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Studies in Mycenaean Texts, Language and Culture in Honor of José Luis Melena Jiménez

Edited by
Julián Méndez Dosuna
Thomas G. Palaima
Carlos Varías García

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José Luis Melena Jiménez
Contents

Preface ........................................................................................................................................................................... xi

Bibliography of José Luis Melena Jiménez .................................................................................................................... xv

Abbreviations ................................................................................................................................................................ xxix

1. Philologia cum Archeologia Procedit: Reflexiones en torno a la demografía y composición de la sociedad micénica ........................................ 1
   Francisco Aura Jorro

2. ἐν y ἐνί en micénico ........................................................................................................................................ 13
   Alberto Bernabé

3. Mycenaean wo-ra* ........................................................................................................................................... 25
   Maurizio Del Freo

4. Le trait d’union linéaire B ................................................................................................................................. 37
   Yves Duhoux

5. Considering the Linear B Tablets in British Museums ......................................................................................... 45
   Richard Firth

6. Anthroponymica Mycenaea 12. Ne-ri-to /Νηρίτος- ‘libre de discordia’ (ἔρις), Ἀνήριτος y Ἀνήριστος /Ἀνέριστος frente a hom. νήριτος ‘innumerable, incalculable’ (*nárito-: NP Νήριτος, topon. Νήριτον) ....... 57
   José L. García Ramón

7. Figs and Fig-Trees at Knossos ........................................................................................................................... 77
   John T. Killen
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Accounts, Values, Futures, Options: Production, Finance, and the End of the Late Bronze Age World Economy</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Michael F. Lane</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alex Leukart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Mycenaean o-pi-ke-re-mi-ni-ja</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eugenio R. Luján and Juan Piquero</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Julián Méndez Dosuna</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Observations on the Linear B Sign a2- in the Various Chronological Phases of the Knossos and the Mainland Archives</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marie-Louise Nosch</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>pa-ki-ja-ne, pa-ki-ja-na, and pa-ki-ja-ni-ja</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thomas Palaima</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Leukippos: Paralipomena zu einem griechischen Personennamen</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oswald Panagl</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Quelques réflexions fiscales sur la tablette Jn 829 de Pylos</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Massimo Perna</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Afinidades semánticas entre mic. do-so-mo y griego δωτίνη</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rosa A. Santiago</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Further Thoughts on the Reflex of Syllabic Nasals in Mycenaean Greek</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christina Michelle Skelton</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>ku-ne y qo-we en la tablilla de Micenas Fu 711</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carlos Varias García</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Missing Numerals: A Neglected Phenomenon in the Linear B Documents</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jörg Weilhartner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table of Contents

Afterword: How Far We Have Come in Mycenology in Seventy Years ................................................................. 259
Thomas Palaima and Garrett Bruner

Personal Comments on José Luis Melena from the Contributors ........................................................................ 267

Photo Section follows
Preface

Works of scholarship, like human lives, move through time and space in ways as unpredictable as the human lives to which they are attached. This Festschrift in honor of José Luis Melena is no exception. What has made the contributors persist in perfecting their papers is the unique individual whom we are honoring.

José Luis Melena is, among philologists, a unique example of wisdom, capacity for work, tenacious determination, a deep and reverent sense of the vocation of being a scholar and a concomitant recognition that it is a rare privilege to pursue scholarly truths as a life’s work. Personally—and all of us contributors have felt the effects of José’s personality—he is generous towards others and has an unwavering sense of humanity, despite the disappointments, frustrations, sorrows, and miseries we inevitably confront as we live out our lives. In his career life and in his home life, José has been tested as if a modern Job. As William Faulkner put it about one of his most memorable characters, it is often a signal mark of success in the lives we lead to endure and endure and endure. José has done that and done so much more for all of us and for many others with equanimity and with intelligent understanding of human weaknesses.

Born in 1946, while still an adolescent schoolboy in his native San Sebastián at the beginning of the 1960s, during one of his frequent visits to the Reading Room of the Municipal Library, he began to read with great interest a Spanish translation of The Aegean Civilization by Gustav Glotz: La Civilización Egea (1926). He remembers being captivated by drawings of the Knossos tablets, much like the decipherer of Linear B, Michael Ventris, reading Adolf Erman’s Die Hieroglyphen. And at once he was clear about where he was going to direct a big part of his studies: the Aegean writing systems.

A few years later, he found on the shelves of the library of the Peñaflorida Institute, where he was studying for the Higher Baccalaureate, a precious book, Diecisiete tablillas micenicas by Manuel Fernández Galiano (1959). He read it in full, as well as all the works available about Mycenae during his high school years in
San Sebastián. Such an early and determined sense of vocation in a recondite and complex area of scholarly inquiry that was studied by very few people in those days is very rare. In some ways it parallels the boyhood interests of Michael Ventris, who in young adulthood in the late 40’s and early 50’s, after his military service in World War II, virtually abandoned the career field of architecture that his mother more or less had dictated that he take up and instead worked intensively toward the decipherment of Aegean scripts, his real passion.

With characteristic intelligence and determination and Delphic self-knowledge, José Luis Melena stayed his course. It is not surprising, therefore, that, in October 1965, having just arrived in Salamanca to begin his university studies, he caught the attention of Manuel García Teijeiro, who was going to teach Mycenaean Greek, and the leading Spanish figure in the understanding of Mycenaean script and language, Martín S. Ruipérez himself. José asked specifically for the two volumes of *Scripta Minoa* (1909 and 1952) and for the run of the journal *Minos*. It was clear why José Luis Melena chose the University of Salamanca to study Classical Philology.

But staying the course was not without investigating seriously other areas of interest. Recently, José reminded us (personal communication August 3, 2021) that “my Master Thesis dealt with the taboo in Ancient Greece (1970) as a preliminary study for my [then proposed] PhD dissertation on the Homeric words for ‘strength’ which I eventually abandoned for a Mycenaean subject.” We can see how far José went down this alternative path by reading his impressive early article that merged intensive study of Indo-European and Homeric vocabulary with what has been his lifelong passion for Mycenology: “El testimonio del micénico a propósito de los nombres de las distintas fuerzas en Homero,” *Emerita* 44:2 (1976): 421–436.

From the time he received his diploma (with Extraordinary Award) in 1970 to today, José Melena has done enormous and extraordinary work in virtually all the subfields that make up the field of Mycenaean studies. He has provided all kinds of help, sometimes without due recognition, to hundreds of researchers around the world, beginning with his decisive work in the edition of *Acta Mycenaea*, the proceedings of the Fifth International Colloquium of Mycenaean Studies organized by his teacher Martín S. Ruipérez in 1970. The *acta* were published as separate volumes of the journal *Minos* XI (1971) and XII (1972). This and many other tasks, which include his doctoral thesis (“Estudios sobre las inscripciones de Cnoso,” Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, 1973) and his work on the journal *Minos: Revista de Filología Egea*, were carried out in a first stage of job instability and regular travel (Madrid, Salamanca, Canarias) until he achieved the position of Professor of Greek Philology at the University of the Basque Country, in 1983.
Mycenology would not have had the strong development that it has had throughout the world in the last fifty years without the tireless cooperative work of José Luis Melena. Among many other major scholarly duties that he performed during all this time, it is worth mentioning first and foremost the journal *Minos*. For over four decades (1970–2011), its enormous international prestige in this field was due almost exclusively to the work of José Luis Melena, first as secretary and then as editor.

It is a pity that, for various reasons, this tribute could not appear in the journal to which José dedicated a large part of his life. We are very grateful to the Center for Hellenic Studies, especially to Gregory Nagy, Leonard Muellner, Kerri Cox Sullivan, and Jill Curry Robbins for their roles in publishing our Festschrift. We thank Charles Delattre, Roser Gómez Guiu, Jörg Weilhartner, Jared Petroll, and Zafeirios Adramerinas, who were of great help with proofing and formatting these complicated texts. Tom Palaima always thanks Garrett Bruner, PASP archivist, for locating needed materials.

José’s excellent scientific production and his capacity for work and planning made it natural for José to be chosen Secretary General of the Comité International Permanent des Études Mycéniennes (CIPEM) in 1990, relieving John Chadwick. At the same time he replaced Martín S. Ruipérez as representative of Spain in CIPEM. He went well beyond working dutifully in these two key positions until he voluntarily ceded them to successors twenty years later in 2010.

The scientific prestige of José Luis Melena transcends the scope of Mycenaean and Classical Philology, as is made clear by two important external recognitions. The first is his appointment in 1987 as Cultural Attaché of the Embassy of Spain in Athens and Director of the Instituto Cultural Español Reina Sofía (now known as the Instituto Cervantes) in the Greek capital, a position from which he was ignominiously dismissed in 1990 through political machinations. The second was receiving the Euskadi Research Prize from the Basque Government in 1999.

We would like to close on a personal note beyond the expressions of gratitude that we have made, as have other contributors, in our papers and/or in the section of brief personal comments that closes this volume.

I, Carlos Varias García, would like to highlight the unparalleled kindness of José Luis Melena in guiding my doctoral thesis. In a letter written in January 1991 that I have treasured ever since receiving it, José Melena, having just recently arrived in Vitoria after enduring the shock of being removed from Athens, responded to my letter from Barcelona asking him to direct my doctoral thesis. José not only welcomed my request, at a very difficult time for him, but also proposed a change of thesis topic from one having to do with Mycenaean anthroponymy to another, the joint study of the inscriptions in Linear B of Mycenae.
Preface

The letter contains an impeccable argument that later proved to be correct. My thesis, from beginning to end, has the stamp of José Luis Melena, and without him as director it would never have seen the light of day. Such was his continuous support and scientific direction that I received as doctoral student, despite being at a different university. José’s support was just as decisive throughout my entire academic career for which I have many times heartily thanked him. Thank you, again, José.

I, Tom Palaima, consider José my second mentor, after Emmett L. Bennett, Jr. José shares with Emmett a sincere sense of the fun in working on problems having to do with the Mycenaean Greeks and the writing system that they used. I was honored that he invited me to serve first on the Comité de Redacción of *Mino* from 1986–2011; then as assistant editor and book review editor 1990–95, and finally as co-editor and book review editor 1995–2011. Working with José, our labors were no burden at all. His open-mindedness, high scholarly standards humanely applied to submissions, and his critical and truly selfless enthusiasm for new ideas were so wonderful to absorb that it is only in recent years that I have come to see how exceptional these attributes were within our field or any scholarly fields. I share fully Carlos’s sense that José Melena is a generous person.

There are stories that could be told of how calmly José withstood personal professional attacks and life tragedies that would have caused most human beings to respond by becoming bitter and hateful or by despairing of life itself. I share with Carlos a deep sense of gratitude for the forty-one years now that I have known and cooperated with José. I have asked him many stupid questions. I have always gotten careful, sincere, and kind answers.

We are sure that if life circumstances permitted Julián Méndez Dosuna, who did an enormous amount of work in organizing, collecting, and editing this volume in the first years of work on it, would add reflections similar to ours. Without Julián’s work, this volume would not exist. He is truly, not just alphabetically, its first editor.

We, all three of us, are proud to have José Luis Melena as a mentor, a colleague, a guiding spirit, a friend, and a fellow explorer in the often sad and sorrowful pathways of life.

We thank all our fellow contributors for making this volume a thank offering worthy of a remarkable scholar and human being.

Carlos Varías García, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
Thomas Gerard Palaima, PASP, University of Texas at Austin
Julián Méndez Dosuna, Universidad de Salamanca
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José Luis Melena Jiménez

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### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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TA-U-RO-QO-RO

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