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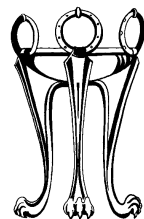
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Representations of Power in Mycenaean Pylos

Script, Orality, Iconography*

JOHN BENNET

In many parts of the world a rich archaeological record is available for the study of the emergence of complex societies and the formation and operation of early states¹. Among those artefacts available are objects commonly labelled ‘art’ and others that carry text, or – in some cases – both. Whether one views the Aegean Bronze Age societies as merely the western band in a continuum of similar societies stretching from Susa to Sesklo, or as an indigenous Aegean phenomenon – the two are not mutually exclusive – it is sometimes surprising how little synthetic and generalising discussion is carried on in the Aegean on questions of the relationship between material culture (including objects typically classified as ‘art’) and text. ‘Surprising’ because – particularly in the Late Bronze Age – there is a rich store of data that not only allow a generalising picture to be drawn for the region as a whole, but facilitate the reconstruction of such processes at the level of the individual region. It is on one of those regions that I focus here, namely that of Late Bronze Age Pylos.

For the quantity and quality of data available to reconstruct its emergence and operation, no Aegean Bronze Age state can yet match that centred on the palatial structures at Ano Englianos – Bronze Age Pylos: namely, a combination of over 1,000 Linear B documents containing information about the structure of the polity and its economic administration in its final days, with the material remains of a well-excavated central site whose territory has been surveyed both extensively (in the 1960s) and intensively (from 1992 to 1994)². It is, therefore, possible to use the essentially synchronic Linear B evidence for the structure of the polity in late LH III B (c. 1200 BC) in conjunction with the diachronic data in the archaeological record to sketch a dynamic reconstruction of the expansion of the Pylos polity.

Elsewhere I have proposed such a model for Pylos’s expansion, beginning in LH I (c. 1600 BC) with its rise to prominence among competing early Mycenaean centres in its immediate area around and north of Navarino Bay; continuing with the construction of the first monumental structures, the earliest administrative documents, and presumably further territorial gains in LH III A (c. 1400 BC); culminating in its incorporation first of Nihoria (in LH III A2), followed by the Pamisos valley region, events that were probably reflected in the

* It is a pleasure to make this small contribution to a volume honouring STEFAN HILLER, who has consistently crossed the artificial academic boundaries between philology, archaeology and art history in his numerous publications. I hope he enjoys this contribution that aims to touch on some of the themes in his own work and uses as an example Pylos, a site on which he has had much to say. My contribution has benefited from oral performance in a number of different contexts in various formats and I thank audiences on those occasions. More specifically, I should like to thank JOHN BARRETT, JACK DAVIS, PAUL HALSTEAD, DEBI HARLAN, CYNTHIA SHELMERDINE, and SUE SHERRATT for various comments and conversations on the topic, although none of them should be held responsible for the use to which I have put their comments or advice.

¹ For a recent, valuable cross-cultural exploration, see, e.g., FEINMAN & MARCUS 1998.

² Linear B tablets: BENNETT & OLIVIER 1973; BENNETT 1992; PALAIMA 1988. A full publication is due to appear shortly as *The Palace of Nestor at Pylos in Western Messenia*, Vol. IV: *The Inscribed Documents*. Excavated site: BLEGEN & RAWSON 1966; LANG 1969; BLEGEN ET AL. 1973. Regional studies: McDONALD & RAPP 1972; DAVIS ET AL. 1997; ZANGGER ET AL. 1997; DAVIS 1998.

construction of the final palatial complex at Englianos by early LH III B (c. 1300 BC)³. At the date of the Linear B tablets – within a short time of the site’s final destruction – Pylos may still have been dealing with areas on the borders of its territory, notably in the north, the Kyparissia–Soulima valley system. Expansion, therefore, did not happen overnight, in a single concerted action, and the major phase of expansion may have belonged within only a century of the palace’s final days, and, indeed, may have been ongoing when it was destroyed⁴.

Against this background I explore some aspects of the representation of power within the LH III B palatial structures at Pylos. The central room in the latest palace was Room 6, the ‘main megaron’, one of three megara within the larger complex (Rooms 6, 46, and 65)⁵. The layout and elaboration of this room is well known, but I summarise some of the key points here. The right wall of this room – as one entered – was decorated with wall-paintings, which, although not well preserved, have been reconstructed by LANG, MCCALLUM, and others⁶. In the midst of the wall, at its foot, there is the impression of a base, regarded by BLEGEN as that for an elaborate seat that no longer survives⁷. To the left of this base – as one faces the wall – there is a channel with a hemispherical depression at either end⁸, while in front of it, there is the only figured panel in the geometric floor decoration of the room, a panel with an octopus⁹. Not often mentioned is the fact that the fill below the base contained two small groups of jewellery, perhaps a ‘foundation deposit’¹⁰.

As one faced the wall, to the left of the base was a group of two life-size animals: a feline and a griffin. Opinions differ, but a parallel pair may have mirrored these to the right of the base¹¹. There are, of course, good parallels for such a ‘heraldic’ arrangement in the Knossos Throne Room, on which STEFAN HILLER himself has commented¹², and in compositions such as the ‘Lion Gate’ at Mycenae¹³. It is not difficult to imagine that these powerful animals – one of them supernatural¹⁴ – were considered to protect whatever figure occupied the seat that originally rested on the base. The iconography, therefore, acted as a static ‘frame’, a ‘focalising device’ for the physical presence of an individual. This scale of Aegean iconography has recently been termed ‘inclusive space’ by COLIN RENFREW¹⁵, although perhaps the term ‘participatory’ captures better the way that life-size, or near-life-size representations invite live actors to participate with figures depicted on the walls. The co-

³ BENNET 1995, 1999a, 1999b, with more extensive references to others’ work.

⁴ BENNET 1998–1999, 28–30.

⁵ BLEGEN & RAWSON 1966, 76–92, 197–203, and 253–9.

⁶ LANG 1969, 194–6; MCCALLUM 1987.

⁷ BLEGEN & RAWSON 1966, 87–8.

⁸ BLEGEN & RAWSON 1966, 88.

⁹ BLEGEN & RAWSON 1966, 84.

¹⁰ BLEGEN & RAWSON 1966, 88.

¹¹ YOUNGER 1995, pl. LXXVI reconstructs the entire composition as symmetrical around the base. LANG 1969, 101, n. 56, 194–5, pl. 125 implies a symmetrical arrangement, although she displays some scepticism (LANG 1969, 101). MCCALLUM 1987, 97–101 suggests that there is insufficient evidence to reconstruct two pairs, one on either side, citing earlier discussions, particularly that of MIRIÉ 1979, 47–9.

¹² HILLER 1996.

¹³ e.g., HILLER 1973.

¹⁴ There is evidence to suggest the griffin was regarded by ‘Mycenaeans’ as ‘other’ rather than supernatural in images that emphasise its mammalian or avian life-cycle. The images on two cushion seals from Routsis Tholos (CMS I no. 269 and 271; DEMAKOPOULOU 1988, 214, no. 194) show a lactating female griffin, while a LH III C light-on-dark alabastron from Lefkandi depicts a pair of griffins holding a nest full of griffin chicks (POPHAM & MILBURN 1971, 340, pl. 54,2). On this question in general, see REHAK 1995a; BENNET 2004, 97–8.

¹⁵ RENFREW 2000, 140–3.

presence of an individual on the seat would, in fact, ‘complete’ the composition, forming a ‘first-person’ iconography of power, distinct from the ‘third-person’ representations that appeared in contemporary Egypt or Mesopotamia¹⁶. Since this is the largest, most elaborate, and central room in the overall complex, and no other similar ‘focalising’ compositions are known, it seems very plausible that the occupant of the seat was – on appropriate occasions – the ruler of Mycenaean Pylos, the *wanax*, as we know his title from the Linear B documents.

On the far right of this same wall, near the entrance into Room 6, there was a scene comprising two groups of figures seated at tables¹⁷, perhaps raising drinking vessels¹⁸; a figure in a long robe seated on a rock, holding (not playing)¹⁹ a lyre and looking to his right, our left, toward a winged creature. Although fragmentary like all the Pylos frescoes, this scene does seem to represent a feast and to do so at a different scale from the animals next to the seat, in what RENFREW terms ‘detached observer space’²⁰, or what I would prefer to call a ‘panoptic’ view. Scenes like these allow the appreciation of the action of the entire composition by an observer, rather than inviting their participation in the action of the scene. This composition in room 6 apparently continues, indeed completes, the theme of a procession – once again, ‘participatory’ or ‘inclusive’ – depicted on the wall of the ante-room (Room 5), a procession that includes a large-scale bull and male and female figures carrying various objects, possibly equipment for a feast²¹.

The juxtaposition in Room 6 of this scene of feasting with a ‘frame’, into which the *wanax* inserted himself, implies a link between the *wanax* and such activities. This link is well attested – through the work particularly of PITEROS, MELENA, and OLIVIER, and of KILLEN²² – in the Linear B documents from Pylos itself²³. Particularly important is Pylos document **Un 2**, whose heading appears to suggest the specific context for such a feast at nearby *pa-ki-ja-ne*: the ‘initiation’ (does this mean ‘coronation’?²⁴) of the *wanax*. Recently JOHN KILLEN suggested that another group of tablets, headed by Pylos **Ta 711**, inventoried equipment for a feast – equipment perhaps like that depicted in the ante-room procession fresco – on the occasion of the *wanax* making an appointment to a particular post, that of *da-mo-ko-ro*²⁵. That

¹⁶ See SHELMERDINE 1999, on the ‘absence’ of the chief in Mycenaean representations; also DAVIS 1995. REHAK (1995c) argues on the basis of the predominance of females in representations of seated figures that the Mycenaean concept of an enthroned figure was that of a woman, not a man. Although the representational evidence is overwhelming, it is possible to get around it by suggesting that such depictions were idealised, perhaps because depicting the male ruler in a seat was an event only enacted, not depicted. Representations of females might therefore represent either divine or mythical figures, or idealisations of the divine power (Mycenaean Potnia?) ‘behind the throne’.

¹⁷ It is worth noting that the fragment formerly identified as depicting a bull trussed on an altar (e.g., MCCALLUM 1987, 94–6) is no longer considered to represent this subject: STOCKER & DAVIS 2004, 70, n. 47.

¹⁸ Based on parallels with the Knossos Camp Stool Fresco (*PM* IV.2, 389–90, figs 324–5; cf. WRIGHT 2004b, 42–4, fig. 15), but representations of the actual kylikes are not preserved at Pylos: SHELMERDINE 1999, 21, fig. 3.2.

¹⁹ YOUNGER 1998, 69.

²⁰ RENFREW 2000, 139.

²¹ MCCALLUM 1987, 77–87, 109–23; KILLEN 1998; PALAIMA 2004, 115–6.

²² PITEROS ET AL. 1990; KILLEN 1994.

²³ More recently, BENDALL 2004; PALAIMA 2004; STOCKER & DAVIS 2004.

²⁴ For example, KILLEN 1998, 422; cf. PALAIMA 1998–1999, 221 for the suggestion that a new *wanax* had recently been ‘enthroned’.

²⁵ KILLEN 1998; see also PALAIMA 2000; 2004.

such feasts were common features at other Mycenaean centres has become increasingly clear since the discovery of a group of sealings at Thebes in 1982²⁶.

The majority of the Linear B texts deal with regular and/or cyclical events within the life of the Pylian state: processes that require monitoring at various stages (allocation of rations, allocation of raw materials, delivery of raw materials, management of livestock) or that repeat from season to season (taxation, disbursement of commodities to deities according to a calendar). These feasts, whose provisioning is part of the palace's overall mobilisation of commodities, can therefore be seen as regular or cyclical events. Further support for this idea is provided by recent re-study of faunal remains from BLEGEN'S excavations and their contexts, demonstrating the presence of burnt animal bone representing at least 19 head of oxen and at least one deer, together with equipment used in sacrifice, in Room 7 of the Archives Complex²⁷. It appears, therefore, that palatial administrators were responsible for verifying and recording the successful completion of feasts like those depicted in the 'main megaron'. It is, therefore, significant that these depictions are explicitly linked with an iconographic 'frame' that facilitated the repeated co-presence of the *wanax* in the same spot, a 'performance of power'.

However, estimates of the size of group involved in such feasts, based partly on the potential meat yield estimated from faunal remains²⁸, partly on the large quantities of drinking vessels stored in rooms alongside Room 6, and also by the entrance to court 63²⁹, and partly on the basis of the quantities mobilised in documents like **Un 2** – nearly 600 l. of wine, for example – suggest that it is unlikely that such feasts took place within the 'main megaron' itself. LISA BENDALL has recently proposed a hierarchy of feasting at Bronze Age Pylos, emphasising its 'diacritical'³⁰ nature, with those of highest status accommodated in the 'main megaron', others out of doors (as implied by the wall-paintings in the 'main megaron') not only in court 63/88, from which there was easy access to the pottery stores both in room 60, upon entry, and – by virtue of modifications to the structure within LH III B – to the stores alongside the 'main megaron', in rooms 18–22, but also in front of the main palatial complex, in court 58³¹.

If we are reading the wall-painting in the 'main megaron' correctly as a depiction of a feast, there is one important additional element that we need to consider: the figure seated on the rock holding a lyre. The assumption has often been made that this figure is a Bronze Age Homer (or an Apollo or Thamyris)³². The seemingly simple assumption that such figures might have existed in the Bronze Age gains credibility from linguistic studies – such as those of HORROCKS, RUIJGH, and WEST³³ – that argue a considerable antiquity not just for the

²⁶ PITEROS ET AL. 1990. More recent bibliography: ISAAKIDOU ET AL. 2002; HALSTEAD & ISAAKIDOU 2004; various papers in WRIGHT 2004a; HAMILAKIS & KONSOLAKI 2004. KILLEN 1994 covers the Linear B evidence from Knossos.

²⁷ ISAAKIDOU ET AL. 2002; HALSTEAD & ISAAKIDOU 2004; STOCKER & DAVIS 2004, 183–8.

²⁸ HALSTEAD & ISAAKIDOU 2004, 146–7; STOCKER & DAVIS 2004, 72.

²⁹ e.g., 2853 kylikes in room 19 (WRIGHT 1984, 24) and a total of nearly 6,600 vessels in rooms 18–22, and nearly 800 in room 60 (WHITELAW 2001, 55); see HRUBY 2006 now for more up-to-date figures and an overall study of ceramics in relation to feasting at Bronze Age Pylos.

³⁰ DIETLER 2001, 85–8; cf. WRIGHT 2004b, 14–7.

³¹ BENDALL 2004, 112–24. See also DAVIS & BENNET 1999, 110, SÄFLUND 1980, 239, SHELMEKDINE 1998, 84, 87–8, and WHITELAW 2001, 58 for suggestions regarding the location of feasting at Pylos in court 63/88. On the use of special pigments in the 'main megaron' wall-paintings, distinct from those elsewhere in the palace, see BRECOULAKI 2005.

³² e.g., BLEGEN & RAWSON 1966, 79.

³³ HORROCKS 1980; 1984; RUIJGH 1985; 1995; WEST 1988.

Homeric poetic dialect, but for elements of that dialect that are particularly suited to the ‘composition-in-performance’³⁴ of hexameter poetry. HORROCKS’ work on that linguistic feature of Homeric style commonly known as ‘*tmesis*’ – better described as the separation of verb forms from verb particles or preverbs – has shown that it was an early feature of Greek (perhaps an Indo-European inheritance) that had apparently disappeared by the time of the Linear B tablets³⁵. The fact that it was retained in the Homeric poetic dialect suggests that the origins of this special dialect pre-date the language as attested in the Linear B tablets. Similarly, certain Homeric forms preserved in formulae – even occasional whole lines – can be scanned more consistently by using reconstructed Mycenaean forms in place of those preserved in the texts as we have them³⁶.

We are, therefore, on fairly secure ground in restoring the existence of oral poetic performances in the Mycenaean world. That such poetry was ‘oral’ – not enshrined in a scribal tradition as in Mesopotamia³⁷ – is a significant point. The generally restricted nature of Mycenaean literacy perhaps reinforces this conclusion, although such *argumenta ex silentio* can never be completely compelling. Again, however, the nature of the ‘framing’ iconography in the ‘main megaron’, only completed by the live presence of the *wanax* – a kind of ‘performance art’? – perhaps offers further confirmation, or at least an analogy for a notion that such displays were ‘performances’ to be experienced in the moment, not re-presented in written form, but retained in bodily memory of tastes, smells, sights and sounds³⁸. Can we speculate still further on the possible content of any performance by the lyre-player and those of his ilk?

The circumstances of performance and therefore composition of oral poetry must have changed radically between the 13th and the 8th centuries BC, as SUSAN SHERRATT outlined a number of years ago³⁹. Perhaps the most important indicator of the possible content of Bronze Age poetry is Aegean iconography, especially that associated broadly with warfare and generally ‘panoptic’ in nature inviting ‘detached observation’, not participation. Not only is there the rich miniature fresco from Akrotiri on Thera⁴⁰, but there are also many other more fragmentary examples of probable narrative iconography in the Mycenaean world, from a period perhaps contemporary with the Thera fresco down to the time of the last palace at Pylos⁴¹. Indeed, some of the best-known examples were found on the northeast wall of room 64 at Pylos⁴². Because such representations do not carry captions as in, e.g., Egyptian or

³⁴ LORD 2000, 13–7.

³⁵ HORROCKS (1980; 1984) argues for occasional instances in Mycenaean, as reflected in the Linear B usage, but DUHOUX (1997) rejects these, implying that the separation of verb and pre-verb must have gone out of use in the language as deployed by Pylian administrators in the late 13th century BC. If DUHOUX is correct, it might imply an even greater antiquity for the formation of the epic ‘*Kunstsprache*’.

³⁶ For a full list and discussion, see RUIJGH 1995.

³⁷ See, e.g., POSTGATE 1992, 66–70 on the expansion in uses of script in the mid-3rd millennium BC; on the existence of oral traditions in Mesopotamian parallel to the literate versions preserved, see, e.g., DALLEY 1989, XV–XIX.

³⁸ On the archaeology of the senses, see, e.g., HAMILAKIS ET AL. 2002; GOSDEN 2001.

³⁹ SHERRATT 1990.

⁴⁰ MORGAN 1988 is the fullest study, but see also TELEVANTOU 1994. For explicit comparisons between elements of Homeric composition and the Thera miniature fresco, see MORRIS 1989; HILLER 1990.

⁴¹ For Aegean narrative depictions in general, see CAIN 1997; also, specifically in relation to scenes on Minoan signets, CAIN 2001. On ancient narrative art in general, see the various contributions in HOLLIDAY 1993.

⁴² LANG 1969, 214–5; DAVIS & BENNET 1999, 107–11. For recent discussion of a naval scene, probably from an earlier phase of decoration in room 64, see SHAW 2001; for a wall-painting fragment depicting an archer, from an earlier phase in the northeast section of the palatial buildings (rooms 27 and 32), see BRECOULAKI ET AL. (forthcoming).

Assyrian representations⁴³, it is difficult to distinguish between generic or specific (broadly ‘narrative’) subject matter⁴⁴. I would like to suggest that such scenes with specific details were intended as narratives.

The compositions in room 64 would have been visible to spectators in court 63, from which room 64 was approached⁴⁵. Room 64 itself was an anteroom to the second-largest megaron in the palatial complex, Room 65. It has been plausibly argued that this megaron and the larger complex (usually referred to as the ‘Southwest Building’) was the establishment of the second-in-command in the Pylian state, the *lawagétas* or *lawagértas*⁴⁶. This official – whose title is quite transparently Greek: ‘leader, or assembler, of the host’⁴⁷ – may well have been the military leader, and, therefore, responsible for rather less predictable or regular activities within the state. The decoration on the wall of room 64 includes a number of duels between figures clearly identified by their iconography – attested elsewhere, not just at Pylos – as ‘Mycenaeans’ (items such as boar’s tusk helmets or greaves) and characters explicitly made to look non-‘Mycenaean’ by the absence of such ‘Mycenaean’ accoutrements and the substitution of animal skins. The narrative seems to be: “we [Pylions] overcome a non-‘Mycenaean’ or a de-‘Mycenaeanised’ enemy”⁴⁸. The puzzling vertical wavy bands have sometimes been seen as rivers, but an argument can be made for their indicating landscape⁴⁹. If so, they well reflect the topography of this part of Messenia, where a series of long, deeply incised ridges run west to the coastal plain or east towards the Pamisos valley, and might suggest a location for these conflicts.

The scenes presented panoptically in room 64 could have been drawn out, made specific, and ‘quickened’ on a regular basis by parallel poetic performances like that illustrated in the feasting composition in the ‘main megaron’, and performed in court 63/88. If we accept that narratives could be created on the basis of a combination of these scenes and poetic performance, we might wonder when such conflict might have occurred within or beyond the boundaries of the Pylian state. A plausible answer would be during the struggles – presumably not diplomatic – to incorporate the ‘further province’ of the state, something that may have happened as recently as three to four generations prior to the final palace’s destruction⁵⁰. There might well have been individuals alive at the time of the final palace who would recall from their childhood such events. Indeed, it is even possible that such actions were going on at about the same time as the destruction, if the construction of the apparently new site at Mouriata da fully within LH III B can be read as indicating Pylian ‘intervention’ in the Kyparissia valley, the northern extremity of the state⁵¹. The representation would therefore be a public statement, accessible for viewing by those enjoying palatial largesse at regular feasts in court 63/88, more public than the ‘main megaron’ composition. What is more its

⁴³ Although not necessarily simple captions in the modern sense, the addition of text to Egyptian and Assyrian representations in general gave a context for the scenes and brought out their specific reference (or ‘quickened’ them, in the sense of BARTHES 1977, 38): e.g., BAINES 1989; DAVIS 1993; O’CONNOR 2000; RUSSELL 1991, 1993; WINTER 1981, 1985. On the effect of such captioning in later Greek art, shortly after the development of the alphabet, see, e.g., BENNET 2004, 96.

⁴⁴ See CAIN (1997, esp. 113–30, 241–55) for a discussion of possible ways to identify visual narratives.

⁴⁵ DAVIS & BENNET 1999, 110–1.

⁴⁶ Notably by STEFAN HILLER (1987), cited in DAVIS & BENNET 1999, 117–8.

⁴⁷ For the term, AURA JORRO 1993, 230–1. See NIKOULOU DIS (forthcoming) for a discussion of the role of the *ra-wa-ke-ta*.

⁴⁸ DAVIS & BENNET 1999, 111–2.

⁴⁹ e.g., LANG 1969, 21–2 (quoting EVANS *PM* II, 728); cf. MCCALLUM 1987, 96–7.

⁵⁰ DAVIS & BENNET 1999, 115–6; BENNET 1999b, 13.

⁵¹ BENNET 1998–1999, 24–6, 30; cf. also BENNET 1995, 599–600; 1998.

message – that Pylian ‘Mycenaeans’ prevail over a ‘non-Mycenaean’ indigenous population or a ‘de-Mycenaeanised’ rival group to the east – may have been based on a historical narrative.

Finally, two other observations suggest that such representations were subject to periodical renewal. First, the presence in dumps of fragments of wall-paintings with the characteristic ‘checkerboard’ upper border of the room 64 frieze, implies they had been removed from that location prior to its final decoration⁵². Second, BLEGEN observed various locations in the palace where periodic renewal of plaster layers were visible: the plaster covering the hearth in room 6, the ‘main megaron’ (at least five layers), and against column bases in the propylon, rooms 1 (6–7 layers) and 2 (7 layers), the northeast stoa, room 44 (4–5 layers), and in room 64 (6 layers)⁵³. If we assume that the latest palatial structures had a lifetime of perhaps a century, from the beginning of LH III B until its end, and we further assume that wall-paintings were renewed at least as frequently as plaster, then we might conclude that such renewals happened, on average, at least once every twenty or fewer years. It lies completely within the realms of speculation, but one wonders if such renewals took place at the accession of a new *wanax*?

We can argue, therefore, that the authority of the state, embodied in the person of the *wanax*, could be reinforced on a regular basis, both by his physical, performed appearance within a ‘frame’ that reinforced his power by analogy to powerful and possibly supernatural beasts, and also by his largesse expressed in the form of feasts, regularly stocked by palatial mobilisation, depicted in the ‘main megaron’ and held perhaps there, in court 63, and in front of the main palatial structures. The dangers of trying to subvert this order were encoded in representations of warfare readily visible by feasters and also, I suggest, expressed in oral poetry that presumably told of the state’s or the *wanax*’s success in such warfare.

One final detail needs consideration. One of the animals flanking the *wanax*’s seat in the ‘main megaron’ was a griffin⁵⁴. Griffins also appear in the third megaron at Pylos, room 46, arguably a more private room, but still perhaps royal⁵⁵. A griffin was also depicted on the gold cushion seal found in Tholos IV, the tholos aligned on the early Mycenaean gateway onto the Pylos acropolis⁵⁶. Griffins occur in many other contexts in the Mycenaean world depicting both violent action (e.g., on the Athens Agora ivory pyxis⁵⁷) and a more nurturing role (e.g., the lactating examples on seals from Myrsinohori⁵⁸). It has even been suggested – perhaps more plausibly than some would believe – that the monumental gateway at Mycenae was not, in fact, a ‘lion gate’, but a ‘griffin gate’⁵⁹.

Given this association between griffins and rulers, let us look once again at a detail of the feast depicted in the ‘main megaron’. There are parallels for the association of musicians and birds in the Aegean Bronze Age, but the crest and colour scheme of the winged creature

⁵² LANG 1969, 74–5 [31 H nws], 186 [19 M ne], and possibly 78 [38 H ne]; SHAW 2001, 38–40, a discussion of LANG 1969, 186 [19 M ne].

⁵³ Room 6 hearth: BLEGEN & RAWSON 1966, 85–7 (also noting that the comparable hearth in the megaron at Mycenae had evidence of 10 re-coatings); Propylon: BLEGEN & RAWSON 1966, 56, 61; Northeast stoa: BLEGEN & RAWSON 1966, 191; Room 64: BLEGEN & RAWSON 1966, 251.

⁵⁴ On Aegean griffins, see, e.g., DESSENE 1957; BISI 1965; DELPLACE 1967.

⁵⁵ BLEGEN & RAWSON 1966, 197–202; LANG 1969, 208–11.

⁵⁶ CMS I no. 293; BLEGEN ET AL. 1973, 113–4, fig. 192, 8a–b.

⁵⁷ From Tomb I, dating to LH III A1: *Agora XIII*, 166, pl. 32.

⁵⁸ CMS I no. 269 and 271; cf. above n. 14.

⁵⁹ PROTONOTARIOU-DEILAKI 1965; cf. HILLER 1973.

here suggested to PAUL REHAK that it may be a griffin⁶⁰. In which case, can we read the scene as the bard having just completed his song – hence his ‘shouldered’ lyre – symbolised by the griffin flying off? The griffin, of course, implies a song about the king’s exploits, such as – perhaps – the conquest of the Pamisos valley region. On this interpretation, moreover, perhaps we are justified in reading the rock, on which the singer sits, as symbolising the divider between the ‘hither’ and ‘further’ provinces, Mycenaean **Aigolaion*, later Greek Αἰγαλέον⁶¹. ‘Winged words’ indeed...

By means, then, of a combination of image, text, and archaeological context, we can explore in some detail the strategies employed by the Bronze Age Pylian elite to present and reinforce power. Unlike contemporary Egypt, these strategies did not involve captioned narrative representations; nor was the king’s image represented in ‘third-person’ monumental form, as in Egypt or Mesopotamia. A significant component in such representations of the Pylian *wanax* and his exploits was ‘live’ or ‘oral’ performance tied to ‘fixed’, ‘panoptic’ representations in room 64 and the ‘participatory’ ‘frame’ in the main megaron. Rather than being valuable for carrying names, places, or things from a ‘real’ Bronze Age across the generations, it would seem that Homeric poetry in fact represents a continuity of practice, no doubt maintained by those who continued to wield power in the Aegean after the palatial systems collapsed, and, with them, the need for any form of restricted bureaucratic literacy⁶².

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⁶⁰ Cited in YOUNGER 1998, 69.

⁶¹ STRABO 8.4.1–2.

⁶² See also BENNET 2004.

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