

Mycenaean Scribal Practices: A Comparative Approach

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## ABSTRACT

### Mycenaean Scribal Practices: A Comparative Approach

A thesis presented to the Graduate Program in Ancient Greek and Roman Studies

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Comparative scholarship has not been brought to bear on dominant questions concerning the Linear B tablet writers. To remedy this, the thesis herein compares prevailing Near Eastern (and especially Western Periphery) scribal practices to Linear B writing practices. The comparison focuses on two such practices, conforming tablet content and function to particular formats and written participation in international diplomatic correspondences. Chapter One examines the E class Pylos tablets and establishes that they show attempts to assemble their unique legal language into specific groupings arranged by tablet shape. Chapter Two reconstructs diplomatic letter exchange and contextualizes those exchanges with references to possible Mycenaean participation in international diplomatic exchange, determining that though Mycenae participated in said exchanges it may have done so without the participation of its tablet writers. The findings indicate that Linear B tablets writers show early stages of participation in prevailing Near Eastern writing practices but not mature participation.

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## Introduction:

The study of Mycenaean scribal culture presents several straightforward problems that often lack clear avenues for progress.<sup>1</sup> 1) Firstly, the Linear B tablets do not contain terminology denoting scribes, the act of writing or writing materials,<sup>2</sup> nor (to the best of our knowledge) do the tablet writers refer to themselves in their texts. 2) Secondly, we do not know whether tablet writers worked in non-administrative contexts or only under palatial employ, a notable blind spot given the economic nature of the overwhelming majority of the Linear B records. 3) Thirdly, we do not know how the craft of writing was transmitted and, most importantly, whether it was regularly practiced on media in addition to clay or employed in non-economic contexts. 4) Lastly, we do not know to what extent the tablet writers interacted with or were influenced by their eastern neighbors. The paper that follows asks whether a comparative approach, one that places Linear B scribes alongside their counterparts in the Near East, especially the area encompassing what Near Eastern scholars dub the “Western Periphery,” the geographic areas

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<sup>1</sup> The paper will employ the terminology “tablet writers,” favored by pinacologists such as Thomas Palaima, and “scribes” interchangeably in its discussion of Linear B scribes Thomas G. Palaima, “Scribes, Scribal Hands and Palaeography,” in *A Companion to Linear B: Mycenaean Greek Texts and their World, Vol. 2*, eds. Yves Duhoux and Anna Morpurgo Davies. (Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2011), 34, 55 n. 39. The terminology of scribes (Akkadian DUB.šar, lit. “king of the tablet”) and scribal culture recalls the Near Eastern context, in which scribes were often palatial administrators dependent upon and integral to the daily life of the palace. Hesitance to use the same terminology with respect to Mycenaean and Near Eastern writers derives from the very question this paper aims to address, namely, whether these writers occupied similar social roles or operated in the same social milieu.

<sup>2</sup> While the absence of writing terminology has become a truism in Linear B studies Professor Leonard Muellner has brought to my attention an early German-language article that suggests, following Evans, the presence of a “wood tablet” logogram. Helmuth Th. Bossert “Sie schrieben auf Holz” in *Minoica*, 1958: 67-74.

covering the Levant and contemporary Turkey, may yield new insights for reconstructing the social role of Mycenaean tablet writers. Specifically, the paper that follows brings to bear the Hittite and Ugaritic archaeological and tablet records on the four major problems in the study of Mycenaean tablet writers outlined above. Where appropriate, general theories concerning the development and history of writing will be incorporated. Though to a certain extent an approximation of the status of the tablet writers within the hierarchy of the Mycenaean palace system can be deduced both through close palaeographical study and reconstructions of the Mycenaean administration, scholars of Linear B have long noted the value of comparing the Mycenaean record to the broader Near Eastern record.

From the onset of Mycenaean studies, scholars such as Moses Finley have articulated the desire for comparisons with the Near East.<sup>3</sup> More recently, Jan Driessen, who wrote the definitive palaeographical and prosopographical work on the scribal hands of the tablets found in the Room of the Chariot at Knossos, advocates for a comparison between the Mycenaean and Ugaritic administrative practices.<sup>4</sup> The Mycenaean and Ugaritic tablets themselves, however, bear little similarity in terms of layout, content or formulae as noted by Alexander Uchitel, who dedicated three years of research to comparing the Mycenaean and Near Eastern records.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> M. I. Finley, "The Mycenaean Tablets and Economic History," in *Mycenaean Palace Archives and Economic History: Economic History Review 10* (1957-58), 128-141.

<sup>4</sup> Jan Driessen, *The Scribes of the Room of the Chariot Tablets at Knossos: Interdisciplinary Approach to the Study of a Linear B Deposit* (Salamanca: Ed. Universidad de Salamanca, 2000), 224. Specifically, Driessen proposes that certain administrative techniques from Ugarit, such as the organization of records and the use of labels, directly inspired Mycenaean practices.

<sup>5</sup> Alexander Uchitel, "The Archives of Mycenaean Greece and the Ancient Near East," in *Society and Economy in the Eastern Mediterranean (c. 1500-1000 B.C.): Proceedings of the International Symposium held at the University of Haifa from the 8<sup>th</sup> of April to the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 1985*, eds. Michael Heltzer and Edward Lipinski. (Leuven, Uitgeverij Peeters, 1998), 23. Uchitel also demonstrates similarities between the Mycenaean tablets and the later (10<sup>th</sup> century) Hittite Kululu lead strip No. 3 + fr. 2 and the E class tablets, an observation which will be discussed in

Instead, Uchitel finds comparable documents primarily in the Ur III records, a period that John Killen has also drawn on for comparative work on the Mycenaean administrative system.<sup>6</sup> Comparison need not be sought only in the details.

Broad trends also make worthwhile comparisons. Thomas Palaima, a detail-oriented pinacologist, asserts the worth of comparing broad trends in scribal practices, noting that, “the evidence from cuneiform cultures gives us ... a template or model for what we should be thinking about when we try to imagine how the technology of writing was acquired and used within the Mycenaean palatial societies,” not a one-to-one correspondence but a paradigm within which to interpret scribal practices.<sup>7</sup> Marian Feldman has successfully applied a similar concept in the field of Art History in *Diplomacy by Design*.<sup>8</sup> She convincingly demonstrates the existence of a Bronze Age *international artistic koiné* in “the visual expression of a specific intercultural, supra-regional community of rulers that coalesced as a distinct sociopolitical entity during the late Bronze Age,” in other words, in common ways of conveying meaning in the visual arts.<sup>9</sup> Might the LBA Mediterranean and Near Eastern writers working for elites participate in a scribal *koiné*? That such a “scribal *koiné*” existed in the broader Near East can be argued on historical grounds through the spread of scribal schools from Mesopotamia to the Western Periphery.<sup>10</sup> Whether the Linear B scribes participated in an international scribal *koiné*, not in the sense of

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Chapter 2. For a general discussion of the importance of the E class tablets in determining the extent of Mycenaean literacy see Chapter 1.

<sup>6</sup> John T. Killen, “The Linear B Tablets and the Mycenaean Economy” in *BCILL 26: Linear B: A 1984 Survey. Proceedings of the Mycenaean Colloquium of the 8<sup>th</sup> Congress of the International Studies* edited by Anna Morpurgo Davies and Yves Duhoux, (Louvain: 1998), 241-305.

<sup>7</sup> Palaima, “Scribes, Scribal Hands and Paleography,” 114.

<sup>8</sup> Marian H. Feldman, *Diplomacy By Design: Luxury Arts and an “International Style in the Ancient Near East, 1400-1200 BCE* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Feldman, 8, 30.

<sup>10</sup> For instance, William Moran writes about what he calls “cuneiform culture,” a writing culture that existed among all of the cultures that wrote in cuneiform. William L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), xviii.

historical contact but in terms of a shared set of general practices, will be discussed in the remainder of the paper.

Despite the attractiveness of drawing a parallel between elite visual and graphic practices, the monotypical nature of the Linear B corpus and its meager size present considerable obstacles to doing so. The Linear B record has been variously described as palatial “counting house docket,”<sup>11</sup> “accounting,”<sup>12</sup> or “economic” records,<sup>13</sup> terminology in the same semantic field and refer to similar activities. The same can be said with respect to the Mesopotamian cuneiform record only until 2600 BCE. It is unclear whether such a period of the restricted use of writing existed in the Western Periphery, since Hittite economic texts seem to have been written on wax tablets and the Ugaritic records primarily reflect only the century before the city’s demise.

The scribal record in all these places at the time of the Linear B record (1450-1200 BCE)<sup>14</sup> is nothing short of robust: it documents legal rulings, communications between private citizens, diplomatic exchanges, palace inventories, etc. Writings in eight different languages were found at Ras Shamra. The Linear B record, in comparison, seems anemic. Likewise, the quantity of texts represented in the cuneiform record positively dwarfs the Linear B record, which at last count stands at ca. five thousand documents. Meanwhile, the Mesopotamian record runs into the hundreds of thousands, more texts than scholars have the resources to publish in our lifetime, perhaps ever. Despite the yawning chasm in quality and quantity output between the

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<sup>11</sup> Leonard R. Palmer, *Myceneans and Minoans: Aegean Prehistory in the Light of the Linear B Tablets*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), 17.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas G. Palaima, "Archives and Scribes in Mycenaean Linear B Records," in *Ancient Archives and Archival Traditions: Concepts of Record-Keeping in the Ancient World*, ed. Maria Brosius. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 269-301.

<sup>13</sup> Uchitel, 21.

<sup>14</sup> The late date is not in contention, only the early end of the dating. For the famous debate over the dating of the Knossos tablets see, L. R. Palmer and John Boardman, *On the Knossos Tablets: the Find Places of the Knossos Tablets, the Date of the Knossos Tablets*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963).



Linear B and broader Near Eastern corpora, the Linear B tablet writers show evidence of participating in the trends that characterize Near Eastern scribal cultures.

While no programmatic study identifying components of a Near Eastern scribal *koiné* exists, six distinguishing features of Near Eastern scribal practices can be identified by way of an overview of the academic literature: 1) writing is employed in diplomacy, usually in a lingua franca (Akkadian, except in the case of inter-Anatolian communication); 2) writing is put to multiple uses, including individual and official correspondences, economic receipts and purchases, and more; 3) writing is generally undertaken by individuals connected to the administration or other economically dominant parties, often including merchants themselves; 4) writers were mostly low-level functionaries connected to and dependent upon industrial or religious institutions; only select writers seem to wield a degree of autonomy within the administration; 5) the purpose of a given document determined the physical characteristics of the writing medium (especially tablet shape); where multiple scripts were in use so were multiple writing surfaces; 6) writing was transmitted in an apprenticeship system that often used the language of familial relationships<sup>15</sup> at “schools” that appear to teach only a handful of students at a time.

A variety of Linear B scholars have demonstrated that particular aspects of each of these six characteristics existed in the Linear B writing tradition. The cumulative evidence, however, has not been assembled, nor has it been systematically contextualized within Near Eastern scribal practices. Doing so, it is hoped, may clarify particularly contentious debates concerning the social role of Mycenaean scribes.

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<sup>15</sup> Scholars usually take the language of family relationship at face value though there is no reason to do so.

## Chapter One: Tablet Shape and Function

The proposition that what one writes dictates one's writing medium (and visa versa), as was the case in Ancient Near East, may seem peculiar given the ubiquity of the computer screen and the decline of snail mail. Yet vestiges of matching the message to the medium survive in the greeting card and the wedding invitation. Still more continuity between ancient writing practices and our own exists in the way that the function of the message determines formatting, and here noting the differences in format between, say, a graduate thesis and a graduate school acceptance letter will suffice to make the point. In the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean, specific types of writing (e.g., lists, letters, legal records) required the use of a specific writing medium. In certain instances, as in Hattuša and Egypt, a change in script attended the change in writing medium.

Each center of literacy within the Late Bronze Age Western Periphery correlates writing medium, format and function, albeit with different tendencies and emphases. For instance, at Hattuša, the interplay between writing's function and the writing medium and format extended to both script usage and language. Two scripts were found at Hattuša, a Luwian hieroglyphic script (which represents Luwian, a close relative of the Hittite language) relegated to use on seals and monumental architecture (primarily stone) and the Hittite language written on clay. Not extant, but alluded to in the clay record, is a third medium, the "wooden writing board," which probably would have been coated in wax and then inscribed, probably in cuneiform.<sup>16</sup> Whereas wood

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<sup>16</sup> Dorit Symington, "Late Bronze Age Writing-Boards and Their Uses: Textual Evidence from Anatolia and Syria" *Anatolian Studies* 41 (1991): 114.

tablets were the medium of choice for recording rituals, clay tablets were used primarily for international business, letter writing and administration<sup>17</sup> Additionally, wood tablets probably were used for economic and industrial activity.<sup>18</sup> In particular, scribes used wood tablets in the field for data collection and on reconnaissance work.<sup>19</sup> So starkly did Hittite culture differentiate the writing media that the cuneiform record preserves a unique word for scribe <sup>LÚ</sup>DUB.SAR.GIS, denoting a “scribe-on-wood.”<sup>20</sup> Additionally, the verb *guls-* “to inscribe, write or draw” exclusively designates writing on wax tablets.<sup>21</sup> The terminological distinctions with respect to writing media exemplify, in exaggeration, the general trend in Near Eastern scribal traditions to relegate particular types of writing to particular media.

Egypt generally adheres to the categorical demarcation of writing content with respect to writing media, a differentiation that generally applies to the type of script used as well as the formatting of the document. For instance, in Middle and New Kingdom Egypt scribes used cuneiform for administration and diplomacy in the international sphere,<sup>22</sup> while hieratic was the script of choice for religious and votive offerings, all of which are documents that were written on perishable materials. Likewise, the hieroglyphic script was used mainly on stone in monumental architecture and other media meant for display, such as scarabs. Though Egyptian

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<sup>17</sup> Symington, 116.

<sup>18</sup> This function must be inferred from the absence of such records in the cuneiform clay record; Symington, 111.

<sup>19</sup> James Moore, “Writing Religion: A Comparative Study of Ancient Israelite Scribes, their Writing Materials, and their Methods Used in the Writing of the Hebrew Prophets,” (master’s thesis, Brandeis University, 2011), 21. Cem Karasu, “Some Considerations on Hittite Scribes,” *Archivum Anatolicum [ArAnat]*, 1 (1995): 18.

<sup>20</sup> Symington, 113. <sup>LÚ</sup>DUB.SAR is the general term for a scribe who wrote on clay, though the word itself contains no reference to clay.

<sup>21</sup> Symington, 115.

<sup>22</sup> There is some evidence that within the Egyptian scribal administration a closed group of scribes wrote in cuneiform. Rachel Thyrsa Sparks, “Re-writing the Script: Decoding the Textual Experience in Bronze Age Levant (c.2000-1150 bc)” in *Writing as Material Practice: Substance, Surface and Medium* R. D. Whitehouse and K. E. Piquette (London: Ubiquity Press, 2013), 25.

scribes employed papyrus for writing a variety documents, they formatted literary and documentary writing differently, arranging the former horizontally in the direction of the papyrus fiber and the latter vertically at right angles to the fiber.<sup>23</sup> In Mesopotamia and the rest of the Western Periphery, where clay tablets were a predominant writing medium,<sup>24</sup> the method for differentiating types of texts was through the tablet shape. School texts and texts produced by students were written on round, palm-sized tablets called bullae, while correspondence was written on squared tablets. Official versions of treaties were often inscribed in precious metals. Judging by the slim extant record, metal treaties were written in the page-shape format like their clay counterparts.

At both the Western Periphery sites of Ugarit and Emar there seems to have been no differentiation between the wood and clay tablet writer, but different scribes may have specialized in different types of writing. The prosopographical and paleographic records indicate no great overlap between the writers of ephemeral legal texts and “scholarly” writers.<sup>25</sup> In the case of Emar, “hardly any of the scribes are known from both ephemeral documents and scholarly texts,” hinting at a division of scribal responsibilities not articulated in the terminology surrounding the scribal craft or in type of writing media, but one that was nonetheless in effect.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ogden Goelet, “Accounting Practices and Economic Planning in Egypt,” in *Creating Economic Order: Record-keeping, Standardization, and the Development of Accounting in the Ancient Near East*, eds. Michael Hudson and Cornelia Wunsch (Bethesda, Maryland: CDL Press, 2004), 230.

<sup>24</sup> In Mesopotamia, Aramaic scribes would have written on wood tablets and/or animal hide; in Hattuša, wood-tablet scribes (not surprisingly) would have written on wood tablets.

<sup>25</sup> W.H. van Soldt, “Private Archives at Ugarit,” *Interdependency of Institutions and Private Entrepreneurs: Proceedings of the Second Mos Symposium* ed. A.C.V.M. Bongenaar (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 2000), 244.

<sup>26</sup> Yoram Cohen, *Scribes and Scholars of the City of Emar in the Late Bronze Age* (Winnona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 54.

All these examples attest to the interplay among writing types, the medium and format throughout the Western Periphery, and the different configurations it takes.

In the Linear B corpus, different tablet shapes may also correspond to different types of documents. Scholars generally admit two basic tablet shapes, the “palm leaf” shape, a long and narrow rectangular shape often with rounded, tapered edges and the “page” shape, a rectangular shape longer than it is wide with generally squared edges.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, general agreement exists that the differently shaped tablets meet particular administrative functions. The palm-leaf tablet serves as a work or inventory receipt, a mnemonic device of sorts,<sup>28</sup> and the page shape tablets collate information from the palm-leaf receipts. The palm-leaf tablets (henceforth “the long and narrow tablets”)<sup>29</sup> generally contain lists and little complex grammar (minimal use of verbs, lack

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<sup>27</sup> Labels can be counted as a third shape. *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Greek Language and Linguistics*, s. v. “Scribes, Mycenaean.”

<sup>28</sup> Bonnie Nilhamn, “From Oral Promise to Written Receipt: A Cognitive Study of the Use of Mnemonics within Ancient Administration,” in ed. Leonid Efimovich Kogan, *City Administration in the ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 53e Rencontre assyriologique internationale. Vol. 2* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 171- 190.

<sup>29</sup> The use of the term “palm-leaf” derives from Pliny’s report that Cretans wrote on *palmularum foliis* (*Nat. Hist.*, XIII, 69). Pliny’s observation is all the more interesting given the ambiguity the term φοινικήια γράμματα, which can just as well mean “Phoenician letters” as it might “palm-leaf letters.” Ventris and Chadwick observed the similarity in shape between the long and narrow tablets and palm-leaf manuscripts in their first edition of *Documents in Mycenaean Greek* (F. M. Ahl, “Cadmus and the Palm-Leaf Tablets,” *The American Journal of Philology* 88.2 (1967): 188-194. While a cursory glance at surviving East Asian palm-leaf manuscripts (the oldest of which date to the second century CE) suggests the reason for Ventris and Chadwick’s assertion, I will desist from using the term “palm-leaf” in a paper investigating the possibility that Linear B scribes regularly wrote in media other than clay (in addition to making pot-marks) as it presupposes a conclusion. No scholars, however, believe that Linear B tablet writers also wrote on palm leaves. Pliny’s use of the term does not recall the collective “Greek” memory of the practice extending over a thousand years into Pliny’s time (or 4,000 years; see Ahl, who connects the palm-leaf interpretation of φοινικήια γράμματα to Evans’ observation that Cretan women in his day wore Linear B seals as necklaces). Rather, Pliny is more than likely observing a contemporary practice of writing and, in all likelihood, given the resemblance between Linear B long tablets and palm-leaf writing boards, he saw Mycenaean tablets first-hand. His etiology, unfortunately, has a compelling resonance with a term referring to the historical transmission of

of full sentences). The variance in tablet shape cannot be diagnostic, however, on account of the common sense intuition that tablets with more information require a larger shape than tablets molded to contain little information. That larger tablets, which compile information from smaller tablets, would have a use different from the tablets that they collate moreover seems inherent in their relationship to one another.

Demonstrating that Linear B scribes exhibit the same tendency to adjust tablet format or medium with respect to what is being written presents difficulties because of the single-mindedly administrative nature of the corpus. The lack of diversity within the corpus poses a considerable roadblock to determining whether Linear B scribes correlated the purpose of a tablet to its shape or medium. Yet some basic tendencies to differentiate between types of writings can be discerned.

The E Class tablets present a greater variation in tablet shape than other “classes” and offer some peculiarities in formatting and language, potentially providing data for meaningful observations concerning the interplay of writing-type and format. In Linear B studies, a “class” designates a group of texts that appear to share one or more logograms. E class tablets hold in common the logogram \*120 GRA and often share various formulae and technical terms. On the whole, they record land grants. Within the E class there are three subclasses, initially identified by Ventris and Chadwick, of tablets that function as pairs, the larger set of tablets recording the smaller. Of these, two sets distinguish themselves and bear discussion, as neither strictly conforms to expectations of tablet shape. The Ep tablets collate the long and narrow Eb tablets but unexpectedly take the shape of a page tablet turned lengthwise. The En tablets, which are the anticipated page shape oriented in the “normal” direction, compile the Eo tablets into

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the Greek alphabet from Phoenician peoples that has caused more confusion than unequivocal evidence.

“paragraphs.” Unlike the other collated tablets, however, the En text copies the Eo tablets with only a slight change in *formula* (as opposed to incidental word choice). Also unexpectedly, a portion of the Eo tablets exhibits neither the long and narrow nor page shape but instead an intermediate shape. The intermediate shape appears elsewhere in one other set of tablets from Pylos, the Eq set.

While determining the exact reason for these peculiarities requires further research (and may nevertheless prove elusive), the peculiarities themselves may prove indicative enough to at least posit a correlation between the types of document shape and their content. As mentioned above, the Eo and En subclasses are the only such pairings that in their entirety resembles direct copies as opposed to summaries (with, of course, changes in formula). Theories concerning the difference in terminology remain sparse, given the apparently slight modifications. The most prominent modification involves the omission of the suffix “que,” which appears to be the conjunction, but how the omission/addition of the conjunction alters the meaning or function of the tablet remains unclear. Clearly the alterations do not reflect an effort to emend the text, as such emendations, which occur not too infrequently elsewhere, take the form of direct intervention in the text. Other sets of text, such as the Eb-Ep pair, which have a similar relationship to one another as do the above Eo-En set, have the same omission of “que” in their final tabulations. In contrast to the En-Eo tablets, there are changes in spelling and word choice between the Eb-Ep pairs and they do not bear on the formula.<sup>30</sup> Given the other types of emendations to texts, some for clarification and others for the sake of summary, it is not a stretch

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<sup>30</sup> Eb35 “The priestess, *and* she holds (this), and she claims the (her) god holds the *freehold*, but the actual plot-owner (claims) that he/she holds the *leases* of *communal* plots: 474 l. Wheat,” 256. Omission of the “erithe” “substitution of *ktoinookhos de* for *dāmos min phāsi*” the omission of *to-so pe-mo*, 257; or cf. Eb 321 which changes a singular to a plural; also the omission of *phasi* (saying); cf. Ep 704.

to imagine that the differences between the Eo-En texts are legal ones, though from our vantage point and the limited resources available to us the nuances of the difference cannot be ascertained.

Whatever the reasons, Linear B scribes distinguished the Eo intermediate shape from the other Eo long and narrow tablets. As noted by Palaima, “the texts of these [Eo] tablets are recorded in similar groups on the En tablets,” of which he identifies three primary groups, A, B and C.<sup>31</sup> Group C, consisting of Eo tablets 160, 211, 224, 247, 276 and 444, reappear consolidated on tablets En 609 and En 74, both of which are the classic page shape, with En 609 displaying *vacat* lines in between texts akin to a paragraph indentation. All the Eo tablets in group C have the same boxy, intermediate tablet shape, the only unifying characteristic among the group.<sup>32</sup> It seems unlikely that the consolidation of tablets conforming to their shape would have resulted from coincidence. Unfortunately, there are not enough verified, “pre-consolidated” tablet groups with variously shaped tablets with which to compare.<sup>33</sup>

Of the three Eq tablets, which have been designated as a set due to their “page shape” and common scribal hand Hand 1 (the same scribe who wrote En and Ep), one clearly exhibits the same “intermediate” Eo shape.<sup>34</sup> Notably, contrary to the aforementioned tablets, the Eo tablets were written by Hand 41. The “intermediate shaped” Eq 213 contains the only use in the Linear

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<sup>31</sup> Palaima, *The Scribes of Pylos*, 101.

<sup>32</sup> Certainly, nothing in the find spots of these tablets, either that of the Eo or En tablets, indicates why the tablets have been consolidated in this manner.

<sup>33</sup> For instance, all the Eb tablet sets, which become consolidated in Ep tablets (as will be discussed below), are of the long and narrow shape. The Jn tablets, which are page-shaped, probably represent a consolidation of early material, but we do not have the earlier tablets, let alone a sure means to guess their shape.

<sup>34</sup> The Eq tablet shapes warrant further research and discussion. Eq 146 and the joined tablet Eq 36 (previously fragments Eq 887, Eq 1451 and 1452) both exhibit multiple-line *vacats*. Multiple-line *vacats* are a regular enough feature of page-shaped tablets (e.g., An 128, Fn 867, Jn 433 and more), but their exact function has yet to be determined.



B corpus of the term *o-ro-jo*, which either refers to a type of seed (possibly “annual” or “olive”) or a type of land (perhaps “damaged”).<sup>35</sup> The tablet repeats the following formula in a series of four lines, “and similarly those of PN, of the *loss*, so much seed, X wheat,” which is preceded with a brief account of how the information was gathered, “thus Axotās [PN] has observed on his tour of inspection, counting the corn-land of *A-ke-re-wa* [PN],” a rare direct account of someone’s administrative responsibilities, even routine.<sup>36</sup> What exactly does the formula mean?

*O-ro-jo* occupies first position in the formulaic phrase *to-so-(de) pe-mo*, which appears consistently in the final position introducing 120 GRA amounts in the En, Ep and Eb tablets. In those comparable tablets, the phrase introducing *to-so-(de) pe-mo* indicates the type of land-arrangement under consideration or the (legal?) status of the person holding the land under consideration.<sup>37</sup> By analogy, *o-ro-jo*, which occupies the position before *to-so-(de) pe-mo*, should characterize the land-arrangement under consideration. Since the context prohibits *o-ro-jo* from characterizing the land-holder it must indicate the status of the land under consideration, perhaps, as Chadwick has ventured, land which has been “laid to waste or allowed to deteriorate,” an interpretation he called “extremely uncertain” despite the Homeric parallel.<sup>38</sup> Even though the meaning of *o-ro-jo* remains unresolved (and in all likelihood will remain so), the comparative context offers enough evidence to suggest that, whatever the exact technical designation of the term, it denotes the legal status of the land in question.

Whether E tablets that feature the *to-so-(de) pe-mo* formula, such as tablet Eq 213 and the Eb, Ep and En sets, constitute legal writing raises questions concerning the breadth of writing

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<sup>35</sup> Chadwick, 155; Palmer, *Interpretations*, 218.

<sup>36</sup> Chadwick, 154.

<sup>37</sup> See, for instance, Eb 846 in which a certain Aithioq<sup>u</sup>s holds a plot “from the village” (*pa-ro da-mo*) and is himself a plot-owner from (*ko-to-no-o-ko*). Also Ed 317 in which the priestess, key-bearer and company hold “leases” (*o-na-ta*).

<sup>38</sup> Chadwick, 269. *Od.* 4.318.

practices in the Mycenaean world. The Eb and Ep tablets stand out from the rest of the corpus on account of the length and complexity of their sentences. The famous Ep 704 and Eb 297 tablets, which are versions of each other, describe the landholdings of one priestess, Eritha. The text from Ep 704 reads:

<sup>8</sup>*e-ri-ta i-je-re-ja e-ke e-u-ke-to-qe e-to-ni-jo e-ke-e te-o da-mo-de-mi pa-si ko-to-na-o* <sup>9</sup>*ke-ke-me-na-o o-na-to e-ke-e to-so pe-mo WHEAT 3*

*Eritha the priestess holds (this), and she claims that (her) god holds the freehold; but the village says that he/she (merely?) holds the lease of communal plots: so much seed: 468 l. wheat*<sup>39</sup>

Leonard Muellner, in his study of the Homeric use of the verb εὔχομαι, was the first to identify the resonance between the language found in this passage and that found in the description of the Shield of Achilles in chapter 18 of the *Iliad*.<sup>40</sup> The relevant portion of the Shield pertains to the description of the city of peace, wherein the people (λαοὶ) gather in an agora to settle a dispute concerning the payment of material compensation for a murder (ποινὴ):

...ὁ μὲν εὔχετο πάντ' ἀποδοῦναι  
 δήμῳ πιφαύσκων, ὁ δ' ἀναίνετο μηδὲν  
 ἐλέσθαι.<sup>41</sup>

The scene in question unambiguously depicts a legal dispute, even though the exact system employed and the laws under discussion are not immediately self-evident.

The similarity in language between the Linear B and Homeric passage is remarkable. Both employ the same main verb, εὔχετο, and involve the participation of the δῆμος in a legal dispute. A third instance of a shared word can be established. Though the Homeric verse uses the helping participle πιφαύσκων, “to shine light on,” Muellner has shown its use here reflects the

<sup>39</sup> Chadwick, 253.

<sup>40</sup> Muellner, *The Meaning of Homeric εὔχομαι Through Its Formulas*, (Innsbruck Institut für Sprachwissenschaft, 1976), 100-106.

<sup>41</sup> *Iliad*, 499b-500.

“unanimous confusion of [the] two words,” *πιφάσκω* and *πιφαύσκω*, in both Aeschylus and in epic.<sup>42</sup> In other words, epic uses *πιφαύσκω*, “to shine light on,” where one would expect it to use *πιφάσκω*, “to say.” Even though Book 18 and the Ep tablet use different verbs, the verbs are used interchangeably in the linguistic tradition. This strange linguistic feature thus further establishes semantic continuity between the Linear B and epic record.

Bolstering the evidence that both passages engage in legal discourse, the work of Near Eastern legal scholar Raymond Westbrook shows how the legal question of whether material compensation (*ποινή*) must be accepted in exchange for “blood-guilt” recalls the Near Eastern legal context.<sup>43</sup> Without making a claim to a Near Eastern ancestry for the legal context described in the Shield of Achilles, Westbrook assembles convincing examples that situate Book 18 in a traditional, legal context. The cumulative evidence from Muellner and Westbrook does not establish that the E series tablets under discussion are legal tablets, but does convincingly establish that they contain technical legal language. In combination with the complex sentences found in the Eb/Ep tablets, the use of legal language suggests the extension of the Linear B script beyond list-making or inventory-making.

Before addressing in what other contexts tablet writers may have employed Linear B, the continuity in language between the Linear B tablets and Book 18 that centers on the theme of *ποινή* bears further comment. The question of *ποινή*, under what circumstances one must accept payment in compensation for incurred harm and who must accept *ποινή* from whom, is central to the epic cycle as recorded.<sup>44</sup> The most readily apparent discussion of *ποινή* revolves around

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<sup>42</sup> Muellner, 105.

<sup>43</sup> Raymond Westbrook, “The Trial Scene in the Iliad,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 94 (1992): 53-76.

<sup>44</sup> Donna F. Wilson, *Ransom, Revenge, and Heroic Identity in the Iliad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1-12.

whether Achilles ought to accept an ἄποινα (ransom) from Agamemnon or whether Agamemnon owes him a ποινή (material compensation) for his offences. As Donna Wilson has demonstrated, themes of compensation recur about thirty times in the *Iliad*.

Incidentally, the concept of ποινή also seems to show itself in the Linear B tablets. As John Killen has argued, two unique tablets in the E series, Ea 805 and Eb 294/Ep 704, discuss land gained through the acceptance of ποινή. In the case of Ea 805, the land-worker came to the plot on account of a manslaughter.<sup>45</sup> That ποινή became the central theme in the epic cycle as recorded in the Classical Age presents and has antecedents in the Linear B records expresses a continuity between Mycenaean and Greek culture encoded in Greek writing culture.

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<sup>45</sup> John Killen, "Observations on the Thebes Sealings" *Mykenaiika* 15 (1992), 378-380.

## Chapter Two: the Design of Written Diplomacy:

The most likely place to find evidence for Mycenaean writing practices other than the tablets themselves comes from diplomatic corpora. The only evidence for direct involvement in the diplomatic exchanges of the Near East's "Great Kings" by any of the polities represented in the Linear B corpus comes from Hatti. The "Ahhiyawa texts" are Hittite tablets so named and compiled by Gary Beckman, Trevor Bryce and Eric Cline according to the presence of either direct references to Ahhiyawa (Mycenae) or the same actors in those texts.<sup>46</sup> The most famous of these texts, the so-called "Tawagalawa Letter" (CTH 181) records a draft for a letter that a Hittite King, in all likelihood Hattusili III (1267-1237), would have written to an Ahhiyawan king whom he considered his political equal.<sup>47</sup> If not a draft for a written diplomatic letter, it could have been a "study guide" to prepare diplomatic messengers for an upcoming mission to Ahhiyawa.<sup>48</sup> Whether or not a letter, the "Tawagalawa letter" (henceforth referred to as the

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<sup>46</sup> Gary M. Beckman, Trevor R. Bryce, and Eric H. Cline, *The Ahhiyawa Texts* (Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature, 2011). The identification of Hiyawa/Ahhiyawa with geographic areas under Mycenaean influence or control, once controversial, has emerged as the scholarly near consensus. For the counterargument, see Ivo Hajnal, "Troia aus sprachwissenschaftlicher Sicht. Die Struktur einer Argumentation," ISL, Innsbruck 2003. For a brief summary of the debate's history see, as cited above, Beckman, Bryce and Cline, *Ahhiyawa*, 1-6.

<sup>47</sup> Harry A. Hoffner Jr., *Letters from the Hittite Kingdom* (Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature, 2009), 296-313. While Hoffner does not believe that the "Tawagalawa Letter" represents a letter, "properly speaking," he includes it in his collection of Hittite Letters "as an example of a document type that doubtless on many occasions provided the material and the argumentation for the composing of a lengthy diplomatic letter," 297.

<sup>48</sup> Susanne Heinhold-Krahmer, "Zu diplomatischen Kontakten zwischen dem Hethiterreich und dem Land Ahhiyawa," in *Keimelion : Elitenbildung und elitärer Konsum von der mykenischen Palastzeit bis zur Homerischen Epoche : Akten des internationalen Kongresses vom 3. bis 5. Februar 2005 in Salzburg*. Editors E. Alram-Stern and G. Nightinglae, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse, Denkschriften 350, Wien:

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Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Hoffner cites Heinhold-Krahmer who writes that the text is “ein Bravourstück diplomatischer Kunst and ein Argumentationskonzept für den Gestandten,” Hoffner, *Letters*, 291). It appears that she argues the text serves as a blueprint from which the messengers could work during their diplomatic mission, raising the possibility that no written transmission reached Ahhiyawa at all and that it served as a template for oral arguments.

Tawagalawa document) evinces direct diplomatic exchange, either written or oral, between Ahhiyawa and the highest level of the Hittite court. In addition to the Tawagalawa document there are two fragmentary letters exchanged between the polities, CTH 183, a letter from an Ahhiyawan King to a king of Hatti (probably Muwatalli II) and the very fragmentary CTH 29.16, in all likelihood from a king of Hatti to a king of Ahhiyawa, which provide direct evidence for diplomatic correspondence between Ahhiyawan and Hittite kings. Whether the diplomatic process involved Mycenaean scribes, however, cannot be deduced from the existence of the letters alone since the Ahhiyawan texts lack any reference to scribes and scribal craft.

What follows aims to envision the role of Mycenaean scribes in diplomacy, first by reconstructing the process through which Late Bronze Age kings exchanged letters and then by reading that reconstruction back into the Ahhiyawan texts. Despite the absence of scribes in the Ahhiyawan texts and scant references to scribes within the context of diplomatic exchange in the broader western peripheral corpus, messengers come to the fore in both corpora. Working from what we know about the role of messengers and methods of diplomatic exchange, we can move to the unknown and attempt to elucidate the role of scribes in the process.

### Part I: the Role of Messengers

Though Mycenaean messengers do appear in the Ahhiyawan corpus, the corpus does not provide enough evidence to reconstruct their function and procedures. For instance, the Linear B corpus makes no direct reference to messengers or similar functionaries. Ration lists found at Thebes, as analyzed by Alexander Uchitel, may record rations for a messenger's stable since that list most resembles messenger's rations lists found in the UR III Sumerian ration lists at

Lagash.<sup>49</sup> Not much else can be said about Mycenaean messengers from the Mycenaean record beyond this. Fortunately, the Hittite record contains references to Mycenaean messengers. In addition, the exchanges between “Great Kings” in Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and Mitanni, and vassals from Ugarit, Western Anatolia and elsewhere in the Near East, contain many references to the role of messengers in elite Bronze Age diplomatic correspondence.

In the Hittite world, the term for messenger (Hittite: <sup>LÚ</sup>*halugattala*, often written with the Akkadogram <sup>LÚ</sup>*TE<sub>4</sub>.ME*) designates administrative function and not rank. The term “messenger” at times applies to low-level functionaries tasked with carrying a correspondence from point A to B and, alternately, to a confidant of the king himself of royal blood.<sup>50</sup> Some messengers take on a “normal” role of diplomat, while others deliver “express,” a distinction perhaps more indicative of the message-type rather than the role of the messenger.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, vassals and “Great Kings” employ their messengers to different purposes.

In their deployment to Great Kings, vassal messengers carried out the obligations imposed on the vassal. The primary duties of a vassal to his king involved the sending of messengers and gifts (CTH 110). In a letter from the Hittite prince Piha-walwi to the Ugarit vassal Ibiranu, the Hittite prince indicates that the latter’s failure to send messengers when the new Hittite king assumed his kingship has made “His Majesty [] very angry,” and requests that the vassal immediately send gifts along with his messengers (CTH 110 §3.6-20). In the case of the vassal-king relationship, the sending of messengers serves to express obedience, and the duties of the messenger seem to have been restricted to that of glorified courier.

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<sup>49</sup> Alexander Uchitel, “Theban Fq Series and Ancient Near Eastern Messenger’s Stations,” *Studi micenei ed egeo-anatolici* 46 (2004): 271-279.

<sup>50</sup> Trevor Bryce, *Letters of the Great Kings of the Ancient Near East: the Royal Correspondence of the Late Bronze Age* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 63.

<sup>51</sup> Amanda H. Podany, *Brotherhood of Kings: How International Relations Shaped the Ancient Near East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 211.



Maneuvering between Great Kings and negotiating their relationships, in contrast, required more of messengers than delivery services. In an exchange from Hattusili III to the Babylonian King Kadashman-Enlil II, the Hittite king employs messengers as eyewitnesses of foreign lands (CTH 172). Having called on his Babylonian counterpart to grant his request for horses, noting the smaller size of Hittite horses compared to their Babylonian counterpart, he then instructs the king to ask his messengers for confirmation of his statement. In the same letter, he reveals messengers not only in their role as eye-witnesses, but as bearers of condolence upon the death of a king, deciders of lawsuits and deliverers of testimony and evidentiary tablets for a law hearing (CTH 172). Queen Puduhepa (wife of Hattusili III) reveals another dimension of the “eye-witness reporter” role sometimes assumed by messengers when she replies to Ramses II’s inquiries concerning her daughter, his prospect bride. He requests that her messengers “speak freely” to the young woman regarding himself and his life in Egypt (CTH 158). As seen here, the messenger was sometimes also a matchmaker. Each of these roles assumed by messengers suggests that messengers served as diplomatic envoys, whose savvy (or lack thereof) could have influenced the course of history.

At the most fundamental level, the exchange of messengers functioned to solidify alliance. A letter from Ramses II to Puduhepa records the following exhortation of friendship; “our messengers will travel continuously between us forever fostering brotherhood and peace,” a common sentiment expressed throughout the Near Eastern diplomatic corpus (CTH 158). In addition to carrying letters and expectations of good will in the form of their persons and the act of going between powers, messengers sent between kings of equal rank carried out the important task of delivering “gifts of greeting,” fine clothing and anointing oil (CTH 173). As Feldman notes, “simply the *act* of participating in a reciprocal exchange of greeting generated a

considerable portion of status for the correspondents,” meaning that the symbolic worth of the gifts often outweighed their material worth.<sup>52</sup> Likewise, letters functioned less as written correspondences and more as material items symbolizing alliances and conferring status.

Just as the content of gifts often mattered less than whether or not they were sent at all, so too letters need not contain important content to be regarded as important by either the sender or recipient. Feldman calls the correspondences between Great Kings “greeting letters” to emphasize their largely symbolic function, referring to the greeting formulae that accompany all correspondences between Great Kings.<sup>53</sup> Ramses II’s description of receiving a letter from Queen Puduhepa, upon which a reconstruction of the process of diplomatic letter exchange can be based, augments Feldman’s observation. In the letter referred to above, Ramses II details the process of receiving a letter quite clearly:

Now, Tili-Teshshup, my sister’s messenger, has arrived before me...told me of [the health] of my sister...and I was overjoyed when I heard of the health of my brother and of the health of my sister—“They are well, [safe], and healthy.” And when I saw the tablet which [my sister] sent me, when I heard all the matter which my sister wrote me about, when I received the present which my sister sent to me and when I saw that it was secure and in good condition, I was indeed overjoyed (CTH 158 §5.11-18-§6.19-25).

The streamlined version of the diplomatic process presented here consists of six discrete steps, 1) receiving the messenger 2) receiving the greetings of health and well-being 3) visual confirmation of the tablet’s arrival 4) hearing the matter written about on the tablet 5) receiving presents and 6) confirming the quality of the presents. While no evidence exists that contradicts Ramses II’s testimony, he skips over some aspects of the process that scholars generally agree upon. For instance, banquets seem to have accompanied the reception of messengers bearing

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<sup>52</sup> Feldman, *Diplomacy*, 148.

<sup>53</sup> Feldman, 145-156. “Thus says Naptera, Great Queen of Egypt: *Say to Puduhepa, Great Queen of Hatti, my sister: I, your sister, am well. My land is well. May you, my sister, be well! May your land be well!*” (CTH 167).

letters, some, if not all of the time, but especially on occasions of political consequence.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps even the simple arrival of messengers occasioned pomp, as Queen Puduhepa recounts the “messengers [who] come in splendor” to visit her daughter-in-laws at the Hittite capital (CTH 176 §9.57-52). The gifts accompanying the delivery of a letter and the often large entourages in which messengers seem to have traveled perhaps also indicate the need for an equally large reception.<sup>55</sup>

Elements 2-4 of the letter reception process described by Ramses II bear most on any reconstruction of the role of scribes in the diplomatic letter writing process, as, at least on the surface, they describe the interface between the written document and its recipient. The persons almost certainly responsible for physically inscribing the text, scribes, nevertheless, are entirely absent from the description, an admittedly subjective, first-person account purportedly from Ramses II himself. Element 2 consists of “hearing” about the health and well-being wishes expressed by the sender for the recipient. Such greeting formulae, mentioned above, grace the opening of lines of most Bronze Age written correspondences, immediately following the official address. Ramses II distinctly relates hearing the well-being formula before he even sees the tablet and or hears of its content. Given that scenario, the well-being formula must have been delivered orally, before the presentation of the tablet itself, which, as the next paragraphs hope to show, may have been presented orally, too.

The recitation from memory of a formula inscribed in the document raises the question of whether in fact the messenger read from the tablet at all or if his formal presentation of the tablet

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<sup>54</sup> Podany, 211.

<sup>55</sup> For examples of diplomatic gifts that would have accompanied the presentation of letters see letters CTH 169, CTH 167, which amount to little more than lists of diplomatic gifts in content. For one example of an entourage see CTH 158 §5.11-18, wherein the messengers of Puduhepa and Ramses II travelled together, five messengers belonging some to Puduhepa and some to Ramses II. Reference is also made to an interpreter.

consisted of oral summaries of its contents. Certainly, kings did not read the tablets themselves, as attested both by Ramses II's reference to "seeing" the tablet and the Near Eastern record more generally.<sup>56</sup> Steps 3 and 4 of the process, the visual confirmation of the tablet's arrival and hearing "all the matters...wrote...about," provide no clues as to whether the messenger actually read the tablet (CTH 158 §5.11-18-§6.19-25). Ramses II could just as easily have been hearing a summary of the letter as hearing the letter read, as the terminology surrounding each seems to be the same. Discerning whether messengers read from tablets upon their delivery requires further consideration of the evidence.

Evidence for oral messages delivered alongside written ones appear in records of disputes. For instance, the likely oral nature of the messenger's letter-delivery process may be inferred from contexts in which information contained in letters also appears to have been transmitted orally. In one among thirteen extant letters exchanged between Mitanni and Egyptian kings, a letter sent from the Mitanni King Tushratta to Amenhotep III explicitly states that the Egyptian messenger relayed the Pharaoh's request for betrothal to a Mitanni wife orally. Such requests represent the backbone of elite LBA diplomatic alliances and feature prominently in the written record. The evidence suggests that, while a written request for a wife would have accompanied the messenger, initially (at least) he would have made the request orally. After the oral message delivered by the Egyptian messenger, a translation into Hurrian by Tushratta's messenger would have followed.<sup>57</sup>

In one of several letters he wrote to Queen Puduhepa, Ramses II recounts an inconsistency in the messengers' reports that he would like resolved. Apparently, one of

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<sup>56</sup> Assurbanipal's literacy remains an outlier in the history of the Near East.

<sup>57</sup> While we know that official interpreters accompanied messengers in some instances, here, perhaps on account of the familiarity between the Egyptian and Mitanni messenger, the messengers seem to have played the role as one another's interpreters.

Puduhepa's messengers, a certain Tili-Teshup, conveyed a message from the Queen that her other messenger denied having heard. Ramses' quotes Tili-Teshup as having reported that the Queen spoke as follows, "Say to the Great King, King of Egypt:..." the same formula employed at the outset of written messages. In addition to the contradictory reports from Puduhepa's two messengers, three of Ramses' messengers and one official interpreter also denied having heard the queen relay that message to Tili-Teshup. Certainly, the contradictory reports of the messengers indicates the oral dissemination of some portion of the Queen's message, and indeed Ramses requests that both the Queen and King send him a tablet addressing the question raised in the contradictory reports (CTH 158 §10.44-52 - §13.67-73). Ramses' request for a tablet, which he necessarily would regard as "authoritative" over and above the conflicting oral testimonies, nevertheless does not necessarily indicate whether the authoritative tablet would have been read aloud upon its reception. As Feldman observes, "written documents of all sorts serve as fundamental means of storing information for later retrieval, with the added implication of authentication," but they do not serve primarily as conveyors of information *in medias res*.<sup>58</sup> The diplomatic moment consists of an interaction between the messenger and the letter recipient. The recipient, in turn, uses the received letter only at a later date, either to quote from when crafting a response or for confirmation of promises made or denied.

In fact, references to scribes within the corpus only occur in archival contexts. One example of the phenomenon comes from a letter from a Hittite to a Babylonian king recounting a communication that would have taken place when the Babylonian king was only a child. Hattusili III communicates to Kadashman-Enlil II of Babylon that perhaps the young king misunderstands the nature of their political "brotherhood" because in the early days of their

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<sup>58</sup> Feldman, 151.

correspondence “my brother was a child...and [scribes] did not read out the tablets in [his] presence” (CTH 172 §4.7-24). The following sentences, in which Hattusili directs the young king to have a scribe read to him from the tablets in his archive, raise the question of where and when the tablet writing in question would have taken place. Certainly, the context of scribes reading tablets from an archive (or perhaps before they were put into an archive, but not, it seems, during the diplomatic process itself) aligns with the broader record.

In his reconstruction of Hittite diplomatic process, Trevor Bryce rightly postulates that a letter would not have been read aloud during its initial presentation. Instead, the messenger would have summarized its contents, touching on its main points as appropriate.<sup>59</sup> The evidence provided above substantiates Bryce’s claim. Written tablets served to verify past statements or to resolve contradictory reports. In fact, the entire Hittite diplomatic correspondence, which quotes from previous correspondences ad nauseam, testifies to the central role scribes must have played in reading documents stored in the archives. As in the case of Kadashman-Enlil II, Hatusilli III instructed the young king to have his scribes read aloud for him the archival record. Something of the function of written tablets may have been expressed in the treaty between Mursili II of Hatti and Kupanta-Kurunta of Mira-Kuwaliya in the Arzawan territories of Western Anatolia in which instruction was given for the tablet to be read thrice yearly (CTH 68).<sup>60</sup> That is, writing serves to make a diplomatic statement durable in time, not to convey diplomatic action in real time.

In other words, written texts have use inasmuch as they outlast the diplomatic exchange itself and can be recalled for verification purposes. Bryce, nevertheless, inserts scribes into the initial process of document reception. In his vision, scribes not only drafted letters but also

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<sup>59</sup> Bryce, *Letters*, 69.

<sup>60</sup> For the complicated history of the tablets and its joins see Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic*, 188.

functioned as court stenographers, writing down the oral message relayed by the messenger. After the conclusion of the presentation, the scribes would then get to work translating the delivered letter. At some point later, when the king determined to craft a response, the scribe would again take dictation. In this reconstruction, scribes remained peripheral to the physical diplomatic exchange, integral to its process. Their work functioned to ensure honesty in the diplomatic process, recording exchanges so that neither side could falsify past diplomatic exchanges.<sup>61</sup>

Despite Bryce's intuition ringing true, namely that written accounts of diplomatic exchanges may provide leverage or insurance in future diplomatic exchanges, nothing about the diplomatic exchange as described in our record indicates the presence or involvement of scribes. As such, only their involvement in the writing of drafts and making copies of received letters can be clearly presupposed. Given that the exchanges between Ahhiyawa and Hatti survive in Hittite tablets, evidence for how Ahhiyawa may have participated in literate Bronze Age diplomatic culture must be sought in the Ahhiyawan texts themselves.

## Part II: the Role of Scribes

The Tawagalawa document serves as useful entrée into the discussion of Mycenaean involvement in the Late Bronze Age custom of elite diplomatic letter exchange. Though not an artifact belonging to a direct diplomatic exchange itself, the document, the only remaining tablet of three, refers to nineteen diplomatic exchanges among four primary actors.<sup>62</sup> Of those nineteen exchanges, thirteen refer to explicitly written exchanges, eight of which were past events and five of which refer to anticipated written exchanges.

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<sup>61</sup> Bryce, *Letters*, 69.

<sup>62</sup> The Tawagalawa letter, like many contemporary letters, reads like a veritable "he said-she said," and the count of nineteen diplomatic exchanges may be condensed to seventeen discreet events, two of which recount involved exchanges CTH 214.12.C § 6.14 and § 5.55.

The diplomatic draft discusses a certain Piyamaradu. Previously a ruler in Western Anatolia, Piyamaradu became a renegade, at first raiding Hittite territory from Millawanda (Miletus) where his son-in-law Atpa ruled, and when Hittite forces entered Millawanda, fleeing to Ahhiyawa.<sup>63</sup> The draft represents Hattusili II's efforts to convince the Ahhiyawan king to expel Piyamaradu from his territory. Twelve of the thirteen diplomatic exchanges attested in the document include the four actors, Hattusili III, Piyamaradu, the unnamed Ahhiyawan king, and Atpa.<sup>64</sup> Unlike his father-in-law Piyamaradu, Atpa appears to be a Hittite vassal and Piyamaradu, though he has no recognized status, demands that the Hittite king treat him as a fellow king. The Ahhiyawan king, on the other hand, did not need to persuade the Hittite king to bestow on him such an honor, and the two corresponded as diplomatic equals. In both the Tawagalawa document and CTH 29.16, the fragmentary letter probably written by a Hittite to an Ahhiyawan king, the Hittite king refers to his Ahhiyawan counterpart as "my brother," an ascription obviously of status, not blood relation. In addition to the "brother" honorific, Ahhiyawan kings appear as "Kings who are equal[s] in rank," to the Hittite Kings (CTH 105).<sup>65</sup>

The Tawagalawa document refers to eight past interactions between the Great Kings, seven of which were written exchanges, several containing direct quotations as is common in Near Eastern scribal practices. Ostensibly, the direct quotations herein would have been read from drafts and copies in the Palace archives of Hattuša. Certainly, they are presented as such in

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<sup>63</sup> Piyamaradu's exploits echo those of Uhha-ziti who agitated against the Hittite kingdom from a base in Western Anatolia and fled to Ahhiyawan territory at the turn of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. See "the Annals of Mursili II, Years 3-4" (CTH 61).

<sup>64</sup> The thirteenth involves a written message that Hattusili III says he wrote. Unfortunately, the name of the letter's recipient has been irreparably damaged § 4.50.

<sup>65</sup> While scholars generally agree that the scribe erroneously included the Ahhiyawan King in the list since the scribe made visible attempts to erase the name, scholars agree that the initial inclusion of the king reflects an earlier list that counted the Ahhiyawan king among the Great Kings.



the text. Despite the robust role scribes must have played as archivists, in drafting documents and reading received texts, no evidence exists for the involvement of Mycenaean scribes in the writing process. Assuming of course that the model of letter delivery described in “Part One” obtains, a scribe need not have been present at the reception of a letter in the Mycenaean court. Surely there would be difficulties of not having scribes to record what happened, but means other than writing may have been used to record diplomatic interactions.

Admitting that correspondences received by the Ahhiyawan king’s court may not have been read raises the question of whether letters written by the Ahhiyawan king were written at his court. Fortunately, one letter exists sent from an Ahhiyawan king to a Hittite king CTH 183, with a *terminus post quem* of the reign of Muwattalli II (1295-1272). According to Harry Hoffner, “this tablet is probably a translation into Hittite of a communication exchanged between trusted bilingual emissaries at the common border between Ahhiyawan and Hittite territory,” and not written at the Ahhiyawan court.<sup>66</sup> Hoffner does not elaborate upon this insight in deference to Craig Melchert who nevertheless published his article after Hoffner. In Melchert’s own words, the letter was “written in standard Boğazköy ductus and so far as the extant text is concerned in quite idiomatic Hittite of the Neo-Hittite period,” so that between the document’s standard scribal craft and non-standard Luwian idiom a Western Anatolian interface between the Ahhiyawan and Hittite courts must be presumed.<sup>67</sup> Hoffner provides no reason for supposing an

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<sup>66</sup> Hoffner, *Letters*, 291.

<sup>67</sup> Craig Melchert, “Mycenaean and Hittite Diplomatic Correspondence: Fact and Fiction” Lecture, *Mycenaeans and Anatolians in the Late Bronze Age: The Ahhiyawa Question*, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada, January 4, 2006.

interface on the border.<sup>68</sup> In this case, Melchert provides no evidence or clear line of argumentation for the border scenario either.<sup>69</sup>

References to writing within the Ahhiyawa texts help clarify, if only a little, whether and how writing would have been done in the Ahhiyawan court. The Hittite verb *hatrai-* appears twice in CTH 183. In the latter of the two references, the Ahhiyawan king refers to a previous letter he wrote to the Hittite king (CTH 183 11). Despite the king's definite use of *hatrai-*, which denotes writing as a method of communication and not the physical act of inscription, the evidence cannot speak to use of writing at the Hittite court any more than the document itself does because we must assume it to have the same characteristics as CTH 183 itself, such as the Boğazköy ductus and Neo-Hittite idiom, indicating composition at a border "camp" not in a palatial setting.

The second use of *hatrai-* appears in the context of the King of Ahhiyawa quoting from a letter sent to him by the Hittite king. The translation by Hoffner reads "My brother, you wrote to me in the...year (as follows)" a parenthetical that is not present in the Hittite, but offers a clue into the nature of the Ahhiyawan king's quotation (CTH 183 Ro 5).<sup>70</sup> Throughout the Hittite record, whenever the correspondent quotes from a previous writing in his position he uses the following phrase *kissan- hatrai-* "he wrote as follows," a formula missing from the Hittite but

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<sup>68</sup> Hoffner, *Letters*, 291.

<sup>69</sup> Melchert, "Mycenaean and Hittite," 9. Melchert rests his case on the assumption that "concern for loss of prestige" would have driven the Ahhiyawan King, seated in an environment less materially wealthy than the Hittite one, to employ the language of the superior court in diplomatic correspondences and that the scribe would have worked on the border, "Mycenaean and Hittite," 9. Conceivably, though, an Ahhiyawan could have studied in a Boğazköy scribal school. Great Kings often shared experts such as physicians and other craft persons. No direct evidence attests to the sharing of scribes. Melchert objects that the Mycenaean king would not have needed the employ of a full-time scribe because of his lower relative status. The connection between status and having a scribe in permanent employment seems vague at best. Many Hittite vassals employed scribes.

<sup>70</sup> Hoffner, *Letters*, 291.

supplied by Hoffner.<sup>71</sup> The omission very likely can be accounted for by positing that the Ahhiyawan king is not directly quoting from a letter but paraphrasing from a diplomatic correspondence. Other paraphrasing statements in Hittite documents also lack the apodeictic *kissan-*.<sup>72</sup> If indeed the second use of *hatrai-* does not refer to an archived letter, it must refer to a message delivered orally along with the physical letter, a message whose content its recipients remembers but a letters whose contents they could not read. If this is the case, CTH 183 betrays the absence of tablet writers at the Mycenaean court, though it necessarily implies the existence of a Western Anatolian in the confidence of an Ahhiyawan king.

Further suggestions of Ahhiyawan scribal craft assert themselves, at first glance, in purported written correspondences between Ahhiyawa and the peripheral Western Anatolian states. Examples of this sort appear three times in the Tawagalawa text and once in the Indictment of Mudduwatta (CTH 147). In two of the three examples in the Tawagalawa document, the Hittite king directs his Ahhiyawan counterpart to write to Atpa (§12.11 and §12.63, §13.18). In the last of these examples the Hittite king refers to a written correspondence previously conducted between the Ahhiyawan king and the Western Anatolian vassal Atpa. An earlier document, “The Indictment of Mudduwatta,” also refers to a written correspondence

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<sup>71</sup> Beckman, in his translation, *The Ahhiyawa Texts*, does not make the same addition, 135.

<sup>72</sup> I suspect that the text itself also betrays evidence of oral composition in its implementation of repetition. It reads “<sup>5</sup> *tu-e-l gur-sa-wa-ra U-Ul ku-it-ki ar-ha da-hu-un* <sup>6</sup> *tu-e-el-wa gur-sa-wa-ra ku-e zi-ik...*” a three-word phrase meaning “as for your islands,” the subject of the letter as it comes down to us KUB 26.91 Ro 5-6. A review of the letter corpus suggests a rhetorical device that seems absent from other texts. A systematic study of the Hittite letter corpus is needed to determine just how unique the repetition of a consecutive phrase at the beginning of two clauses is and also whether the device appears in quotations of oral speeches. A general argument can be made that repetition serves most effectively and commonly as a rhetorical device, but such an argument bears little weight without additional evidence supporting it. Contextualizing its use within other examples of repetition in Near Eastern documents may also be useful here.

between an Ahhiyawan official (not king) and his Western Anatolian counterpart, perhaps suggesting continual diplomatic correspondences between the two regions (CTH 147 §7.40).

Recordings of written correspondences between the polities of the Western Anatolian and Ahhiyawa could indicate diplomatic relationships between Ahhiyawa and west Anatolian territories that existed independently of Hittite involvement. That Ahhiyawa served as a refuge for enemies of the Hittite states throughout the early part of the 13<sup>th</sup> century suggests as much. Determining whether the written correspondences attested between the two regions point to writing within the Ahhiyawan court, or texts written on a common border, as was most likely the case with KUB CTH 183, remains difficult to demonstrate without Ahhiyawan texts addressed to Western Anatolians.

Certainly, the Ahhiyawa referred to in Hittite texts regularly participated, in some fashion or another, in the literate diplomatic exchanges of Hittite Anatolia, itself a “Great King” of equal rank with its Near Eastern counterparts. Such involvement places Mycenaean culture at the periphery of broader Near Eastern practices while ensuring its familiarity with elite Late Bronze Age diplomatic customs. Its diplomatic involvement with Hatti and Western Anatolia over at least the early part of the 13<sup>th</sup> century can best be characterized as regular and sustained. Whether that sustained involvement translated into the practice of employing scribes to draft and copy diplomatic documents remains a matter of judgment. At the very least, the evidence suggests that Mycenaean messengers orally dictated diplomatic messages to scribes trained in Hattuša and to other Western Anatolian scribes. In turn, the evidence suggests that the King of Ahhiyawa received messengers and the letters they delivered, but not whether scribes copied and archived those records. Indeed, the scant evidence suggests the contrary.

## **Conclusion:**

Despite minimal evidence for Mycenaean scribal craft in the Western Anatolian record, in the surviving record from Boğazköy or in the Mycenaean written documents themselves, the cumulative impression conveys the picture of a culture on the cusp of a literate flowering. The scant preserved record of Ahhiyawan-Hittite interaction reveals around a hundred years of contact, and, while the polities did not always maintain peace, they seem to have maintained intermittent diplomatic correspondence. Though only two letters survive, those letters refer to other, previous letters and to past, ongoing and future political maneuverings between the kings. Likewise, though no letters between Ahhiyawa and Western Anatolia survive, evidence indicates a sustained diplomatic engagement of some sort between them.

Given these contacts, Ahhiyawa could not have escaped sustained exposure to Anatolian scribal culture, itself a derivative from Near Eastern scribal traditions. Whether that exposure meant that Mycenaean *wanakes* employed Anatolian scribes or if that exposure spurred innovations in the use of Linear B cannot be said for certain. If the evidence and interpretation submitted earlier herein stands, it seems that Ahhiyawa did not employ its writers to perform diplomatic tasks. Nevertheless, the prolonged nature of diplomatic contacts within Anatolia presupposes an intimacy with written culture that could have begotten parallel scribal traditions or required that scribes be employed at Ahhiyawan courts, if only the Late Bronze Age had not ended in cataclysm.

In that vein, the written record from Pylos suggests a writing culture poised between the conservative, restricted use of Linear B and innovation. Scholars have always identified the E

class tablets as unique by the length of their sentences and the wealth of etymological and grammatical data inherent in them, but have not been able to distinguish their uses from those of other tablets. Usually called the “land grant” tablets, a name that hints at a possible legal dimension of the tablets, nothing clearly indicates that the texts functioned as other than administrative catalogues. By analyzing the tablets in terms of their shape and language use, and by contextualizing that language use, the distinct legal tenor of the tablets becomes demonstrable. Whether the tablets functioned to bestow ownership or validate legal standing, however, cannot be established with certainty. The unique tablet shapes in conjunction with the technical language in them nevertheless suggest that tablet writers may have been stretching their skills to new ends or figuring out how to do so.

Although the Mycenaean writing output and evidence for Mycenaean writing pales in comparison to its Levantine counterparts, the budding practice of adapting tablet shape to function, some kind of involvement in the diplomatic exchanges of the Western Periphery and possibly putting writing to multiple ends places Mycenaean tablet writers in conversation with the Near Eastern scribal *koiné* but not fluent in the language. These three writing practices constitute half of the elements of the scribal *koiné* presented in the introduction. Discussion of the remaining three features, the status of tablet writers, their role within the administration and their educational practices, awaits further consideration. With respect to the aspects of scribal *koiné* investigated herein, Mycenaean culture exhibits tentative engagement. It participates in diplomatic exchanges, but in all likelihood without the assistance of the palace tablet writers. It uses legal language in certain documents (apparently of distinct types), but does not record laws, and it connects tablet shape to tablet function in at least some instances.

In other words, Mycenaean palatial culture participated in the LBA elite scribal *koiné* without strictly conforming to its prevailing practices. While Mycenaean kings engaged in diplomacy and commissioned letters, they do not seem to have written those letters in their palaces nor kept written archives of correspondences. They did, however, receive messengers with letters in hand, though those exchanges seem to have been otherwise exclusively oral, and the information in the letters was received and retained orally. Likewise, Linear B tablets show some evidence of recording legal matters and some evidence of recording them on specifically shaped tablets, innovations which, however, lack signs of systemization and seems to be *in medias res*. Were there room to investigate the other three elements of scribal *koiné* in this paper, the author suspects that a similar mixed picture would emerge, in part because of scarce extant evidence and in part because Mycenaean culture seems to exhibit an ambivalent relationship with its powerful eastern counterparts, as evident in its writing practices investigated thus far.

A reason behind the “partial” participation in the scribal *koiné*, wherein Mycenaean culture expresses features of each of its elements but to a lesser extent than its eastern counterparts, may be that Alashiya, Cyprus, mediated much of Mycenaean contact with the Western Periphery. Cynthia Shelmerdine suggests that Cyprus in fact mediated between Mycenae and the broader Eastern Mediterranean world, conducting its international trade.<sup>73</sup> Cyprus has a rich writing history, not focused on in this paper. Finds include writing in cuneiform and Cypro-Minoan. Written materials originating from Cyprus, but discovered elsewhere, include Cypro-Minoan writing found in Ugarit and Akkadian letters found in Egypt

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<sup>73</sup> Cynthia Shelmerdine, “Where Do We Go from Here: And How Can the Linear B Tablets Help Us Get There,” in, edited by E. H. Cline and D. Harris-Cline, *The Aegean and the Orient in the Second Millennium. Proceedings of a Conference Held at the University of Cincinnati 18-20 April 1997*, (Liège and Austin: Université de Liège and The University of Texas at Austin, 1998), 293.

and elsewhere. A further study ought to incorporate material from Cyprus or to compare the Cypriot and Mycenaean material with respect to the criteria of the scribal *koiné*. Though the results from this study and, in all likelihood, any future study that thoroughly incorporates the Cypriote record may prove to be somewhat inconclusive, the preponderance of evidence may one day contribute to a picture of Mycenaean writing practices more vivid than what the tablets alone can provide.



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