' of palatial self-definition implies that the palaces were "*in large part dependent on the contingencies and activities of the surrounding world over which, fundamentally, they had little real control.*"

This last observation of Sherratt's I think is crucial for any assessment of the Mycenaean palatial system. I think this for two reasons.

First, as I have already mentioned in discussing Deger-Jalkotzy's theories, Sherratt's insight asks us to consider what is possible for any 'state' to achieve within the physical environment of the ancient Greek mainland and at any particular historical period within Greek prehistory and history. That is, we have to factor in what resources were at the disposal of any forming

¹⁴ See T.G. PALAIMA, "Archives' and 'Scribes' and Information Hierarchy in Mycenaean Greek Linear B Records," in M. BROSNIUS (ed.), *Ancient Archives and Archival Traditions* (2003) 153-194; and "Comments on Mycenaean Literacy," in J.T. KILLEEN, J.L. MELENA, J.-P. OLIVIER (eds), *Studies in Mycenaean and Classical Greek Presented to John Chadwick* (1987) 499-510.

or existing ‘state.’ We also have to consider what was going on with surrounding high cultures and the already established networks of economic trade, international power diplomacy, and cultural exchange and power ranking.

Second, although these are not the conclusions Sherratt necessarily draws, her critique implies that the palatial centers and their rulers were not the all-controlling and oppressive micro-managers that, as we shall see, Kopcke’s extreme view makes of them. Nor are they the brutish ‘ape-neck Sweeneys’ he makes them out to be.

My own view is that these centers, both in their formative and in their fully developed stages, relied much more on strategies of negotiation with and cooptation of existing regional social, political and economic structures and individuals—and that the mainly late LH IIIB Linear B texts support this view.¹⁵ Deger-Jalkotzy herself emphasizes the importance of kin groups, descent groups, local communities, community leaders and councils of elders in making the Mycenaean palatial system viable, and, we should say, beneficial to a wide range and number of human beings, families, villages, clans.¹⁶

Underlying Sherratt’s—and Deger-Jalkotzy’s and Kopcke’s—observations and critical insights, are a series of unstated important questions. We should ask them here.

How did the palaces relate to the populations and physical conditions of the regions surrounding them?

How did they relate to each other?

How did they relate to the greater world of the Near and Middle East?

Sherratt argues against some of Deger-Jalkotzy’s reading of, for lack of better words, the ‘greatness’ and ‘importance’ and even ‘cultural significance’ of the Mycenaean palaces.¹⁷ Sherratt (p. 217) warns against being “overimpressed by the idea of the *palaces as sophisticated political, economic and cultural institutions and centres of international ‘civilization’*” and also by the “*assumed incentive and ability of their rulers to engage personally and regularly with the literate rulers of the east, in direct and unfiltered lines of communication.*”

I should say here that as someone focused on the textual evidence from the Late Bronze Age, I have never assumed for the Mycenaeans and their palatial-period rulers—even while accepting the equation of some Mycenaean palatial center or centers with the *Ahhiyawa*—the extreme form of high status implied in Sherratt’s last point. At the same time, I do not hold the palatial system responsible for not reaching the level of greatness or prestige of surrounding high cultures formed over a much longer period and developing out of and operating under very different conditions.

I would argue that the outcome of Mycenaean civilization was largely determined by the resource limitations of the different Mycenaean palatial regions. If we vilify Mycenaean palatial society for not bringing regions like Achaea and Elis (Deger-Jalkotzy above) up to palatial standards of culture, should we not likewise criticize later Greek polis culture for what prevailed in Spartan-dominated Messenia during the 7th, 6th and 5th centuries BCE? For that matter, should we not take our cue from Thucydides in his *archaeologia* (1.10) and conclude—and I am being absolutely serious here—that, judging by material and inscriptional remains (and, as we know, the clear social realities), the Greek polis-form of ‘state’ created conditions that left the whole lower half of the Peloponnese (Laconia and Messenia) in a state of cultural marginalization. And how do the Greek city-states of the high period of polis culture, the 6th, 5th and 4th centuries BCE, outside of the core major poleis of central Greece and the coast of

15 See T.G. PALAIMA, “Sacrificial Feasting in the Linear B tablets,” in J.C. WRIGHT (ed.), *The Mycenaean Feast* (2004) 225-226 and note 60; and J. BENNETT, “The Linear B Archives and the Kingdom of Nestor,” in J.L. DAVIS (ed.), *Sandy Pylos* (1998) 125-127, for a succinct view of the late formation of a unified palatial kingdom in Messenia.

16 S. DEGER-JALKOTZY, “Working for the Palace: Some Observations on PY An 261,” in J. BENNETT and J. DRIESSEN (eds), *A-NA-QO-TA. Festschrift for J.T. Killen* (2002) 65-81, especially 76-77.

17 Kopcke, as we shall see below, goes even further in a negative direction.

Anatolia, compare with the power and sophistication of the Persian Empire and Egypt? And at what price in terms of the single-minded and self-serving use of military power (and slave labor)¹⁸ was the greatness of imperial Athens achieved?

Sherratt offers the 'hillfort model' (pp. 224-230) as a way of explaining the characteristics of the Mycenaean palaces as she has identified them. The palaces—and here I paraphrase instead of directly quoting—are disappointingly small in comparison with 'states' in the Near East or even earlier on Minoan Crete; their design and self-conception has the tool-kit simplicity already described; and they are concerned with controlling their own territories with an aim toward "the large-scale manufacture of value-added goods" that would be used in trade. She views the palatial rulers as the continuation of an overtly warrior society. Textually, iconographically and archaeozoologically well-documented practices of communal feasting and drinking were necessary for the palatial elite to promote clientage. Palatial frescoes in her mind (p. 230) show a surprising uniformity of theme and lack "any very subtle ideological potential they could have offered." And the writing system (p. 230) was also used in "unimaginatively limited application."

Sherratt produces an overall picture of the Mycenaean palaces not so much as territorial states, but as strategic placements that supervised and militarily protected coherent segments of longer-distance trade networks (pp. 231-232). Sherratt (pp. 234-235) agrees with Deger-Jalkotzy in emphasizing the prosperity of many regions in the period following the collapse of the palatial system—Messenia being an exception. She posits that the problem in post-palatial Messenia may have been being by-passed by changes in trade routes and who controlled them.

No matter what the reasons were for the territory-wide lack of prosperity in post-palatial Messenia, we should conduct an imaginary survey of the approximately one thousand individuals mentioned by name in the Pylos tablets.¹⁹ We should ask them whether they felt 'liberated' by the demise of the Palace of Nestor. These individuals cooperated with and benefited from the palatial system of organization. They worked as skilled artisans, crafts people, economic managers, priests (and no doubt honorific 'servants') of the gods, livestock owners and caretakers, and palatial and regional officials. They were rewarded with secure and protected landholdings and with a stable market for their products from agriculture and livestock-herding and from various forms of crafts work.

Through the palatial system these thousand named individuals and their families and extended clans had access to non-local foodstuffs, spices, foreign manufactured goods and raw materials. They were able to obtain implements that they could use in building, husbandry, horticulture, food-processing, crafts production, shipbuilding, chariot construction, domestic and palatial architecture, and warfare. These implements were made from an alloy of raw metals (copper and tin) that were not found locally, and could only be obtained by developing the production of manufactured items that other cultures would want. Most importantly of all, the Mycenaean palatial system provided protection through organized armed forces. These armed forces were themselves dependent on the Mycenaean manufacture of weaponry.²⁰

Let us just imagine what life must have been like for the broad middle-class of Mycenaeans and those above and below, in the decades after the palaces collapsed.

18 For a blunt appraisal of the tyrannical and bloody use of power by imperial Athens, see the last speech of Pericles in Thucydides 2.59-64. See the estimates of the slave labor force working in the Laureion mining district through time (413-307 BCE) given in Y. GARLAN, *Les esclaves en Grèce ancienne* (1984) 77-79. The Athenian statesman and general Nicias owned 1,000 such slaves. The orator Demosthenes inherited two workshops with 32 and 33 slave workers respectively.

19 See NAKASSIS (*supra* n. 1) 154. There are ca. 1,000 individuals mentioned by name in the extant Pylos tablets. Ca. 4,100 individuals are somehow connected to and dependent upon the central palace for their food, livelihood or 'creature comforts.' This is out of an estimated overall population of ca. 50,000 in the region of Messenia.

20 Texts of the Jn series at Pylos, and especially tablet Jn 829, attest to systematic production of bronze objects, the recycling of used bronze agricultural and horticultural implements, and the manufacture of weaponry. For Jn 829, see M. VENTRIS and J. CHADWICK, *Documents in Mycenaean Greek* (1973) 357-358, 511-514. For the individuals who served as collectors, see J.-P. OLIVIER, "Les collecteurs": Leur distribution spatiale et temporelle," in VOUTSAKI and KILLEN (*supra* n. 6) 139-157.

In Sherratt's view, the Mycenaean palaces were "client-based warrior societies onto which the outward trappings of a derivative, and essentially symbolic, idea of 'palatial' civilization were somewhat clumsily grafted." These centers had "limited international contacts by comparison with the palaces of Crete and the Near East." Their *raison d'être* was to serve as nodal points along long-distance trade routes. Sherratt (p. 238) then views the palaces as "an essentially transient phenomena" that had a "brief economic and social viability" from "being in the right place at the right time in the history of Mediterranean maritime interaction."

As hard as it might be to imagine at this point, Kopcke's view of Mycenaean palaces and rulers is the most negative. He begins (p. 170) with the Platonic proposition (*Laws* V 73D-E) that 'love of self,' i.e., self-interest, is the greatest of evils, a characteristic that he sees in Greek culture from the earliest days of the Shaft Graves onward. Kopcke is relentless in seeing as negative what an experienced high-level military expert and pragmatic historian like Thucydides would see as proper and necessary responses to prevailing conditions.

Recall that in his *archaeologia* (1.1-22) Thucydides emphasizes throughout past history, from the Bronze Age to the late 5th century: (1) the serious poverty of Greece; (2) the fierce competition for regions that had a higher level of agricultural yield than the 18% arable land of Attica; (3) the instability that competition brought; and (4) that the simple goal of rival *ethne* or *poleis* was accumulation of resources in order to achieve *autarkeia* (self-sufficiency and self-determination) by the simple means of having enough power to protect what they had and even to acquire more. There is no sense in Thucydides that such a natural response to natural conditions was in any way a bad thing. It was what had to be done for 'states' in Greece to achieve stability, an absolute prerequisite for *to eu zen* 'living well,' the highest aim of the historical *polis*. Neither high culture nor military power was attainable without surplus resources.

Kopcke takes Achilles as the prime example of a heroic "self-centredness" that reflects "the innate traits of the poet's audience." He here implies that unalloyed selfishness was the quintessential Greek cultural trait and that the Greeks had a monopoly on it. This interpretation can only come from a hopelessly flat and uninformed reading of the *Iliad*. It can be corrected easily by understanding the hard military ethos that gave rise to the *Iliad* and by reading something like Jonathan Shay's *Achilles in Vietnam*. Shay helps us to understand that Achilles served as a cultural representative of the effects of extreme combat trauma.²¹

Shay, with his deep understanding of the minds and souls of battle veterans—and almost all Greek men of all periods were battle veterans—points out the true nobility of Achilles' character: (1) his 23 successful sackings of neighboring communities, *sine quibus non* that provided the essential support of the Greek expedition at Troy; (2) his exceptional courage in being the only Greek regional leader to try to explain to Agamemnon what all commanders and all the troops knew, that his (Agamemnon's) selfish and sacrilegious behavior towards the priest of Apollo was responsible for the plague killing off the pack animals and the troops; (3) his attempt to handle the matter deftly and diplomatically in common council, with the help of the seer Calchas, so that divine authority would be brought to bear on the matter as well; (4) Andromache's admission that Achilles had been a pious conqueror in affording her father proper burial rites after Achilles sacked their town; and (5) the testimony of Lycaon, that Achilles had shown due mercy on the battlefield, before the death of Patroclus.

The lesson of Achilles is that noble warrior character can be ruined by high command abuse. But it also can be recovered, as we see in Book 23, when Achilles presides over the funeral games that reintegrate him into society, and in Book 24 when he meets and sympathizes, in the literal sense, with Priam and takes all due precautions to see to it that Priam and Hector's corpse make it back to Troy safely and that Priam and the Trojans have the proper length of truce to bury their fallen son and hero.²²

21 J. SHAY, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (1994).

22 See also now L. GOLDEN, *Understanding the Iliad* (2006), which argues convincingly that the figure of Achilles in the *Iliad* has a didactic purpose as an example of humane pathos. Achilles is transformed through 'emotional and psychological anguish' and thereby transcends the 'kill or be killed' aspects of a materialistic warrior code.

Kopcke's (p. 171) assessment of the Mycenaean palaces and their rulers continues in the same vein, often making gross assumptions or passing over available evidence. According to Kopcke, the *wanaks* was willful master of all he surveyed. "The rule of law we know did not exist." This is a bald and completely unsupportable assertion. Kopcke claims: "Custom, prudence imposed barriers, but barriers probably light enough to breach, given the will to do so." This again substitutes assertion for reasoning. It does not even use imaginative reconstruction to posit what kinds of factors might curtail the powers of the Mycenaean *wanaks*.

There is evidence in the Linear B texts that speaks directly to the other sources of power within the Mycenaean palatial system that no palatial ruler could be unaware of or breach with light exertion. If Kopcke needs a paradigm, he can find it in the *Iliad*, where Zeus time and again is constrained by the pragmatic politics of Olympus and the need to maintain harmony among various divine factions. And Hesiod, whose fable of the hawk and the nightingale is a lesson in pure power politics (and one the Athenians may have subconsciously remembered in 427 BCE when they changed their minds about Mytilene), makes clear that the position of even the supreme leader of the Olympian gods is not secure, much rather the limited power of local petty (and we should note *post*-Mycenaean) chieftains.

Kopcke asserts (p. 171), "A restraining, regulating factor could have been religion and probably was. But again what kind of protection was extended to whom and for what duration is anybody's guess." Kopcke takes this series of assumptions to their rightful conclusion (p. 171): "[Mycenaean] Greek practice may have veered to the anarchic, favoring crude autocracy." "The king was not as in the East the one chosen by the gods to look after his people. There are not temples to speak of, and we are sure that there was no priesthood safekeeping sacred ordinances."

If we need temples to speak of, we find them on Pylos tablet Jn 829, wherein each of the well-organized sixteen districts into which the territory of Messenia is divided clearly has the wherewithal to provide recycled bronze from their temples (*naoi*, literally 'dwelling places' of the gods), explicitly referenced via the term *ka-ko na-wi-jo*. Pylos tablet Tn 316 informs us of the many sanctuary sites within the general region of *pakijane*. And Mycenaean Crete abounds with sanctuaries.²³ All these receive due offerings.

Likewise, priests (*i-je-re-u*), priestesses (*i-je-re-ja*), probable sacrificiants (*i-je-ro-wo-ko*), overseers of sacrificial banqueting provisions and implements (*o-pi-te-u-ke-e-u*, and *o-wi-de-ta*), and numerous individuals with the status known as 'servants' of the deity (*not* 'slaves') are attested. (There are also other prominent religious officials known as *klawiphoroi* and *du-mate*).²⁴ Given the special relationship, again attested in the Linear B records, which seems to exist at Pylos between the *wanaks* and the deity known as *potnia* (compare the relationship between the Hittite kings and the Sun Goddess of Arinna) it is almost impossible for me to entertain the notion of Mycenaean kings who were not restrained by religious instincts and in close communion with the divine sphere.

Again we cannot prove when the epithets and expressions linking the Mycenaean kings with divine selection came into being (e.g., *diogenes* and *diotrephe*, 'Zeus-born' and 'Zeus-nourished') within the epic tradition, but they are conspicuous in Homer and there is good reason to think that the very word the Mycenaeans used for king (*wanaks*) was associated with communal fertility and well-being.²⁵ See also the connection between the very clear religious iconographical program of the megaron complex at Pylos and the arguably traditional image of Nestor as pious *wanaks* and unifier of his palatial territory.²⁶

Kopcke criticizes the Mycenaean palatial system, both at its centers and in its outlying landscape (major and minor towns) for not showing signs of material prosperity and aesthetic taste similar to Crete or the Near Eastern and Egyptian 'states.' The relative poverty of the

²³ See S. HILLER, "Mykenische Heiligtümer: Das Zeugnis der Linear B-Texte," in R. HÄGG and N. MARINATOS (eds), *Sanctuaries and Cults in the Aegean Bronze Age* (1981) 95-126.

²⁴ For Mycenaean religious references, see T.G. PALAIMA, "Linear B Sources," in S. TRZASKOMA, R. SCOTT SMITH, and S. BRUNET (eds), *Anthology of Classical Myth: Primary Sources in Translation* (2004) 439-454, especially pp. 450-452 for Pylos Tn 316.

²⁵ PALAIMA in DEGER-JALKOTZY and LEMOS (*supra* n. 8) 57-63.

²⁶ E. COOK and T.G. PALAIMA, "New Perspectives on Pylian Cults: Sacrifice and Society in the *Odyssey*," APA paper, San Diego 2001, <http://www.apaclassics.org/AnnualMeeting/01mtg/abstracts/cook.html>.

Middle Helladic period, which he calls “*four hundred years of egregious insignificance*,” in his opinion, was brought to some kind of end with the Mycenaean conquest of Crete. In Kopcke’s view, this conquest briefly raised the standard of wealth for the warrior chieftains and increased their appetites with negative consequences. They wanted more of the same and could not attain it with ease. The end result “was a well-known Greek characteristic, exploitative over-reaching” (p. 175).

According to Kopcke, the Palace of Nestor is architecturally impressive (contrast Sherratt here), but it is the only such center in all of Messenia. Kopcke sees the Mycenaean king as “lord and master of depressed peons.” He cannot imagine the Mycenaean palatial elites being called connoisseurs. The art of the period is too impoverished in quality and conception, little above the level of the Shaft Graves. The earlier influence of Cretan metallic and glyptic art has disappeared. “*Mycenaeans remained Middle Bronze Age peasants*” (p. 174).

Frescoes that Sherratt considered surprisingly uniform in quality, Kopcke calls “dully repetitive, and more often than not not very well executed” (p. 173 n. 19). Worse still the Mycenaeans of the palatial period seem to Kopcke to have been unreceptive to influence from the Near East of the kind that led to the later Greek renaissance of the 9th and 8th centuries BCE.

Such an extreme and single-minded reading as Kopcke’s of the entire Greek experience, but particularly of the Mycenaean palatial period, can have a positive effect. Its extremism invites reaction and also throws into highlight what is sound, sensible and well-informed in Deger-Jalkotzy and Sherratt, who, as we have seen, criticize what they see as the negative features of Mycenaean palatial culture at much lower decibel levels.

I have already responded to some particular points above. Let us look at what the Mycenaean palatial centers and their rulers did achieve with extremely limited resources.

First, I think it is right to question assertions made about the unsuitability and unsustainability of the Mycenaean palatial system, its so-called shallow-rootedness. Even conservatively estimated, some form of palatial culture was in existence for something like 200-250 years, perhaps even longer. This is longer than the period of the free democratic Athenian polis (507-322 BCE), even disregarding its sack by the Persians in 480-479 BCE and its right-wing governmental coups at the end of the fifth century BCE.

The late Nicholas Hammond once told me that a year in antiquity is as long as a year now. How does 250 years of the Mycenaean palatial system match up in stability with the Soviet Union, Germany from 1860 to the present, Spain and Italy in the twentieth century? The United States is just approaching this mark.

If one wants examples of the symbiosis and mutual interdependence of high connoisseurship and exploitative over-reaching, one need only read Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and the first chapters of James Bradley’s *Flyboys*,²⁷ or listen to Woody Guthrie’s “Ludlow Massacre” and “1913 Massacre,”²⁸ and contemplate at what cost luxury artifacts adorned European royal palaces or found their way into the Metropolitan Museum of Art. What are we to make of the series of recent British official apologies or near-apologies for their use of slavery, for the mass starvation they allowed to prevail during the Irish potato famine, for the near genocide of the Maoris in the 1860s and the Amritsar Massacre in the Punjab in 1919?²⁹ This at least makes us aware that judging civilizations according to personal tastes concerning their artistic or cultural achievements leaves out the crucial element of moral action.

The Mycenaean rulers and their palaces did ‘overlay’ pre-existing systems. But there are no signs that they did this by widespread use of force, by destroying towns and communities in the very territories they eventually controlled. Rather, we should consider that they came into being through negotiation with and cooptation of existing systems of social organization and local and regional elites. The model would be something like later Athenian *synoikismos*, keeping

27 J. BRADLEY, *Flyboys: A True Story of Courage* (2003).

28 http://www.lyricsfreak.com/w/woody+guthrie/ludlow+massacre_20233150.html and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludlow_Massacre.

29 See C. BROWN, “Blair admits to ‘deep sorrow’ over slavery—but no apology,” *The Independent* (27 November 2006) <http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/politics/article2018756.ece>.

in mind that even that tradition must disguise fierce competition and, as with the origins of democracy in Athens between 511-507 BCE, rivalries involving such things as assassinations, the use of even external military force, and power compromises among aristocratic factions.

In the Pylos texts, it is clear that the *wanaks* functions alongside and in clear regard for local collective land organizations known as *damoi* and their representatives known as *telestai*, land organizations representing incoming population groups (*wo-ro-ki-jo-ne-jo ka-ma*), and the figure of the *lawage(r)tas*.³⁰ The palatial system also made use, as we have mentioned, of private individuals out in their territories known as 'collectors.' These individuals maintained a good measure of autonomy and managed certain economic resources in exchange for benefits that the palatial system made available.

As we have also mentioned, the extant Pylos records alone list ca. 1,000 named individuals who benefited directly from involvement in the palatial economic system. They are distributed throughout the kingdom and perform services or contribute materials and products in return for rewards in a system that mirrors the Hittite in terminology. I am sure if you asked any of these thousand Mycenaeans if he viewed himself as a peon, he would probably say no. The same can be said for the 2,000 individuals who participated regularly in communal banquets. And our texts are incomplete.

Stefan Hiller has estimated that the dependent labor force in Messenia reached 3,000-5,000 persons.³¹ Some are clearly slaves,³² a fact of life in the Near and Middle East, in Egypt and in Greece. Others are anonymous individuals who receive allotments that undoubtedly make their lives livable in a countryside that they might have had to consider emigrating from, were it not for the economic engine of the palatial system.

Wallbuilding, the construction of ships, metallurgical work, chariot construction, furniture-making, work with gold and blue-glass paste, and military service are all textually attested as 'non-slave' labor activities. Many of these specialized 'palatial' occupations disappeared with the collapse of the palatial system.³³ Many also vanish completely from the Greek lexicon.

No doubt the material basis for the livelihoods of the people who used these refined skills also disappeared. Here, too, as Deger-Jalkotzy has shown, during the palatial period, the palace used not compulsory force, but negotiated arrangements with heads of *gerousiai*, with local big men known as *qa-si-re-we*, and with clan groups and sib-groups.³⁴

I have no doubt that an art historian used to the wonders of Near Eastern glyptic or Egyptian painting or the monumental use of writing in combination with figural decoration is unimpressed by the levels of aesthetic attainment of Mycenaean palatial society in these areas. But this does not justify contempt for what the Mycenaeans did achieve.

I do not think that it is an accident that the vision of stable kingship we get in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* is positive. Inhabitants of Mycenaean palatial territories, I would hazard, preferred the stability of a righteous and pious *wanaks* to the kind of regional rivalries we see in Ithaca in Odysseus' absence, or in mid-sixth century Athens with its terrible, but historically massaged outcome: the thuggish Peisistratus, who at various points brought a foreign military force into his own country, moved about in the company of club-wielding bodyguards, exiled the children of aristocratic rivals to islands where his 'friends' could see to their 'safe-keeping,' preyed upon the religious naiveté of the common Athenians, and even showed up in court to face a murder charge—when, surprise, the chief witness never showed up.

30 See the recently completed dissertation by S. NIKOLOUDIS, "The *ra-wa-ke-ta*, Ministerial Authority and Mycenaean Cultural Continuity" (Ph.D. University of Texas at Austin 2006).

31 S. HILLER, "Dependent Personnel in Mycenaean Texts," in M. HELZER and E. LIPINSKI (eds), *Society and Economy in the Eastern Mediterranean, c. 1500-1000 B.C.* (1988) 171-201.

32 The slaves function mainly in cloth production and bronze working, see J. CHADWICK, "The Women of Pylos," in J.-P. OLIVIER and T.G. PALAIMA (eds), *Texts, Tablets and Scribes: Studies in Mycenaean Epigraphy and Economy Offered to Emmett L. Bennett, Jr.* (1988) 43-95. For the bronzesmiths and their slaves, see M. LEJEUNE, "Les forgerons de Pylos," *Historia* 10 (1961) 409-434. For terminology relating to slavery, see M. LEJEUNE, "Textes mycéniens relatifs aux esclaves," *Historia* 8 (1959) 129-144.

33 See A. MORPURGO DAVIES, "Terminology of Power and Terminology of Work in Greek and Linear B," in A. HEUBECK and G. NEUMANN (eds), *Res Mycenaee* (1983) 287-310.

34 DEGER-JALKOTZY (*supra* n. 16) 65-81.

In conclusion, keep in mind that out of the estimated regional population of Messenia of 50,000 human beings, around 1,000, are *named*. These are not anonymous slaves or collective laborers, but individuals who receive clear benefits (material, political, and social) from the Mycenaean palatial system. Keep in mind that our texts are incomplete, representing at most 3-5 months of the Pylian annual calendar.³⁵ If we conservatively double this number to fill out the textual record and take into account now unattested economic and seasonal activities, we can see the considerable impact the palatial center at Pylos had on families and clans throughout the territory it presided over.

Land was left almost entirely in control of local *damos* organizations. Land allotments are plentiful in the texts and are rightly called *o-na-to*, 'plots that are a benefit.' Town communities retained their local 'big men' (*qa-si-re-we*) and their councils of elders (*ke-ro-si-ja*). The palace interacted with these existing power personages and social units through officials it created: *da-mo-ko-ro* and *ko-re-te-re* and *po-ro-ko-re-te-re*. But these officials interfaced, as PY Jn 829 shows, with regionally empowered officials.

The 'exactions' of the palace are hardly oppressive. The yearly 'taxation' of *ti-mi-to-a-ko* (Nichoria) included a mere 10 oxhides and 24 bolts of textile. Individuals are noted as performing service as rowers and as soldiers in units guarding the coast lines under leaders known as *e-qe-ta* or 'followers.' Use your imaginations to think of what Nichoria would have been like in this period *without* the palatial-system and its well-run economic engine and the organized protection provided by the palatially mobilized army. Also do not forget the clear social benefits of major palatial public works programs. We may cite here the port at Pylos, the road network around Mycenae, the draining of the Copaic basin, and the public works around Tiryns.³⁶

How can a system that existed for 250 or more years be considered 'transient' and 'shallow-rooted'? Almost all the economic gains from the palatial system were hard won. Messenia had no copper or tin resources. Nor any of the other luxury goods amply listed on the Pylos tablets (including the exquisite banqueting furniture that no doubt was primitive in Kopcke's aesthetic judgment). The palace centers in cooperation with regional centers and towns developed industries that brought in such basic raw materials.

Nor did the Messenians get lucky as Athens did with its Laureion silver strike and the shrewdness of Themistocles to convert that wealth windfall into military power (the Athenian fleet) that was used to subjugate nearly 200 other city-states in the interests of empire and high Periclean culture.

That the Mycenaean palaces used writing as they did for very complex economic management is well beyond the use to which writing was put in Minoan administration. The Mycenaeans are not blameworthy for not using writing as a substitute for oral literature. The Minoans did not do so either. And recent studies have reiterated that in most early cultures it takes several hundred years for writing to be used in more than simple, practical ways.³⁷

It is easy to imagine why palaces with megaras and frescoes were not built in the IIIC period. The prevailing economic and political organization of the period did not support the specialized crafts personnel, the social energy, and the acquisition of specialized materials and specialized skills that the Mycenaean palaces made possible.

All in all, then, I suggest that we look at the Mycenaeans from the point of view of what it was possible for them to attain and give them credit from what they did achieve. The palatial system was for the inhabitants of Mycenaean palatial territories far better than what had preceded it by a century or followed it by a century. That the palatial system collapsed is clear. But given how exposed it was to so many external forces, which any system would have been powerless to combat, this, too, should not be viewed in a negative way.

35 T.G. PALAIMA, "The Last Days of the Pylos Polity," in *POLITEIA* 623-633

36 E. ZANGGER, "Landscape Changes around Tiryns during the Bronze Age," *AJA* 98 (1994) 189-212; "The Port of Nestor," in DAVIS (*supra* n. 15) 69-74; J.M. BALCER, "The Mycenaean Dam at Tiryns," *AJA* 78 (1974) 141-149; J. KNAUSS, "Arkadian and Boiotian Orchomenos, Centres of Mycenaean Hydraulic Engineering," *Irrigation and Drainage Systems* 5 (1991) 363-381; J. KNAUSS, B. HEINRICH, H. KALCYK, *Die Wasserbauten der Mynier in der Kopais: Die älteste Flussregulierung Europas* (1984).

37 S.D. HOUSTON, *The First Writing: Script Invention as History and Process* (2004).

We would do well to assess the Greek past with more generosity and with due respect for the experienced pragmatism of our informants, whether the long succession of anonymous oral poets who preserved the elements for the Homeric epics or the experienced understanding of men of action and discernment like Thucydides.

Epos is an important source for our knowledge of the past. The prevailing communal spirit in the kingdom of Pylos in the Mycenaean period may have been very much like how Homer depicts the kingdom of the Pylos under King Nestor in the *Odyssey*.³⁸

Thomas G. PALAIMA

38 My friend, former colleague and leading Homerist, Erwin Cook, I know, shares my viewpoint: COOK and PALAIMA (*supra* n. 26).