

D. Nakassis, *Individuals and Society in Mycenaean Pylos*. Mnemosyne Supplements History and Archaeology of Classical Antiquity 358. Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2013. Pp. xiv + 448. ISBN 9789004244511. Price €123 / \$171.

It is forty years since the last systematic study of the prosopography of the Linear B documents found at Late Bronze Age Pylos in southwestern Messenia (Lindgren 1973). Since then, the texts of the Pylos documents have been improved through a programme of study resulting in many new readings and joins. In this book Nakassis (henceforth N) offers two contributions: first, an updated prosopography, and, second, a new interpretation of the workings of the Pylos polity that draws on it. The details of the book will be relevant to those studying the Linear B texts, while the more general argument about the nature of the Pylian polity will have a broader interest for those working on the archaeology and early history of Greece, or on early states.

The major contribution of N's book is an Appendix (pp. 187–414) in which each of the 964 sign-groups identified as personal-names is listed in alphabetical order, including certain (805), probable (83), possible (59), doubtful (10) and “other” (7: patronymics or adjectives derived from personal names) examples. Each name is listed with its Linear B form (e.g., p. 224: 139. *a₃-ta-ro*) together with a reconstructed form (*Aithalos*) and a later Greek parallel, where this exists (Αἰθάλης), plus all attestations of the name in the Pylos documents. There is discussion, longer or shorter, depending on issues with the name itself or the need to assess how many individuals lie behind multiple occurrences, and finally a set of three numbers expressing the minimum, the maximum and the ‘probable’ number of individuals represented: so, *a₃-ta-ro* has “1/2/1”, since N (doubtfully, in this reviewer's opinion) regards the similar name *a-ta-ro* as an alternative form, documenting the same individual, while it is possible that the two occurrences document two different individuals. N's is not a study in onomastics, but the reader can explore such issues through frequent references to discussions in the major Mycenological sources (e.g., Aura Jorro 1988; 1993; García-Ramón 2011; Ventris and Chadwick 1973). As the most up to date collection of names and occurrences in the Pylos assemblage, this appendix will need to be consulted by anyone wishing to explore the Pylos Linear B documents in the future. It also, crucially, makes transparent the data on which N bases his overall discussion.

The book comprises five chapters. In the first, N gives an overview of current views of Mycenaean society, arguing for a more nuanced picture, one that emphasises individuals (expressed through the personal names studied here) rather than administrative roles (expressed through titles). The chapter's closing words essentially encapsulate N's overall argument and justification for treating personal names in the way he does (pp. 26–27):

[T]he Mycenaean social order was not simply split into palatial “haves” and non-palatial “have-nots,” but was a more complex patchwork of individuals with differential access to resources and various relationships to the palace. The palace

in turn seems less of an agent in its own right ... and more of a framework for an array of socioeconomic interactions between individuals and social groups.

N next outlines the methodology he uses and the crucial assumptions he makes about the relationship between personal names and individuals, in Chapter 2. Although the Pylos corpus (approximately 1,100 documents) is only the second largest in the Aegean, after Knossos, it has the advantage that, with a handful of exceptions, the documents all belong to the same annual cycle of administration, the final one, since they were preserved by the burnt destruction of the palatial structures at Ano Englianos around 1200 BCE. As N notes (pp. 30–33), they therefore satisfy one condition for demonstrating personal identity that other, more chronologically diverse collections of texts do not (cf. Landenius Enegren 2008 on the Knossos personal names). N presents some helpful statistics (pp. 33–34) about his 964 names: they give rise to a total of 1,683 attestations in the documents and, in theory, represent a *minimum* of 742 and a *maximum* of 1,115 individuals. N regards 875 as the most likely “real” number of named individuals (argued in greater detail in chapters 3 and 4, and the Appendix) and points out that this may represent about 20% of all the people recorded (mostly anonymously) by the palace administration, perhaps 2% of the total population of the polity, and, since the vast majority were adult males, about 6% of the adult male population. Although N’s approach has expanded the size of the elite group under study beyond that of titled officials, he is still dealing with a tiny fraction of the overall population.

In the remainder of the chapter, N critiques previous approaches to Pylian prosopography: in general, these adopted the cautious position that multiple occurrences of a single name should be assumed to refer to different individuals in the absence of clear evidence to the contrary, such as occurrence against the same place-name, or where an individual had high social status. In particular, earlier studies therefore tended to assume that “smiths” (Linear B *ka-ke-we*) or “herders” were of lower status and therefore unlikely to be operating at multiple locations. Since there is such a large stock of personal names at Pylos (an average of 1.11–1.22 individuals per name: p. 36), and since they are all likely to refer to a small sector of the population (i.e., members of the elite), N seeks to replace prior assumptions with the default assumption that a single name denotes a single individual in multiple instances, unless there is evidence to the contrary: “In almost every case, it is theoretically possible that one name equals one individual” (p. 70). He qualifies this by assigning four “confidence levels” to his identifications: certain, probable, possible, and tenuous (p. 49) and offers a helpful set of examples (pp. 48–67), illustrated with photographs of the actual tablets, to demonstrate non-identity and identity of different types.

In Chapters 3 and 4 N develops this argument at length and in considerable detail, with helpful tables to support and illustrate the points being made. The first two groups (“smiths” and “herders”, the Jn and Cn groups of documents, respectively) comprise the two largest collections of personal-names in single series of documents: a maximum of 263 (Jn) and 199 (Cn). Within the Jn series, 13 (of 225 definite or probable) “smiths” occur at more than one place-name, while 30 names appear in *both* sets of documents. N

regards each as the same individual operating in different locations, with the implication that they are more likely to be acting in a supervisory, rather than hands-on capacity. Although N brings in other factors than simple homonymy, such as patterns of co-occurrence between Jn and Cn, the reader will have to make up his or her own mind on how convincing his arguments are. The detail mentioned above, for example, is used to identify a “smith” (as *a₃-ta-ro*: Jn 415.2) who brings alum to the palace (as *a-ta-ro*: An 35.5), while the consensus in the field would be that these are two different names: *Aithalos* and *Atalos* (p. 99). The repeated names in Chapter 4 are less controversial, since overlaps have been noted in the past, as N fully documents, between the *o-ka* series and other aspects of Pylian activities, such as land-holding or agriculture.

N’s overall results are summarised in a concluding chapter: of 700 certain and complete names, 67% (469) occur only in one text; 33% (231) appear in more than one text, of which 183 (i.e., 79% of the re-occurring examples) appear in more than one “series” (i.e. they are involved in different activities, according to our “etic” categorisation of the documents); of these 183, N accepts identity in 96 instances where Lindgren had argued against it (p.153). N goes on to explore the implications of his study for how we understand Pylian society and the operation of the polity. He sees the polity as operating through a much broader group of elite individuals well beyond the limited group of titled office-holders. This reconstruction is consistent with a trend in Mycenaean Studies that has played down the role of the palace as an institution, stressing the existence of local resource-bases (e.g., Halstead 1999; 2001) and emphasising the importance of individual actors within the overall system (e.g., Lane 2004; Peters 2009). It is also worth noting that the view articulated in N’s final chapter does not ultimately stand or fall on the basis of the identities proposed in the preceding two chapters.

Overall, this is both an up-to-date, concise prosopography of the Pylos Linear B documents, with sufficient transparency to allow the reader to accept or reject specific identifications, and a refreshing, well-written synthesis contributing to an emerging view of the workings of this particular late Mycenaean polity.

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