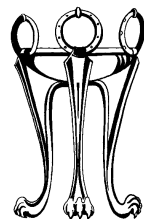


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Palatial Potters in Mycenaean Greece*

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The place of pottery production in Mycenaean economy and palatial administration has naturally drawn the interest of scholars, with attention focusing particularly on the enormous inventories of drinking vessels (kylikes) and other pottery in the destruction deposits of the Palace of Nestor at Pylos. The LH III B–C transitional destruction horizon contained more than 10,000 pots¹. A number of articles have discussed what is said to be a marked contrast between the dearth of references to pottery and potters in the palatial Linear B records and the amount of pottery actually found². The perceived dichotomy has been seen as convincing evidence of a lack of palatial interest in ceramic production and even as an indication of a large private sector free of state control or significant involvement. I believe, however, that the problem has been misspecified. What requires explanation is not why there are so few references in the tablets to potters, but why there are so many.

Of course, even an absence of references to pots and potters would not necessarily indicate a lack of palatial involvement, nor would such a silence be unique even with regard to activities that are clearly palatial. The Linear B scribes themselves are nowhere mentioned, unless they are subsumed under one of the designations for palatial administrators³. Excavations have revealed workshops utilizing many exotic raw materials in palace precincts, but the artisans are unnamed⁴. There are only a handful of possible references to corvée labor, yet the palaces must have summoned large workforces at harvest time⁵. The *da-wo* grain harvest of 800 tons recorded at Knossos must have required, according to HALSTEAD, something like 1000 reapers for 20 days as well as a similar workforce for stooking, transporting, threshing and winnowing⁶. There is no mention in the Linear B tablets of imports or exports, not even of copper and tin, essential components of a Bronze Age society. In all likelihood the relevant records of state-sponsored trade and voyages were kept on perishable materials, probably parchment, whose use is clearly attested on the backs of sealings from Minoan Crete⁷.

* It is a pleasure to offer this paper in tribute to STEFAN HILLER, dear friend, colleague and source of encouragement for a quarter of a century. HILLER'S combined knowledge of Linear B texts and Bronze Age archaeology has contributed much to our understanding of the Mycenaean palatial economy, the subject of this paper.

¹ WHITELAW (2001, 52) reports 8,540 pots based on the excavators' initial estimate, but a reanalysis of the pottery to be published in the forthcoming University of Cincinnati dissertation of J. HRUBY concludes that there were significantly more (pers. comm., for which I am most grateful).

² HALSTEAD 1992, 64; WHITELAW 2001; KNAPPETT 2001; ANDERSON 1994–1995; LINDGREN 1973, 77–8; PALAIMA 1989, 95–6; 1997.

³ PALAIMA 1998–1999; BENNET 1998–1999; PALAIMA 2003, 153–4, 173–7, 188; DRIESSEN 2000, 230–2; BENNET 2001, 29–31, 35; LINDGREN 1973.

⁴ HALSTEAD 1992, 64, citing KERAMOPOULLOS 1930; ALEXIOU 1953–1954; KILLEN 1985, 268; WIENER 1991; see also WARREN 1991.

⁵ **PY An 1, An 610, Ac-series** (KILLEN 1983b; BENDALL 2003, 206; BENDALL 2004, 111). References to agricultural workers of some type appear in the Thebes tablets (DAKOURI-HILD 2005, 215–6).

⁶ HALSTEAD 1992, 67; HALSTEAD & JONES 1989, 47–9. Feasting ceremonies requiring large numbers of drinking vessels may have followed a harvest. It is tempting to think that the rhapsodic marchers on the Neopalatial Harvester Vase from Ayia Triadha participated in such a harvest festival.

⁷ HALLAGER 1996, 135–58; WEINGARTEN 1983.

While the Linear B tablets contained records of valuable palatially owned and controlled goods such as the bronze sent to the many bronzesmiths in the Pylian state for fashioning into weapons, tools and vessels, pottery was a different matter. Palatial administrations are unlikely to have felt a need to control or inventory sources of clay for potting or fuel for firing kilns, nor would pots have been efficient as a medium for levying taxes on the sixteen districts of the Pylian kingdom. Moreover, potting was in all likelihood highly seasonal; inventories (if any) of pots delivered in the summer may have become obsolete by the following spring, the season when the destruction of Pylos is thought to have occurred. PALAIMA estimates that the tablets contained in the Archives Complex at Pylos covered between two and five months of selected economic activities⁸. Accordingly there is no particular reason to anticipate records of references to pottery or potters in the palatial archives.

Records and references there are, however, and they imply a significant palatial involvement in the acquisition of pottery. One fragment of a Linear B tablet (**K 700**) from the LH III A2 destruction at Knossos lists 1,800 stirrup jars in two lots of 900 each; when whole, the tablet may have listed many more⁹. Another tablet from the same destruction lists 180 more (**K 778**)¹⁰. A Linear B tablet from Knossos listing personnel refers to a female potter (**Ap 639.7**)¹¹. Among the very few tablets recovered from Mycenae, one mentions a potter in the dative case (**Oe 125**)¹². From the House of the Sphinxes at Mycenae came tablet **Ue 611** and sealings **Wt 501–07** recording in all probability various types of pots¹³. While some have regarded the House of the Sphinxes, the House of the Oil Merchant and Petsas' House as private establishments operating outside the palatial sphere, evidence for this proposition is lacking. I believe it likely that all three functioned as part of an economy under general palatial control¹⁴. At Thebes both decorated wares and plain dining vessels were produced within the palatial precincts at the House of Kadmos kiln and workshop in LH III A2 and early III B1¹⁵.

Our principle source of information is of course the palace at Pylos. Massive amounts of pottery were stored in the palace pantries, as noted above. One Pylos tablet (**Tn 966**) records the acquisition or intended acquisition of 12 highly specialized ceramic items including “three drainable tubs for bath-water.”¹⁶ The Pylos tablets list no fewer than four potters, two by name, some of whom receive rations from the palace¹⁷. What is most significant is that one of the potters, *pi-ri-ta-wo*, is described as the ‘*wanakteros ke-ra-me-u*’ – the royal potter – and is one of a select group *te-re-ta* who hold lands that they can sublease¹⁸. Individuals mentioned in the tablets as holding land evidently enjoyed a higher status than those individuals who

⁸ PALAIMA 2003, 169.

⁹ WHITELAW 2001, 72; BETANCOURT 1985, 159–60.

¹⁰ WHITELAW 2001, 72.

¹¹ PALAIMA 1989, 95; PERPILLOU 1973, 40.

¹² See PALAIMA 1997, 410 n. 23.

¹³ BENNETT 1958; CHADWICK 1958; TOURNAVITOU 1995, 265–6.

¹⁴ See KILLEN 1983a.

¹⁵ DAKOURI-HILD 2001, 107–8; 2005, 210. The pottery in the destruction level of the building and kiln is mostly LH III A2 with some early III B1. CATLING & MILLETT (1965) question whether the kiln may have been inserted into an already damaged palatial structure. DAKOURI-HILD concludes that the ashlar building and the workshop and kiln were destroyed simultaneously in early LH III B1.

¹⁶ VENTRIS & CHADWICK 1973, 338; see also GALATY 1999, 78.

¹⁷ PALAIMA 1997, 410 n. 23.

¹⁸ PALAIMA 1997, 410 n. 23.

received rations, however substantial¹⁹. KILLEN suggests that the landholding perfumer Eumedes may have been in charge of the perfume industry²⁰.

The designation of a royal potter in the Pylos records appears to fit neatly with the evidence now available from the pots themselves. Advances in recent years in ceramic studies, when applied to the pottery of the Pylian kingdom from both inside and outside the Palace of Nestor, demonstrate that one workshop produced all of the fineware found in the palace²¹. Pottery from the same workshop was found in various localities outside the palace as well²². GALATY summarizes the situation in Messenia in the period preceding the destruction of the palace at Pylos as follows: “Eventually, only one industrialized concern generated all of Messenia’s mass-produced finewares, including kylikes Coarseware pottery continued to be manufactured, but at no more than three workshops ... and on a smaller scale relative to finewares.”²³ Anthropological and ethnographical research strongly suggests that the annual estimated consumption of all pottery by the palace could have been met by one potting establishment, comprising one or two master potters together with some apprentices, with capacity to spare for other clients²⁴. It seems reasonable to conclude that the royal potter identified in the Linear B tablet was the sole source of the finewares found in the destruction deposit.

The designation ‘royal’ appears directly on pots as well, namely the inscribed stirrup jars (ISJs) exported from Crete²⁵. On the mainland, the term *wa-na-ka-te-ro* in full or abbreviated form was found on painted stirrup jars found at Eleusis (**Z 1**), Tiryns (**Z 29**) and Thebes (**Z 839**). Khania in Crete may provide another example (**Z 16**)²⁶. In the case of the ISJs, the intent may have been to designate contents of the stirrup jars rather than the jars themselves as royal, but in this case the royal establishment responsible for export of the contents would have established the parameters of size and form and provided a market for the large and sturdy stirrup jars it utilized. Tablet **Fr 1184** from Pylos records 38 jars in connection with 518.4 liters of oil²⁷. There is evidence for the manufacture of perfumed oil in the palace at Pylos at the time of the destruction²⁸. The Pylos tablets also indicate that the palace collected and shipped wine in both large and small amounts²⁹. The need for containers for shipments of olive oil, perfumed oil and wine directed by the palaces³⁰ would have provided an important motive for palatial interest in pottery production³¹.

¹⁹ BENDALL 2004, 109.

²⁰ KILLEN 2001, 180, cited in BENDALL 2004, 109.

²¹ GALATY 1999; HRUBY 2004.

²² GALATY 1999, 77.

²³ GALATY 1999, 76.

²⁴ WIENER 2006, 6; CLARK 1995; COSTIN 1991; LEWIS 1983.

²⁵ HASKELL 1999, 340–1.

²⁶ PALAIMA 1997, 408.

²⁷ SHELMERDINE 1985, 23–4; see also WHITELAW 2001, 72.

²⁸ HALSTEAD 1992, 62; BLEGEN & RAWSON 1966, 224; TEGYEY 1984; MORRIS 1986, 134; SHELMERDINE 1985, 61.

²⁹ PALMER 1994, 192–3.

³⁰ SHELMERDINE 1984; 1985; see also GALATY 1999, 77; PALMER 1994, 187–95.

³¹ Decorated pottery produced in the Argolid such as the LH III A2 drinking sets found at a large number of sites along the coast of Asia Minor (DABNEY 2006) and the Pictorial Class of Mycenaean krater exported to Cyprus in particular may have been valuable exchange goods in themselves, but the degree of palatial involvement, if any, in their manufacture and exchange is presently undeterminable.

Above all, the palaces had a critical interest in the acquisition of drinking and dining vessels for palatial cultic or other feasting ceremonies³². Indeed the kylix shape may have been introduced as the archetypical drinking vessel at the instigation of the palaces³³. The few references to royal personnel such as the royal potter appear mostly in tablets or series of tablets with cultic overtones³⁴. Mass ritual feasting utilizing large numbers of ceramic vessels surely played a crucial role in the life of the Mycenaean palaces, as it had in the palaces of Neopalatial Crete³⁵. The Campstool Fresco at Knossos from the LM II–III A1 period of Mycenaean domination shows groups of men drinking from kylikes in a ceremonial feast recorded for posterity³⁶.

In Mycenaean Greece, exports of olive oil, perfumed oil and wine met some of the costs of importing copper, tin and preciousness, while belief reinforced by ritual linked populace and palace. The palatial interest in ceramic containers for palatial products and vessels for the requisite feasts can be clearly discerned by comparing the excavated pottery to the ample references to pots and potters in the Linear B texts.

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³² KILLEN notes an instance of what may have been a non-cultic feast apparently organized to mark the investiture of a senior official (KILLEN 1998, 421; see also STOCKER & DAVIS 2004, 71).

³³ GALATY 1999, 79. The abundant evidence for Mycenaean ritual feasting has attracted much scholarly attention in recent years and has been the subject of recent symposia (WRIGHT 2004; HALSTEAD & BARRETT 2004; for Minoan Crete, see also WIENER 1984; 1990).

³⁴ PALAIMA 1997, 411.

³⁵ One Linear A tablet from Ayia Triadha (HT 31) lists small numbers of other vessels, but 3,710 conical cups, surely stored and inventoried for large-scale palatial feasting ceremonies (WIENER 1984, 20; GODART & OLIVIER 1976, 58–9).

³⁶ That the palaces monitored the production of some potters does not mean, of course, that they controlled the production of all pottery. So long as the palaces obtained the pottery required for state exports and feasts, it seems likely that at least some of the potters would have been allowed or encouraged to sell or distribute some or all of their products elsewhere, particularly in outlying districts.

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