

Introduction

The seven essays that make up this work are concerned with aspects of Mycenaean Asianism and as such are offered as contributions first to the study of the earliest form of Greek culture to leave behind written records but also to the study of Asianisms, this latter constituting “an evolving field of historical enquiry.”¹ The notion of Asianism has in recent years been defined broadly, as, notably, by Frey and Spakowski (2016a:1), who offer for Asianisms the following: “discursive constructs of Asia and their related political, cultural and social practices.” This sort of Asianism is thus to be kept notionally quite distinct from that “Asianism” that identifies a rhetorical style of Greek literary language that gained popularity in the third century BC, one “characterized by the abandonment of the traditional period and a return to Gorgianic [Gorgias of Leontini, fifth century BC] precepts . . ., involving the motive accumulation of vocabulary and rapid successions of short antithetical clauses with a heavy emphasis on metaphor, word-play, ‘poetic’ vocabulary, and contrived rhythmic and phonetic effects” (Horrocks 2010:100).² This rhetorical Asianism has been traditionally defined by its contrast to the stylistics of Atticism. This is an opposition (Asianism versus Atticism) that has found particular relevance as a construct in studies of the literary output of the Second Sophistic.³ The so-called Asiatic style could of course in antiquity

¹ Frey and Spakowski 2016a:2. For explication see their pages 2–5 and the associated notes on pages 14–17.

² On the characteristics of this rhetorical Asianism see also, *inter alia*, Kim 2017:54–55.

³ The scholarly construction of a Second Sophistic contrast of “Asianism versus Atticism” extends back to the nineteenth century, as seen in, for example, Rohde 1886, Schmid

be linked directly to Asia Minor, as conspicuously by Dionysius of Halicarnassus in his *De antiquis oratoribus* 1, where he contrasts the Attic muse, likened to a wife, with the Asian *hetaira* (ἑταῖρα) ‘prostitute’:⁴

ἡ μὲν Ἀττικὴ μοῦσα καὶ ἀρχαία καὶ αὐτόχθων ἄτιμον εἰλήφει σχῆμα, τῶν ἑαυτῆς ἐκπεσοῦσα ἀγαθῶν, ἡ δὲ ἔκ τινων βαράθρων τῆς Ἀσίας ἐχθρὸς καὶ πρῶτην ἀφικομένην, Μυσὴ ἢ Φρυγίᾳ τις ἢ Καρικόν τι κακόν [ἢ βάρβαρον] Ἑλληνίδας ἡξίου διοικεῖν πόλεις ἀπελάσασα τῶν κοινῶν τὴν ἑτέραν, ἡ ἀμαθὴς τὴν φιλόσοφον καὶ ἡ μαινομένη τὴν σόφροναν.

On the one hand, the Attic muse – ancient and autochthonal – had received a dishonored character when she’d fallen from her own good fortune. But, on the other, some Mysian, or Phrygian, or some lowborn Carian having arrived just yesterday or the day before from some pits of Asia claimed to exercise authority over Greek poleis, having driven out the former [muse] from public life – the ignorant expelling the wisdom-lover, the raving woman expelling the sound-minded.

Such a contrast could only be set up because of a Greek presence in Asia – a presence that has its beginnings in the Mycenaean Bronze Age.

In part, Mycenaean Greek cultural structures – entailing myth, ritual, society – can be characterized as Asian phenomena – as giving expression to Asianisms. This, I believe, is an accurate statement in at least the following ways. When those Indo-Europeans who would enter the Balkan peninsula (to evolve into Greeks) in the later third millennium BC (ca. 2300 BC) did so, they brought with them fundamental ideas that they held in common with Indo-Iranian peoples. Such jointly held ideology was a consequence of the persistence of inherited social and cult structures and practices: that is to say, the ancestors of the Mycenaeans, the ancestors of the Indic peoples, and the ancestors of the Iranian peoples at some moment constituted a single population group.

That moment of Helleno-Indo-Iranian cultural and linguistic unity is quite probably to be assigned a *terminus ante quem* of somewhat prior to 2500 BC, as proposed, for example, by West (2007a:7–10). Watkins (2001:56–57) who adds ancestral Armenian and possibly Phrygian speakers to this unit, observes that “this group forms the basis on which the [Indo-European] proto-language was first reconstructed, and it is

1887–1896, Wilamowitz 1900. See more recently, *inter alia*, Wisse 1995; Whitmarsh 2005:7, 49–52; Hidber 2012; Kim 2017.

⁴ See, *inter alia*, de Jonge 2014:393–398; Kim 2017:56.

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probably the most recent in time of the various ‘branches’ or subgroups of the [Indo-European] family.”⁵ He continues

Greek and Indo-Iranian also share the largest number of ‘poetic’ features of any pair in the [Indo-European] family: the largest number of shared formulas (common stock phrases), and a uniquely shared system of quantitative metrics based on the alternation of heavy and light syllables.

The habitation-space occupied by common Helleno-Indo-Iranian society was likely located within the geographic range of Pit-Grave, or Yamnaya, culture (ca. 3500–2700/2600 BC; see Anthony 2023:14–17), an area that stretched from west of the Dniester river, eastward across the Steppes above the Black and Caspian Seas, and on further east to the Urals. Anthony (2007:100, fig. 5.2) would place the pre-Hellenes (fragmented from Indo-Iranians) in the Central Steppe region for some period beyond 2500 BC. The beginnings of the movement of these ancestral Hellenes away from Eurasia (geographic space within which the fluid western margins of Asia lurk) may well be linked to the onset of a severe little Ice Age and period of decreased precipitation dated ca. 2500 BC (Anthony 2009:48–52).

The Indo-Iranian relatives of the separated pre-Hellenes would migrate across southwest and central Asia, some continuing on into the South Asian subcontinent, and give rise to distinct Iranian and Indic cultures and civilizations – Persian, Median, and Vedic Indic, among others – foundational Asian civilizations of historical antiquity. The evidence for a Mycenaean continuation of ancestral cult ideology and practice that we can recognize as prototypically Indic presents itself as one symptom eliciting the diagnosis of Mycenaean cultural structures as *Asian* – as *Asia* is currently and commonly delimited, even if that spatial delimitation shows, and has historically shown, some variation.⁶

A second way in which Mycenaean cultural structures can be categorized as Asian has to do with the active transfer of ideas from Asia Minor to Balkan Hellas in the Late Bronze Age. Such transfers were effectuated by the presence of a Mycenaean community in Anatolia, one which remained in contact with its “home” Mycenaean community in European Hellas through ongoing trans-Aegean maritime intercourse. As I have argued in detail elsewhere (see Woodard 2025) the

⁵ See also, *inter alia*, Meid 1975 and Drinka 2013.

⁶ See, on this matter, Korhonen’s (2012) discussion of Asia as defined in relation to Europe, with the bibliography of earlier work. See also the bibliography of Frey and Spakowski 2016a:15n10.

Mycenaeans of Bronze-Age Asia Minor – that is, the Ahhiyawans – intermarried with Luvian peoples living in western Anatolia (and in this way gave rise to the Iron-Age Aeolian Greeks). The outcomes of Mycenaean-Luvian intermingling were linguistic and cultural, and, in the case of the latter, cult transferences – and, undoubtedly, associated ritual narratives (myths) – are notable.

There is, moreover, a curious intersection of these two areas of Mycenaean Asianism. Those Mycenaeans resident in Anatolia in the Late Bronze Age would have brought with them from the Balkans the inherited cultural elements that Bronze-Age Hellenes shared with their Indo-Iranian counterparts. These eastward transplanted Mycenaean Greeks – the Ahhiyawans – were in effect “re-entering” Asian space and in so doing were exposing their reflexes of ancestral Hellenic-Indo-Iranian ideas to a new mix of Asian ideology – that of Anatolian Indo-Europeans, especially Luvians, whose own Indo-European ancestors had settled in Asia Minor long before the pre-Hellenes had arrived in the Balkan peninsula. Those Indo-European ancestors of the Luvians, Hittites, and so on had themselves come under the influence of the indigenous (non-Indo-European) Hattic peoples whom they encountered within the space of Asia Minor.

There is that; but there is also this. In Syria, to the south of areas inhabited by Luvian peoples, some of whom intermixed with Mycenaeans, was the kingdom of Mitanni. It was a place peopled by Hurrian speakers but ruled by kings having Indic names; and, as will be discussed later in this work in detail, there existed in Bronze-Age Mitanni religious ideas and cult practices that find an equivalent among the peoples of Vedic India. In other words, among those Indo-Iranians who pushed south out of the Eurasian Steppes some subset, speaking what appears to have been an early form of Sanskrit, set themselves up as ruling and warrior elites in Mitanni. Ideas would spread out of Indic Mitanni into the Luvian milieu, funneled through the south Anatolian region of Kizzuwatna (these are points to which we will return briefly below in the chapter summaries). We must surely allow the possibility – probability, I will argue – that Indic ideas thus made their way to the Mycenaeans (admixed with Luvian populations) resident in Anatolia, Hellenic descendants of the same ancestral community from which the Indic peoples of Mitanni were themselves historically descended. Yet another set of ideas that spread in Asia Minor, reaching Greeks living there, emanated out of Iranian-settled areas around the Black Sea, including Transcaucasia. In this instance we seem to be dealing with a chiefly

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Early-Iron-Age phenomenon, but the dynamic is the same: ideas reached Asian Greeks who were historically descended from the same Eurasian Helleno-Indo-Iranian community as the Iranian peoples from whom those ideas emanated.

The essays that compose this volume are roughly divided into two groups. The first four chapters are concerned with interpretation of Mycenaean documents and draw heavily on comparative – principally Sanskrit – evidence for elucidation of cult vocabulary and of the ritual actors and actions which the vocabulary encodes. Chapter 1 (“A Mycenaean Ritual and Its Cult Language”), the most lexically focused of the seven essays, examines Pylos tablet Tn 316 in depth, giving particular attention to the Linear B forms spelled *po-re-na*, *po-re-si*, and *po-re-no*-, and related Sanskrit forms, and to the especial closeness of post-Mycenaean Aeolic to ancestral Helleno-Indo-Iranian in regard to this matter. Chapter 2 (“Mycenaean and Vedic Sacrificial Posts”) examines the Vedic sacrificial post called the *yūpa* and its role in ritual performances. I argue, building upon earlier work (my own and others’), that a Mycenaean Greek cognate term and comparable ritual implement lies behind the Linear B form spelled *u-po* – that is, *hūpos* (ὑπος). This essay also examines, among other topics, the Mycenaean deity called the *po-ti-ni-ja*, *a-si-wi-ja*, the Asian Potnia, and especially the *u-po-jo po-ti-ni-ja*, the Potnia of the *u-po* (that is, *hūpoio Pótnia* [ὑποιο Πότνια]), a term matched exactly by Sanskrit *patnī-yūpā*-. In Chapter 3 (“Mycenaean Leaders in the Context of Indo-European and Indo-Iranian Society and Ritual”) I examine the Mycenaean *wanaks* and *lāwāgetās*, figures responsible for *leading* Mycenaean society in specific ways, and argue that they correspond notionally to figures implicit in Indic and Iranian social structures – figures that descend from still more ancient Indo-European antecedents charged with the task of *leading* society through the spaces of the Eurasian Steppes and in migrations southward out of the Steppes. Such movements through space find well-documented ritual expression in Indic cult and, I contend, are no less a component of Mycenaean cult. This first set of essays concludes with Chapter 4 (“Potnia of the Labyrinth, Initiation of the King, and the Triple Sacrifice”), in which I turn again to an examination of a Mycenaean divine Potnia, this one affiliated with the “labyrinth,” the Potnia of the *dabúrinthos* (δαβύρινθος). I propose that the labyrinthine space with which she is associated is an Asian cult notion introduced from Anatolia to Balkan Hellas – and doing so explore a further linkage between the “Special Mycenaean” dialect and the dialect of Mycenaean that was spoken in Bronze-Age Asia Minor (on this Asian

Mycenaean see the detailed treatment in Woodard 2025). In this chapter I also examine the Rājasūya, a Vedic rite of consecration by which a warrior is made a king, and argue that a cult counterpart is most likely to be found in the Mycenaean initiation of the *wanaks*.

The second group of essays, geographically localized in Asia, begins with the examination in Chapter 5 of “Mitannian and Anatolian Triads.” In the early portion of the chapter, careful consideration is given to the Indic divine twins, the *Aśvins* (*Aśvínā*), or *Nāsatyas* (*Nāsatyā*), their association with the Indic Dawn goddess *Uṣas* (with associated color symbolism), and their place in the Indic Soma cult. Discussion then shifts to the kingdom of Mitanni in Syro-Mesopotamia, a place into which, as noted above, Indic culture was introduced as Indo-Iranian peoples migrated southward through Asia, as also at Nuzi (in northeastern Iraq). Many, possibly all, known rulers of Mitanni have names that can be reasonably recognized as Indic; and a treaty between the Hittite sovereign Suppiluliuma II and the Mitanni king Sattiwaza (cf. the Sanskrit compound *vāja-sāti*- ‘winning spoils/battle’) incorporates reference to a set of deities whose names correspond to the Vedic theonyms *Mitra*, *Varuṇa*, *Indra*, and *Nāsatyas*. This corresponding Indic set constitutes a triadic structure well attested in the Vedas. I argue that (again, as mentioned above in delineating the two types of Mycenaean Asianisms and their interaction) there is good lexical evidence for the presence of a Soma cult in Mitanni and that Soma-cult ideas spread out of Mitanni, through Kizzuwatna, into the Luvian milieu of western Asia Minor, where such ideas would almost certainly have been encountered by resident Mycenaean Greeks, intermingled biologically, socially, culturally, and linguistically with Luvian populations. With that spread certain elements of Soma-cult ideology were mapped onto Anatolian cult structures. These investigations of Chapter 5 continue in Chapter 6 (“Nart Saga, Indo-Iranian Twins, and Dioscurias”), in which Iranian cult and myth play a central role, chiefly as evidenced in the Nart sagas of Transcaucasia, but also among Scythians as well as in Zoroastrian tradition. Iranian *Haoma* (where *Haoma* is cognate with Indic *Soma* [both from Proto-Indo-Iranian **Sauma*, a form attested in the early variety of Sanskrit used at Mitanni]) and variant Indo-Iranian psychoactive cult materials that were used from Eurasia across central Asia and into south Asia figure conspicuously. The Greek polis of Dioscurias in the Caucasus is explored as a place where Hellenic and Indo-Iranian divine-twin myth and cult affiliation meet, as indeed they do in the Pontic polis of Sinope – both colonies of Miletus – the Bronze-Age Luvian and Ahhiyawan place

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Millawanda/Milawata. Aeolian connections are conspicuous at both locales. In Chapter 7 (“Golden Fleeces”) I examine the sheep’s fleece filter – poetically described as ruddy and golden – used in the preparation of Soma, an artefact of Indic cult that has surfaced in earlier chapters. I contend that a cult ideology in which such an implement played an important role was preserved for some time in Iranian tradition of the Caucasus, ultimately giving expression to Greek ideas about the presence of fleecy filters impinged with gold in the vicinity of Dioscurias – rationalizing accounts of the Golden Fleece of Aeolian Argonautic tradition. I further argue that specific elements of the Golden Fleece myth find parallels in Indic poetic accounts of the performance of Soma cult and that the common Hellenic and Indic elements – mythic and cult features – constitute a shared nexus of ideas that earliest took shape in Bronze-Age communities of admixed Mycenaean and Luvian populations into which Mitanni Soma ideas had spread via Kizzuwatna. The upshot of this is that Golden Fleece mythic tradition, with its geographic localization in Transcaucasia, is a Mycenaean Asianism that took shape in Asia Minor under Indic and Iranian influences and continued to evolve among the Iron-Age Asian Greeks.

I

A Mycenaean Ritual and Its Cult Language

I.1 INTRODUCTION

We begin with a consideration of various elements of Pylos tablet Tn 316, a Mycenaean document to which we shall have cause to return from time to time, and with a close examination of the form *po-re-na*, which can be plausibly interpreted as an infinitive (of early Indo-European type), as others have argued. The associated Theban form *po-re-si*, I contend, shows itself to be another verbal – in this instance a participle, one having attested Arcadian and Aeolic counterparts. Another affiliated form, *po-re-no-*, equally has Aeolic affiliations and can be viewed as a participant, along the diachronic axis, in an ancestral Hellenic-Indo-Iranian lexical matrix of religious vocabulary.

I.2 PYLOS TABLET TN 316

This Mycenaean tablet has received considerable attention since the early days of Linear B studies, owing chiefly to its “draft” appearance coupled with what some have viewed as sensational specifications of human sacrifices to gods. Many of these recipient deities are unknown in post-Mycenaean documents; and this is of course one clear signal that significant theological, mythic, and cult changes occurred between the unraveling of Late-Bronze-Age Mycenaean civilization and the reemergence of Iron-Age Greek religious documentation in the alphabetic record. These changes must in large part be due to the influx of ideas about the gods from traditions external to European Greece. The sensationalistic aspect of the text has perhaps ebbed among

1.2 Pylos Tablet Tn 316

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commentators,¹ but Tn 316 remains a document of interest.² The text of Pylos tablet Tn 316 can be transcribed as follows:

*Pylos Tablet Tn 316**Front*

1. po-ro-wi-to-jo,
2. i-je-to-qe, pa-ki-ja-si, do-ra-qe, pe-re, po-re-na-qe
3. pu-ro a-ke, po-ti-ni-ja AUR *215VAS 1 MUL 1
4. ma-na-sa, AUR *213VAS 1 MUL 1 po-si-da-e-ja AUR *213VAS 1 MUL 1
5. ti-ri-se-ro-e, AUR *216VAS 1 do-po-ta AUR *215VAS 1
6. *empty*
7. *empty*
8. *empty*
9. *empty*
10. pu-ro

The remainder of this side of the tablet lacks line ruling

di-we si-po-ro ti-mi-to

Reverse

1. i-je-to-qe, po-si-da-i-jo, a-ke-qe, wa-tu
2. do-ra-qe, pe-re, po-re-na-qe, a-ke
- 3a. -ja
- 3b. pu-ro AUR *215VAS 1 MUL 2 qo-wi-ja, na-[], ko-ma-we-te
4. i-je-to-qe, pe-re-82-jo, i-pe-me-de-ja-qe di-u-ja-jo-qe
5. do-ra-qe, pe-re-po-re-na-qe, a, pe-re-82 AUR+*213VAS 1 MUL 1
6. i-pe-me-de-ja AUR 213VAS 1 di-u-ja AUR+*213VAS 1 MUL 1
7. pu-ro e-ma-a₂, a-re-ja AUR *216VAS 1 VIR 1
8. i-je-to-qe, di-u-jo, do-ra-qe, pe-re, po-re-na-qe a-ke
9. di-we AUR *213VAS 1 VIR 1 e-ra AUR *213VAS 1 MUL 1
10. di-ri-mi-jo | di-wo, i-je-we, AUR *213VAS 1 []
11. puro
12. *empty*
13. *empty*
14. *empty*
15. *empty*
16. pu-ro

The remainder of this side of the tablet lacks line ruling

¹ For recent treatments of Pylos tablet Tn 316, with discussion and bibliography of earlier work, see Duhoux 2008:323–335 and Palaima 2011:64–72.

² For a comparison of Pylos tablet Tn 316 with the Hittite document KBo XVI.65, see Uchitel 2005, in which article the author draws attention to the “offering” of men, women, and golden vessels to gods that is common to both documents. Portions of the Hittite tablet appear to have been copied from wooden-tablet receipts, likely composed in Hieroglyphic Luvian. Uchitel concludes that the recurring phrases of the Mycenaean tablet “probably reflect the formulary of ‘receipts’,” as in the Hittite. If this should be so, the Mycenaean “receipt” formulations continue much older Indo-European syntagms (see below). The distinction that Uchitel would make between economic and ritual language in identifying a source of the Mycenaean “formulae” may blur along, at least, the diachronic axis.

The interpretation offered here of the verbal phrase that occurs in lines *Front* 2–3, *Reverse* 1–2, 5, and 8 – that is, *do-ra-qe, pe-re, po-re-na-qe, a-ke* – has been informed by Willi (1994–1995), who rightly recognizes a recurring coordinated syntagm of an early Indo-European pattern, and, especially, by Nagy (1994–1995, 2015b, and 2017b), who realizes that a formulaic parallel to the lexical concatenation is expressed in *Iliad* 23.509–513. The tablet can be translated in the following way:

Front

1. In the month of Plowistos³
2. X both offers sacrifice⁴ at Pa-ki-ja-ne, and carries gifts and
- PYLOS⁵
3. takes Y for the carrying: to Potnia 1 GOLD *215-CUP [and] 1 WOMAN
4. to Ma-na-sa 1 GOLD *213-BOWL [and] 1 WOMAN; to Posidāheia
- 1 GOLD *213-BOWL [and] 1 WOMAN
5. to the Tris-hērōs : 1 GOLD *216-CUP; to Dospotās 1 GOLD *215-CUP

//

PYLOS

//

di-we si-po-ṛo ti-mi-ṛo⁶*Reverse*

1. X both offers sacrifice at the shrine of Poseidon, and the city takes
- PYLOS
2. and carries gifts and takes Y for the carrying:
3. 1 GOLD *215-CUP [and] 2 women to Boia⁷ // to Komāwenteiā
4. and X offers sacrifice at the shrine of Pe-re-*82, of Iphimedeia, and of
- Diwia
5. and carries gifts and takes Y for the carrying: to Pe-re-*82 1 GOLD *213-
- BOWL [and] 1 WOMAN
- PYLOS
6. to Iphimedeia 1 GOLD *213-BOWL; to Diwia 1 GOLD *213-BOWL [and] 1
- WOMAN

³ For the reading of the month name *po-ro-wi-to* as *Plōwistós* Πλωριστός) the ‘month of sailing’ see Palmer 1955:11 and 1969:254–255. For proposed identification of the month with Attic Mounichion see Sergent 1990 (especially pp. 177–178, 180, 182–183, 185–188, 194–197, 204, 208–209, 211, 214), whose identification of several divine figures mentioned in the tablet differs from that proposed herein.

⁴ For the sense of the verb *i-je-to* see, *inter alia*, García Ramón 1996.

⁵ Pylos is written in oversized symbols along the left margin of the text area, positioned approximately as in the above translation.

⁶ A graffito, closely matched by sequences on Pylos tablets Aq 218 and Xa 412. On possible interpretations see Palaima 2011:51–52n30, with bibliography.

⁷ That is, Boea (by the transcription convention used herein). On the reading, see Duhoux 2008:334.