Mycenaean Religion
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(Slide 1) Welcome to Carl Seaquist's lecture on Mycenaean religion. Both archaeological and textual sources are useful: both provide evidence regarding ritual practice, but evidence relating to conceptions of religion – what people believed, and how the religious system was structured – is much harder to come by. Since the Linear B tablets relate to economic transactions, recent research by Lisa Bendall and Susan Lupack has focused on the role of the religious sector in the Mycenaean economy. The study of Mycenaean religion is, interestingly, a growth field these days, and I'll only be able to address this range of topics briefly.

Mycenaean Gods

(Slide 2) Many of the names of classical Greek gods occur in the Linear B texts. Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Artemis, Athena, Hermes, Ares, and Dionysus are well-known even in the modern era. The term "pantheon" (literally, "all the gods") is often used for the collection of these gods, because they are often represented in myths as interacting with each other, so they seem to form a group or family. Other names that we tend to think of as alternate names for major gods, such as Enyalios for Ares and Paion for Apollo, are also found in the tablets, but treated on a par with the other names, as though they were viewed as independent gods in their own right. Still other names, including Erinys and Eleithyia, are also known from the classical period, but are not treated as quote-unquote "major" gods in the modern handbooks on Greek religion.

These distinctions between major and minor gods, and primary and alternate names, are more a function of how modern people tend to think of the ancient gods and don't necessarily correspond to distinctions made in the classical period, much less the Bronze Age. The most surprising name was Dionysus, because a significant element of his mythology in the classical period treats him as being a foreigner to Greece, coming either from Thrace in the north of the peninsula or from Phrygia in Anatolia. Many scholars had taken these stories of origin at face value, assuming they represented true, historical accounts of the adoption of the god in Greece, though this Mycenaean evidence would seem to lead to the conclusion that the classical Greeks used a made-up foreign origin to justify in their own minds the elements of the Dionysus myths that seemed shocking or opposed to traditional Greek social norms. The occurrence of the name Athena is problematic in a different way, because it may be a place name and not a personal name at all. Given the later association of Athena with the city of Athens, it is interesting that the name appears to be Minoan in origin.

(Slide 3) Just because a name is a theonym (the name of a god) in the classical period doesn't mean that it was a theonym in the Bronze Age. Gods are mentioned in the Linear B texts when they were recipients of gifts or tribute/taxes, and often mortal and divine names appear to occur side by side, which makes sense because mortals also received these same things as gods. Sometimes goods given to the gods were consumed by religious personnel, whereas other time they were sacrificed, or given to the god by being destroyed.

The Greek word for "god" (theos) does occur in Linear B, but not with particular divine names. Its most common use is in stock formulae such as "so-and-so, servant of the god, holds a lease,

so much seed . . ." The word also occurs in an interesting text (PY Ep 704) that documents a dispute between a priestess and the local community on how much of her land was taxable: she held that a portion of that land was dedicated to the god, whereas the community believed that she was farming land held as in common by the village.

(Slide 4) References to "the god" or "the goddess" without the use of any personal name are common in the classical period as well. A similar name that occurs frequently in the texts is Potnia; the word is used in classical Greek to refer to both mortal women and goddesses, and may be translated as "lady," "mistress," or "queen." Some scholars treat it as a personal name rather than a title in the Linear B texts – the debate here is whether we should take all references to Potnia as referring to a single goddess, or, like the Classical *thea*, "goddess," a word that can refer to many goddesses. Often Potnia occurs in combination with an epithet such as i-qe-ja, "of horses," or da-pu$_2$-ri-to-ja, "of the labyrinth." This makes it look more like a personal name. A similar phrase is "divine mother" (Linear B ma-te-re te-i-ja).

(Slide 5) Beyond the names that are familiar from the classical period, there would appear to be many other divine names, though how many is hard to say because of the uncertainty of distinguishing mortal and divine names solely from context. Some names appear to be demonstrably Greek, such as Triseros (Linear B ti-ri-se-ro-e), even though they do not occur in the classical period, whereas others, if they are theonyms, are probably Minoan, such as ka-u-da. Then there is what Chadwick calls the "principle of divinity by association": we know that the Winds were worshipped because a "priestess of the winds" is referenced in the documents.

Locating Mycenaean Religion

(Slide 6) One important trend in recent decades in the study of ancient religion has led to a focus on the spatial configuration of worship: in brief, where did people practice religion? This involves questions both of location (to what extent did the practice of religion take people away from their normal haunts, and to what extent were people able to incorporate practice into their daily routine?) and geometry (how were religious spaces configured? What did this mean for participation in worship?). Archaeology provides some, partial answers to these questions for Mycenaean Greece, and the Linear B documents augment the physical remains in interesting ways.

(Slide 7) A variety of physical remains are of primary significance in the archaeology of Mycenaean religion: figurines, certain types of vessels, altars, "lustral basins" and depictions on items such as frescoes and seals. It is widely believed that the figurines, most often made of clay, that are found throughout Bronze Age Aegean sites, are depictions of divinities – or perhaps worshippers; at any rate, that they are always religious in nature. There's really no evidence for this, so far as I know, but it is a pretty much universal assumption among archaeologists, and it might be true. In any case, when these are found in, for example, rooms adjacent to gates in fortification walls, then the rooms in which they are found are referred to as "gate sanctuaries." Similarly, when found in private residences then "house sanctuaries" are posited, on the assumption that even when religious functions were performed in private spaces, they must have been spatially separated from mundane activities of daily life. Such assumptions

say a great deal about modern notions of religion, perhaps more than they do about ancient notions.

(Slide 8) In any case, it seems clear that some areas of Mycenaean palaces were centers of religious worship, and also that worship was to some extent diffused around palaces, including both private areas and the most public of areas, the megaron around which palaces were constructed.

The case of the palace at Mycenae, a very rough plan of which is given here, may serve as an example. The original palace was built at the summit of a hill, and surrounded by a circuit wall. Outside this wall was a cemetery that contained graves from the Middle Helladic and Late Helladic I periods. At a later period, new walls were built at the base of the hill. This later wall brought part of the cemetery (known as Grave Circle A) inside in the palace complex, along with a group of buildings built mostly in LH III B. The graves thus incorporated into the palace were at that point several centuries old, dating from the 16th century BC, and they were shaft graves, trenches cut into the earth and rock, lined with rubble walls, and then covered over in such a way that they could be uncovered for later burials. When they were incorporated into the LH III palace, a low retaining wall was built around them and the ground leveled off, thus turning a set of simple graves (though some containing wonderful grave goods) into an architectural feature. The buildings that were also brought inside the walls in LH III include a group known as the Cult Center.

(Slide 9) It makes sense that the lower, western portion of the acropolis at Mycenae contained both Grave Circle A and the Cult Center: both provided opportunities for religious practice within the palace compound. Libations, or liquid offerings, were offered at the graves, whereas the cult center contained a cache of figures and a large altar.

Figurines sometimes are found in caches in side rooms or in recesses under floors, other times individually. Some figurines may have been votive offerings, or gifts made to the gods, but others may have been displayed as objects of veneration: the so-called "temple" building in the Cult Center contains platforms or benches, on which sacred objects may have been placed. There is no evidence of monumental statues such as were placed in classical temples, nor are there monumental temples.

An interesting fact about pictorial art in the Bronze Age Aegean is that Minoan frescoes depict crowds of people gathered for religious festivities, whereas Mycenaean frescoes do not. This could be evidence about differences in ritual practice, but such so-called "arguments from silence" should be used with care in reconstructing Mycenaean religion.

Social and Economic Role of Religion

(Slide 10) The Mycenaean religious sector played a role in the production of both agricultural and manufactured goods. A fair proportion of agricultural land appears to have been in the control of people identified as "servants of the goddess" or by similar terms. We know that there were religious centers (known to scholars as "sanctuaries") outside of the palace complexes because the Linear B texts refer to them. Unfortunately, it hasn't been possible to identify any of

the extra-palatial sanctuaries in the archaeological digs that have been conducted so far. It seems likely that these sanctuaries had rights to the produce of particular fields. Some religious land was evidently taxed by the palace, with the sanctuary probably retaining rights to the residual production, but some land seems to have been set aside for the use of the sanctuary. Some produce would have been consumed in sacrifice, with the rest either supporting the sanctuary's personnel or perhaps being exchanged on markets.

It has been suggested that certain sanctuaries may have had rights to particular fields even before the palaces took their most developed form in LH III. In that case, palaces may have served as redistributive centers in their own right, though on a smaller scale than the palaces, just like older political centers may have retained some redistributive role even after they came under the sway of the major palaces.

(Slide 11) As for manufacturing, some personnel at the palaces, who were engaged in manufacture, were identified in the tablets with the adjective "Potnian," or associated with the goddess Potnia. Please note: "manufacture" in the ancient world always refers to the work of craftsmen, because of course large scale manufacturing in the sense we speak of it today is much more recent. Therefore the term "workshop" is used rather than "factory" to refer to the venue for manufactures.

When a craftsman <u>in the palace</u> is identified as serving a religious role, this could indicate that the works he produced were intended for dedication to the goddess, or that he was somehow in the employ of a sanctuary in or away from the palace. It's not clear which. It could also be that craftsmen who previously had worked at sanctuaries were moved to the palace in LH III C, when the security situation got more precarious. There are indications that the palaces became more heavily fortified, and prepared for long sieges, in the final decades before their final collapse, so this might help explain the number of religious craftsmen in the palace. The stairway built to the underground cistern in the NE corner of the palace complex at Mycenae (see the plan given earlier) is often given as an example of preparations for sieges in this late period. But is seems that craftsmen did work in the palaces all along, producing goods used by the palaces themselves and given to other palaces or kings to help maintain political relationships. The Potnian craftsmen were likely working alongside palatial craftsmen.

(Slide 12) Thus far I have said relatively little about the personal experience of religion, or of beliefs. This is because the evidence that survives, written and material, only allows for assumptions about these topics. Most of what scholars think they know is due to analogical reasoning: based on our better knowledge of classical Greek religious thought, or contemporary Bronze Age cultures in Egypt, the Levant, or Mesopotamia scholars can fill in the blanks, as it were, and interpret the mute physical remains. This will change in the classical period, when we get more complex and diverse written sources.

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