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**AEGAEUM 39**

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# **METAPHYSIS**

## **RITUAL, MYTH AND SYMBOLISM IN THE AEGEAN BRONZE AGE**

**Proceedings of the 15<sup>th</sup> International Aegean Conference, Vienna,  
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Edited by Eva ALRAM-STERN, Fritz BLAKOLMER, Sigrid DEGER-JALKOTZY,  
Robert LAFFINEUR and Jörg WEILHARTNER

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## ***PU-RO, PA-KI-JA-NE,* AND THE WORSHIP OF AN ANCESTRAL *WANAX***

### **The Ancestral *Wanax* in the Linear B Tablets at Pylos**

I think it is likely that the offerings sent to the *wanax* within the Fr series were indeed being sent to a deity, rather than to the mortal *wanax*, and that the identity of that deity was a divinized (or at least heroized) ancestral *wanax*.<sup>1</sup> My reasoning behind this proposal is largely based on the words that the *wanax* is associated with on the Fr tablets.

Within the Fr series, the word *wanax* appears in the dative as the recipient of oil four times: once with *wa-na-se-wi-jo* (Fr 1215.1), once with *di-pi-si-jo-i* (Fr 1220), and twice with *wa-na-so-i* (Fr 1227, 1235.1).

Fr 1215

1. wa-na-ke-te , wa-na-se-wi-jo , we-a-re-pe
2. sa-pe-ra RA

Fr 1220

1. ro-u-si-jo , a-ko-ro , pa-ko-we OLE+PA V 4
2. di-pi-si-jo-i , wa-na-ka-te OLE+PA S 1

Fr 1227

1. wa-na-ka-te , wa-na-so-i , [ ] S 1 V 1

Fr 1235

1. wa-]na-so-i , wa-na-ka-te , pa- k̄o [-we ] OLE+PA 1
2. ] w̄a-na-so-i , po-ti-ni-ja , pa-ko-we OLE+PA V 3

The textual associations of the words *wa-na-se-wi-jo*, *wa-na-so-i*, and *di-pi-si-jo-i* show that they are being used in religious contexts. For instance, the *wa-na-so-i*, who appear a total of seven times on the Fr tablets, are associated with *po-ti-ni-ja* on Fr 1235.2 (see above), with *po-se-da-o-ne* on Fr 1219.2, and with the religious festival *to-no-e-ke-te-ri-jo* on Fr 1222.

Fr 1219

1. vacat
2. wa-no-so-i , po-se-da-o-ne OLE+A V 2

Fr 1222

- a. OLE+PA V 1  
wa-na-so-i , to-no-e-ke-te-ri-jo

Associations such as these indicate that the *wa-na-so-i* and *di-pi-so-i* were part of the religious realm. They most likely represent groups of people, who, being in the dative, acted as recipients of the oil, and the *wa-na-se-wi-jo* most likely indicates the shrine that the *wa-na-so-i* were associated with. But since these words often appear with another dative recipient (e.g., *wa-na-ka-te*), we can infer that

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<sup>1</sup> See S. LUPACK, "Offerings for the *Wanax* in the Fr Tablets: Ancestor Worship and the Maintenance of Power in Mycenaean Greece," in D. NAKASSIS, J. GULIZIO and S. JAMES (eds.), *Ke-ra-me-ja: Studies Presented to Cynthia W. Shelmerdine* (2014) 163-177, for a full discussion of this proposal.

*wa-na-so-i* and *di-pi-so-i* also served to indicate the address to which the oil was being sent, while the second dative was the recipient to whom the oil was being offered.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, we can read, “to the *wa-na-so-i* for the *wanax*.”

Thus, I think we can consider the oil allocations that are sent to the *wanax* as religious offerings, and I think it is possible to interpret the *wanax* recipient as a deity, rather than as the mortal *wanax*.<sup>3</sup> And instead of a deity such as Zeus or Poseidon, as has been proposed in the past,<sup>4</sup> I think that the term *wanax* should be taken at face value – that it referred to a Mycenaean *wanax*; specifically to the original *wanax*, or the ancestral *wanax*, who was considered to have founded the institution of the *wanax*, and who was revered as the forefather of all the succeeding *wanaktes*.

The worship of an ancestral *wanax* (along with his wife or mother given the feminine form that *wa-na-se-wi-jo* is derived from) would have supported the ideology that distinguished the *wanax* from his *basilees*. Elevating the creator of the position of *wanax* to divine, or at least heroic, status would have been a way to demonstrate the *wanax*'s distinctive association with the divine sphere, since the current *wanax* would, consequently, have been seen as the descendant of a divinity. It makes sense, too, that the *wanax* is associated on Fr 1222 with the *to-no-e-ke-te-ri-jo*, a religious festival whose focus was most likely a throne. During the ceremony a throne could have stood as a symbol of the prestige of the personage who originally sat on it – the ancestral *wanax*; it would also have served to support the claim to power of the *wanax* who occupied the throne in the mortal sphere.

### The Ancestral *Wanax* in Archaeology: Mycenae

Archaeological support for the concept of a cult centered around an ancestral *wanax* can be found in Grave Circle A at Mycenae. Circa 1250 B.C., the *wanax* who was then the ruler of Mycenae set out to monumentalize the burial grounds that contained the shaft graves. By encircling the area with a wall and accurately reerecting grave stelae over four of the six graves, he created what we know as Grave Circle A. The renovation of the Grave Circle must have been meant to demonstrate his links to the rulers of the past.<sup>5</sup> It seems reasonable to infer that some kind of religious observance, such as the worship of an ancestral *wanax*, was linked to the creation of the Grave Circle. I believe this observance was part of Mycenaean religion prior to 1250 B.C.

Gates<sup>6</sup> and Laffineur<sup>7</sup> have challenged the idea that the renovation of Grave Circle A was done simply in order to honor specific ancestors. Gates details the “mistakes” that were made in the LH IIIB renovation, and says that, “their motivation in constructing Circle A cannot be explained exclusively by a concern to preserve and protect those early burials.”<sup>8</sup> In this Gates and I (and Antonaccio<sup>9</sup>) agree;

<sup>2</sup> C.W. SHELMERDINE, *The Perfume Industry of Mycenaean Pylos* (1985) see p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> Pace T.G. PALAIMA, “*Wanaks* and Related Power Terms in Mycenaean and Later Greek,” in S. DEGER-JALKOTZY and I.S. LEMOS (eds.), *Ancient Greece: From the Mycenaean Palaces to the Age of Homer* (2006) 53-71, see p. 64.

<sup>4</sup> M. LEJEUNE, in *Mémoires de philologie mycénienne* I (1958) 342, n. 3; P. CARLIER, *Le royaume en Grèce avant Alexandre* (1984); ID., “*wa-na-ka* der chef : nouvelles réflexions sur les royautés mycéniennes,” *BCH* 122 (1998) 411-415.

<sup>5</sup> J. WRIGHT, “Death and Power at Mycenae: Changing Symbols in Mortuary Practice,” in R. LAFFINEUR (ed.), *Thanatos: Les coutumes funéraires en Égée à l'Âge du Bronze, Actes du Colloque de Liège 21-23 avril 1986* (1987) 171-184; M.K. DABNEY and J.W. WRIGHT, “Mortuary Customs, Palatial Society and State Formation in the Aegean Area: A Comparative Study,” in R. HÄGG and G.C. NORDQUIST (eds.), *Celebrations of Death and Divinity in the Bronze Age Argolid* (1990) 45-53.

<sup>6</sup> C. GATES, “Rethinking the Building History of Grave Circle A at Mycenae,” *AJA* 89 (1985) 263-274.

<sup>7</sup> R. LAFFINEUR, “Grave Circle A at Mycenae: Further Reflections on Its History,” in HÄGG and NORDQUIST eds. (*supra* n. 5) 201-206; ID., “Aspects of Rulership at Mycenae in the Shaft Grave Period,” in P. REHAK (ed.) *The Role of the Ruler in the Prehistoric Aegean. Proceedings of a Panel Discussion presented at the Annual Meeting of the Archaeological Institute of America, New Orleans, Louisiana, 28 December 1992. With Additions* (1995) 81-94.

<sup>8</sup> GATES (*supra* n. 6) 268.

the *wanax* who renovated the area must also have been making a political statement concerning his connection with the rulers of the past.<sup>10</sup>

Also, as the LH IIIB Mycenaeans did accurately remember the positions of four of the graves, I think their memories of the people buried there had become focused on those four graves. The significance of the graves to their society was not forgotten. Rather, the graves and their occupants were mythologized, and they may have gained in stature because of what they symbolized for the Mycenaeans.

### **Evidence for Continuous Worship within Grave Circle A**

In addition, there is evidence that the burials were the object of a cult before the renovation of Grave Circle A. Keramopoulos (1918) reported that a small cave or hollow in the bedrock between Graves I and IV contained a series of hearths with a great deal of burnt matter and sherds that dated to the MH and each of the LH periods.<sup>11</sup> Wace, in his publication of Grave Circle A, refers to the small cave as evidence that “offerings continued to be made to the shades of the kings who lay here.”<sup>12</sup> Thus it seems likely that ancestor worship was conducted on the site of Grave Circle A after the final burials were placed in the Shaft Graves and right up until its refurbishment.

This evidence has been overlooked, I think because of a misunderstanding based on its initial publication. Keramopoulos proposed that this hollow could have been used in conjunction with an altar found over Grave IV. The altar was later determined to have been used contemporaneously with the graves, and Wace recommended disassociating the altar from the cave. The result, however, was that later scholars dropped the cave from their discussions of the site (although the altar is generally discussed). I would like here to reinstate the evidence for continuous cult activity on the site.

One implication of this evidence is that when the *wanax* of the LH IIIB period instituted his renovations of Grave Circle A, rather than creating a religious observance out of whole cloth, he may instead have been drawing on religious practice that was already well established in Mycenaean society.

### **Archaeological Evidence for the Ancestral *Wanax* at Pylos?**

The texts from Pylos inspired my proposal that worship of an ancestral *wanax* was part of Mycenaean religion, and the renovation of Grave Circle A at Mycenae seems to support that proposal, but do we have complementary archaeological evidence for such worship at Pylos, the site that produced the tablets?

Clearly the *wanaktes* of LH IIIB Pylos never had the need to emphasize their connections to their forebears on as grand a scale as the *wanax* of Mycenae did. Murphy confirms in her diachronic study of tomb use around the palace that more investment was made in palatial architecture than in tombs during the LH IIIB period.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, I think a pattern among the elite burials can be discerned that demonstrates, particularly in the earlier LH periods, that the palatial elite did consider their association with the dead to be of some importance.

During the LH I–IIIA periods, a 3.5 m wide road ran from the palace, down its slope, through the Northeast Gateway, and straight on to Tholos IV.<sup>14</sup> The long-term use of what can be termed a

<sup>9</sup> C.M. ANTONACCIO, *An Archaeology of Ancestors: Tomb Cult and Hero Cult in Early Greece* (1995).

<sup>10</sup> Please see my more detailed discussion of Laffineur’s and Gates’s ideas concerning Grave Circle A in LUPACK (*supra* n. 1) 171-173.

<sup>11</sup> A. KERAMOPOULLOS, *ArchEph* (1918) 52-57.

<sup>12</sup> A.J.B. WACE, “Excavations at Mycenae: The Grave Circle,” *BSA* 25 (1921-1923) 103-125.

<sup>13</sup> J. MURPHY, “The Varying Place of the Dead in Pylos,” in NAKASSIS, GULIZIO and JAMES eds. (*supra* n. 1) 209-221. My thanks go to Joanne Murphy for kindly allowing me to read her article when it was still forthcoming. It has helped me a great deal in my thinking about this topic.

<sup>14</sup> MURPHY (*supra* n. 13) 213, 216.

processional way associated with an elite tomb seems consistent with the worship of an ancestral *wanax* having been part of Pylian religion from the LH I period.

In the LH IIIB period, burials shifted to Tholos III, and the Northeast Gateway was put out of use. This shift perhaps reflects a change, such as in the branch of the family that the *wanax* claimed descent from. I do not think that the religious observance honoring the ancestral *wanax* would have been abandoned with such a change, but rather the mythology may have been modified to suit the new regime.

### Where Was the Pylian *wa-na-se-wi-jo* Located?

A separate question though is, where were the *wa-na-se-wi-jo* shrine and its religious functionaries, the *wa-na-so-i*, located? I think that, while rituals meant to propitiate the ancestral *wanax* were likely to have been conducted at his burial place (as it was conceived of by the Pylians), the shrine that supported his cult could have been located at *pa-ki-ja-ne*.

The fact that the religious aspect of the district *pa-ki-ja-ne* was of *original* importance, and therefore characterized the site from its foundation, can be seen in the root meaning of its name: *pa-ki-ja-ne* is associated with the Greek root σφαγ-, which in historical Greek produces the verbs σφάζω and σφαγιάζομαι, which mean “to slay a victim” or “to sacrifice.” Thus we may infer that the district acquired its name from the religious site, whose founding date seems to match that of the palace site.

The written evidence seems to indicate that *pa-ki-ja-ne* was located very near to Pylos, and although they were treated as separate districts for economic purposes, Tn 316.2–3 even seems to imply that they were somehow identified with each other in the minds of the Pylians – Pylos is given as the main location for this entry, but then the scribe wrote that the activity was taking place *pa-ki-ja-si*, that is at *pa-ki-ja-ne*.

Tn 316

1. po-ro-wi-to-jo ,
2. i-je-to-qe , pa-ki-ja-si , do-ra-qe , pe-re , po-re-na-qe
3. PU-RO a-ke , po-ti-ni-ja AUR \*215<sup>VAS</sup> 1 MUL 1

This speaks for their having been a very long and close relationship between the two.

The most likely location for *pa-ki-ja-ne* is in (or under) the modern town of Hora,<sup>15</sup> where the cemetery of Volimidia, with its chamber tombs dating to the LH I–III periods, was excavated by Marinatos.<sup>16</sup> Marinatos also found LH III pottery associated with some evidence for walls, and LH I pottery ca. 1 m below the LH III material.<sup>17</sup> Thus Volimidia was a long-lived site, which, despite all its mortuary activity, did not have a tholos tomb. Bennet has pointed out that this lack of a tholos tomb may indicate that *pa-ki-ja-ne* had already come under the rule of one of the earliest Pylian *wanakes* in the LH I period.<sup>18</sup>

It is possible then that the palace of Pylos and the religious site of *pa-ki-ja-ne*, or, to make the situation more personal, the *wanakes* of Pylos and the religious hierarchy of *pa-ki-ja-ne*, interacted with each other for many generations. The result of this interaction may be seen in the tablets, but most

<sup>15</sup> J. BENNET, “The Mycenaean Conceptualization of Space, or Pylian Geography (...yet again!),” in S. DEGER-JALKOTZY, S. HILLER, and O. PANAGL (eds.), *Florent Studia Mycenaea, Acts of the 10th International Mycenaean Colloquium held at the University of Salzburg* (1999) 131-157, see p. 144.

<sup>16</sup> S. MARINATOS, *Praktika* (1955) 473-496; (1956) 238-250; (1957) 299-316; (1966) 78-89, 198-201; and (1967) 102-109. See [http://www.dimos-pylou-nesoros.gr/dimos/sandy-ancient-pylos-chora/index.php?option=com\\_gallery&task=category&cid=15&Itemid=89](http://www.dimos-pylou-nesoros.gr/dimos/sandy-ancient-pylos-chora/index.php?option=com_gallery&task=category&cid=15&Itemid=89) for images of the chamber tombs at Volimidia.

<sup>17</sup> S. MARINATOS, “Ἀνασκαφαὶ ἐν Πύλῳ,” *Praktika* (1956) 238-250, see 248-249.

<sup>18</sup> J. BENNET, “Space through Time: Diachronic Perspectives on the Spatial Organization of the Pylian State,” in *POLITEIA*, 587-601, see p. 597. Also see J.L. DAVIS, “The Palace and Its Dependencies,” in *Sandy Pylos: An Archaeological History from Nestor to Navarino* (2008) 53-68; see p. 60.

particularly in Un 2, which shows that the *wanax* was initiated by the religious powers of *pa-ki-ja-ne*, and indicates that the power of the *wanax* was intertwined with that of *pa-ki-ja-ne*. Thus, I think that if we were to look for the location of the shrine of the *wa-na-so-i*, where the cult of the ancestral *wanax* had its home, it would most likely have been found at *pa-ki-ja-ne*.

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