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John Chadwick
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PREFACE

There is no shortage of books describing the civilization which developed in Greece in the Late Bronze Age, the period of the sixteenth to thirteenth centuries which we call by the name Mycenaean. But this remote epoch has been until recently the jealously guarded preserve of the archaeologist, since it was directly known only from the mute testimony of palaces, tombs, pottery, seal-stones, frescoes, and such other durable objects as have withstood more than thirty centuries of burial. Nearly all the books up to the present which have sought to describe this civilization have been written by archaeologists, and their interest has been centred on the material remains, even when they have shown awareness of another dimension.

Since 1939 we have known that Mycenaean palaces made use of writing, and since 1952 that their script, identical with that used in fourteenth-century Knossos, concealed an archaic form of the Greek language. I described the decipherment of that script by Michael Ventris in my small book, *The Decipherment of Linear B* (Cambridge 1958, 2nd edition 1967). A chapter of that book was devoted to a brief description of life in Mycenaean Greece, as it emerged from the new documentary evidence. But research into these written sources has now progressed so far that no revision can do justice to the subject. It is necessary to write a whole new book to describe Mycenaean Greece as it now begins to emerge from the tablets.

At first sight their contents are deplorably dull: long lists of names, records of livestock, grain and other produce, the account books of anonymous clerks. Here and there a vivid description of an ornate table or a richly decorated chariot breaks the monotony. But for the most part the tablets are drab and lifeless documents. Their one virtue is their utter authenticity, for they contain the actual words and figures noted down by the men and women who created the same civilization that has yielded such splendid treasures to the archaeologist's spade. The facts written down by the clerks and officials of four different royal establishments are now accessible to us; and they are historical evidence as solid, and may

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serve as foundations for historical deductions just as reliable, as the material remains.

Progress in interpreting the documents has been possible for a number of reasons. The script and the rules governing its use are now better understood; the nature of the dialect has become much clearer, and the meaning of words which at first seemed obscure has often been elucidated. The study of the original texts has enabled us to propose many improved readings; and in particular the location of the different fragments that make up a single tablet has allowed us to reconstitute, wholly or in part, many new texts from unintelligible pieces. But perhaps the greatest step forward has been due to the identification of the contents of the individual baskets, files as we might say, in which the tablets were stored, before a conflagration precipitated them to the floor in a confused heap. This has been possible in many cases through the recognition of the handwriting of different clerks. Where a single tablet is often like a single card removed from an index-file, a whole basketful can reveal a great deal of the facts underlying the records.

There seemed therefore to be a need for a book which would present a picture of Mycenaean Greece as it can now be reconstructed from the documentary evidence. This is of course complementary to the archaeological sources, on which I have also drawn heavily; but the main emphasis is on the new evidence which we now possess for economic life in this period. However, a detailed discussion of every group of documents so far known would quickly become tedious; all the main groups are discussed in *Documents in Mycenaean Greek* (Ventrìs and Chadwick, 1956; 2nd edition, Chadwick, 1973). There are still some groups which are too little understood to contribute much to a synthesis of the type attempted here; but when I look back on the progress we have made over the last twenty years, I feel sure that as time goes on, and especially if new texts are found, it will become possible to extract from these too fresh items of information which can contribute to the general picture.

Some of my colleagues will doubtless think I have in places gone too far in reconstructing a pattern which will explain the documents. Here I can only say that some pattern must exist, for these are authentic, contemporary sources; and if the pattern I have proposed is the wrong one, I will cheerfully adopt a better one when it is offered. But what I do reject is the defeatist attitude which refuses even to devise a pattern, because all its details cannot be proved. The documents exist; therefore the circumstances existed which caused them to be written, and my experience has shown me that these are not altogether impossible to conjecture.

In seeking to bring together all the evidence on each topic considered, it

is often necessary to treat the same document under different headings. So far as possible repetition has been avoided by means of cross-references; but the reader must accept that these refer forwards as well as backwards, and he may have to wait until later for the evidence on which some conclusions are based. I have of course not had room to discuss all the rival theories that have been advanced; but I have tried to present what I now judge to be the most likely interpretation of the documents, following for the most part the consensus of opinion; though in places I have adopted solutions of my own against widely held views, and I have from time to time found myself obliged to advance new solutions. In some cases fuller justification of my views is being presented elsewhere; as for instance my detailed refutation of some current views on Pylian geography. I have given references to new work so far as I can without overloading the text with notes; these are in the form of author's name, date of publication and page number if appropriate, and the full reference will be found in the bibliography, which in a book of this kind must inevitably be selective.

It is as irritating for the expert to read 'a tablet from Knossos' as it is for the more general reader to be confronted with strings of unintelligible numbers. I have tried to compromise by inserting, usually in parentheses, the exact reference to tablets in such a way as not to interrupt the discussion. For those who wish to look up these references I must explain the conventions now in general use. The site from which the document comes is abbreviated to the first two letters of its name: KN = Knossos, MY = Mycenae, PY = Pylos, TH = Thebes. The tablets are further classified by series of two-letter prefixes, which give the expert further information about the subject to which they refer; e.g. prefixes beginning A- indicate lists of men and women, C- livestock, L- textiles, R- weapons and so forth. Finally each tablet has a serial number, which, after an early experiment at Pylos, is now regarded as fixed; though apparent changes may occur if two numbered fragments are shown to belong to a single tablet. The texts are normally quoted after the latest edition: KN = J. Chadwick, J. T. Killen and J.-P. Olivier, *The Knossos Tablets IV* (Cambridge 1971); MY = J.-P. Olivier, *The Mycenae Tablets IV* (Leiden 1969); PY = E. L. Bennett and J.-P. Olivier, *The Pylos Tablets Transcribed* (Rome 1973); TH = J. Chadwick, *Minos* (Salamanca) 10 (1969), 115–37 and 'Thebes Tablets II', Supplement to *Minos*, No. 4 (1975).

This is perhaps the point at which to say something about the Linear A script, for although it lies strictly outside the scope of this book, some references have to be made to it. Between the eighteenth and fifteenth centuries B.C. the Cretans employed an indigenous script, which they used both for keeping accounts and for dedicatory inscriptions. This was

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patently the source from which Linear B was borrowed; indeed it is likely that the Greeks began by borrowing Minoan scribes, who then adapted their script to represent the Greek language. Thus we can understand much of the content of the Linear A tablets; we know how the writing system works and we can assign approximate values to most of the syllabic signs. But although we know the meaning of a few words, it has so far proved impossible to demonstrate convincingly what the underlying language is. Further progress will depend largely on the discovery and publication of more texts.

It may be useful to insert here a brief note on chronology. There is no exact means of dating events in the whole of the Greek Bronze Age; we rely on a sequence which is primarily that of pottery styles, and in a few places we can synchronize these with the more exactly dated history of Egypt. The archaeologists therefore use a classification into Early, Middle and Late Bronze, employing the terms Early, Middle and Late Helladic for the mainland, Minoan for Crete. These periods are further subdivided into three, and each sub-period may be further divided into phases. As far as possible this book makes use of dating by centuries, but it must be remembered that even these are merely approximations. The following table will give some rough indication of the principal events.

Century	20th (or earlier)	Ancestors of the Greeks enter Greece; beginning of Middle Helladic period.
	16th	Beginning of Late Helladic or Mycenaean period.
	15th	At beginning, major eruption of Thera; around the middle of the century, Greek invasion of Crete.
	14th	(Early) Destruction of Knossos (Late Minoan III A period). (End) Beginning of Late Helladic III B period.
	13th	<i>Floruit</i> of Mycenaean civilization. Towards end, destruction at Thebes, Mycenae, Pylos and elsewhere.
	12th	Late Helladic III C period.
	8th ?	Date of Homer.

In the course of this book a number of Mycenaean words are quoted, so it is necessary to explain the system of transcription employed. The Linear

B signs can be transcribed alphabetically according to a system devised in the earliest days of the decipherment. In this, each syllabic sign is replaced by a conventional alphabetic form, which gives an approximation to the sound of the word as we can reconstruct it. But since a number of sounds are omitted by the script and left to the reader's imagination, we must often give two transcriptions: a straight representation of the Linear B signs, which is indicated by the use of hyphens to space out the syllables (e.g. *a-to-ro-qo*); and a reconstructed form representing the pronunciation we believe the word would have had (for this word *anthrōquōi*). Classical Greek words too are here transliterated into the roman alphabet.

The system used for Linear B requires some explanation. The syllabic spellings are only approximate, because the script does not make distinctions which are important for Greek. Thus the aspirated form of stops, which in ancient Greek were pronounced like the plain stops but with a puff of breath, are not separately noted; *k* may stand for *kh*, *t* for *th*, *p* for *ph*. Nor are the voiced equivalents noted, except in the case of *d*; thus *k* stands equally for *g*, and *z* probably has the values *ts* and *dz*. The letter *r* is used in transcription, but may be read as either *r* or *l*. The letter *q* is used with the value of *qu* (or *kw*), and may be aspirated (*quh*) or voiced (*gu*). There is ordinarily no sign for *h*. The letter *j* is to be pronounced like English consonantal *y*; *w* as in English. In the course of the decipherment it was observed that certain signs appeared to duplicate the values of others, and these were labelled by adding a numeral: thus *ra*₂ and *ra*₃. But it is now known that all signs of this type have special values: *ra*₂ stands for *rya* or *lya* as a single syllable, *ra*₃ for *rai* or *lai*. Similarly *a*₂ stands for *ha*, *a*₃ for *ai*, but both of these are optional, and *a* may be used with these values. There are also syllabic signs containing the semi-vowel *w*: e.g. *dwe*, *dwo*, *nwa*; they also occur rarely since Greek words which contain them are rare, and the *w* had been eliminated in classical Greek.

The transcription of numerals is simple, but it needs to be remembered that the Mycenaean are like the Roman numerals and do not rely on position. But ideograms are more difficult, since these are not ways of writing Greek words, so much as counting symbols added to numerals in order to specify what is being counted. There seems to have been a certain freedom to devise an ideogram; for instance, the signs for different kinds of vessels are in effect small schematic pictures. But the majority had already in the parent script, Linear A, become formalized, and these were simply conventional patterns. We have been able to work out the meaning of most of these, though there are still a few which are obscure. The method of transcription now internationally adopted is to represent ideograms by appropriate Latin words, which are then, if necessary,

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abbreviated. Hence if you look up recent editions, you will find such curiosities as VIR, MUL, GRA, OLIV, CUR, EQU: but in this book these are always interpreted, and will be described in English as *man*, *woman*, *wheat*, *olives*, *chariot*, *horse*, and so forth.

The metric signs for weights and measures of capacity are a special problem. After some experiment, we fixed upon a conventional system using capital letters of the alphabet to represent them, ranging from L to Z. Their use will be apparent from the discussion in Chapter 7, pp. 102–8; see also figs. 42, 44 and 45.

Another problem confronts us in dealing with Greek place names. In some cases there are specifically English forms and pronunciations in regular use, and it would be pedantic to alter familiar names like *Athens*, *Corinth* or *Mycenae*. But even when a place has retained the same name from the Bronze Age to the present day, its pronunciation has of course changed. Thus what in the Mycenaean period was (presumably) *Mukānai* became in classical times *Mykēnai* (where *y* has the value *ü*) and is known to the Greeks of today as *Mikīne*. Thus reconstructed Mycenaean words are written with *u* rather than *y*, *ā* for later *ē*, *qu* and *gu* for later *p* and *b* or *t* and *d* according to context, and with *w* where nothing survives later; hence *guasileus* for classical *basileus*, *wanax* for classical *anax*, and so on.

The spelling of modern Greek place and personal names raises a further difficulty. After much hesitation I have decided to adopt a compromise, with the intention of enabling the user to arrive at something like the correct pronunciation, while keeping reasonably close to the official spelling. But I must explain how the system works.

Vowels and diphthongs are pronounced long or short depending upon whether or not they carry an accent, which is therefore always marked. The foreign visitor is often left helpless by guide-books which omit this indispensable feature. But although the foreigner who asks for *Knósos* instead of *Knosós* will be instantly corrected, it needs to be said that sometimes more than one accent may be heard: *Monemvásia*, *Monemvasía* and *Monemvasiá* are all in use. It should also be noted that in speaking Greek the accent may change in the inflexion: Athens is (in the literary form) *Athíne*, but ‘of Athens’ is *Athinón*. The vowels *a*, *e*, *i* and *o* are pronounced more or less as in Italian, when short something like the vowels of English *pat*, *pet*, *pít*, *pot*; *ou* is pronounced as Italian *u* (English *ou* in *you*).

The consonants as transcribed are more or less as in English, except in the following combinations: *dh* like *th* in English *then*; *ph* like English *f*, *th* like English *th* in *think*, *kh* like a rough *h* or Scottish *ch* in *loch*, *gh* a similar voiced sound, but almost like *y* before *e* or *i*. Initial *h* is not pronounced;

thus the common element in place names meaning ‘Saint’, *Hághios*, is pronounced something like *Áyos*. There are of course many subtleties not mentioned here, for which the reader must refer to books on modern Greek.

It hardly needs saying that this book could never have been written without the help and advice of many friends. But it is a pleasure to record the names of those who have read and criticized drafts of the whole or parts of the book: Dr J. T. Killen, Dr C. G. Thomas, Miss C. W. Shelmerdine and Mrs C. Murray. Mrs B. Black has done most of the typing. I am much indebted to a number of people and institutions for permission to reproduce photographs; a full list of these appears separately. But I must mention specially Mr Henry Hankey, who painted the picture of the Mycenaean scribe at work. To all of these I offer my thanks.

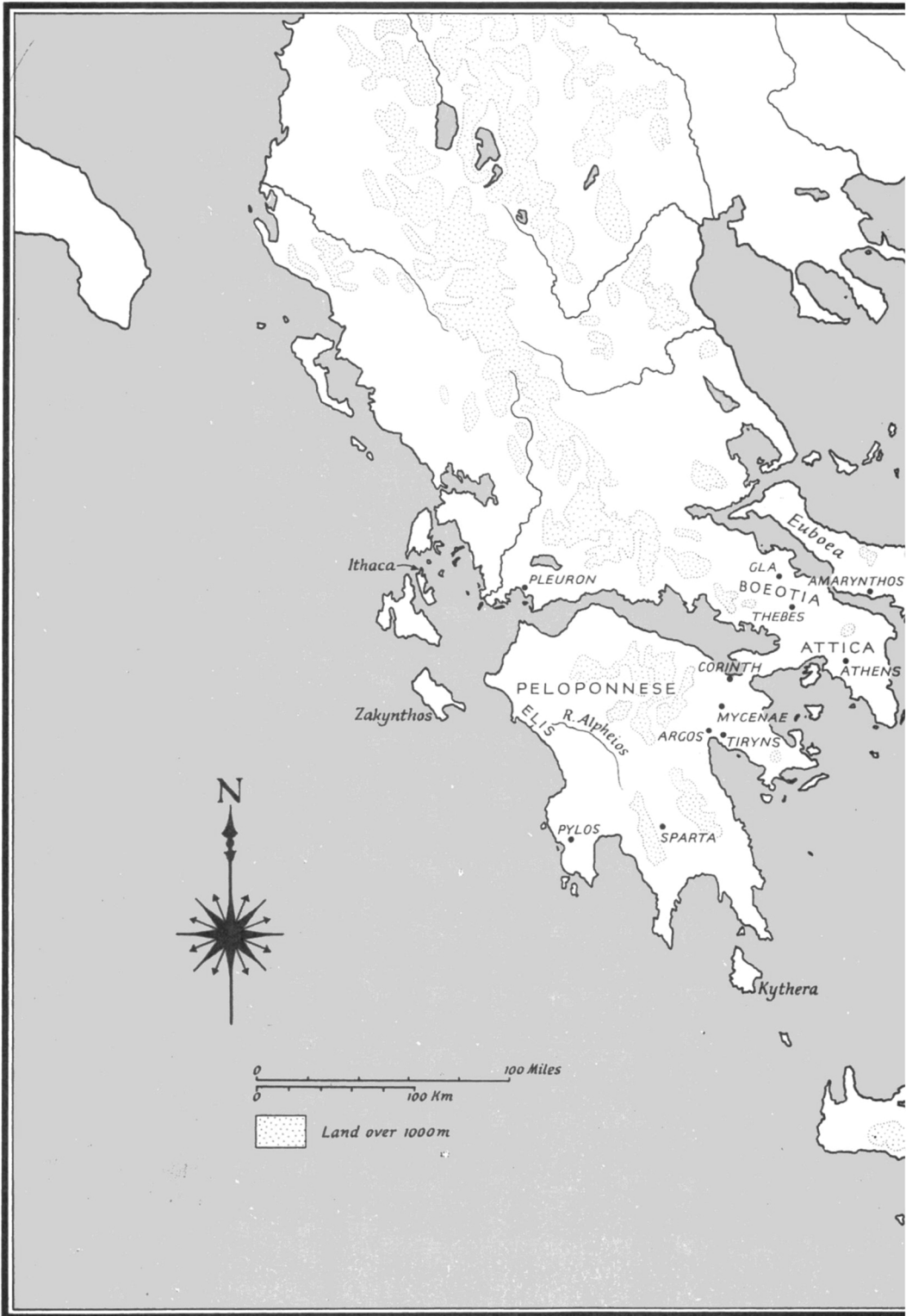
It is my hope that the book will be of interest not only to students of the early phase of Greek civilization, but also to the more general reader. I should like here to remember particularly my many Greek friends, and to offer them this small contribution to their history in return for many enjoyable visits I have made to Greece, and for several honours received at their hands. The Greek language has a continuous line of development from the fourteenth century B.C. down to the present day, and the echoes of Bronze Age Greek have been well described by a contemporary poet, Mr P. A. Sinopoulos:

xekhúthike kambanolálima triandatrión eónon.

‘There rang out a peal of bells thirty-three centuries old.’

Cambridge
June 1975

J.C.



1 Greece and the Aegean

