

**Erwin COOK and Thomas PALAIMA**  
**New Perspectives on Pylian Cults Sacrifice and Society in the 'Odyssey'**

We here address a tendency in modern scholarship to treat "Homeric Society" as monolithic. We also address the Grote-like 'rationalist' reaction to the Homeromania that prevailed in the study of the Linear B documents and Mycenaean archaeology in the years that followed the Ventris decipherment. We argue that Homer presents a more variegated view of the Greek world than is generally accepted. We identify important narrative reasons for this, but we also suggest that Homer's description of Nestor's Pylos includes distinctive features of the Bronze Age palatial culture that once existed on the acropolis at Ano Englianos that were preserved through a living tradition ultimately derived from the post-Mycenaean inhabitants of Messenia.

The Pylian narrative in Homer is organized as a series of religious rituals bracketed by an arrival and departure scene. Telemakhos arrives at Pylos to encounter ritual feasting on a scale without precedent in Homer. Special prominence is awarded libation rituals and libation vessels, described interchangeably as *depas* and *aleison*. Both seem to be non- or pre-Greek loan words.

A number of elements of the physical description help lend Homeric Pylos a BA patina, including most famously the political organization of Pylos as a confederation of nine cities under palatial control. To them can now be added Homer's presentation of the Pylian *wanax*. The centrality of cult to the ideology of the *wanax* has been demonstrated from the full Linear B textual documentation from the site of Pylos and the iconographical and architectural program of the Palace of Nestor. In fact the strong cultic functions of the Pylian *wanax* may result from the particularly strong Minoan influence upon Mycenaean palatial Messenia and may distinguish it from the forms of *wanax* ideology in other Mycenaean palatial territories.

Libation was an especially prominent feature of BA palatial cult at Pylos: the famous 'human sacrifice' tablet Tn 316 records golden 'Mycenaean goblets' and 'Minoan chalices', dedicated to various deities. Clay versions of over 600 such 'Mycenaean goblets' were discovered in room 9 of the palace, where they could serve in commensal cultic ceremonies reconstructed from textual evidence, again mainly Pylian. Another room (19) contained an extraordinary 2,853 *kulikes*. Such archaeologically and textually documented emphasis on wine consumption and attendant libations corresponds to the ceremonies surrounding Nestor and his family in *Iliad* 11 and *Odyssey* 3, both of which use preserved non-Greek vocabulary for ritual vessels that was so 'fossilized' as to be misunderstood in Homer and its infrequent later uses in Greek literature.

The question remains, how could Homeric epic preserve and manipulate distinctive features of Pylian *wanax*-ideology. One possibility is that they were preserved in the living traditions of IA Messenians who claimed descent from the BA rulers of Pylos. After a hiatus, in which settlement activity is archaeologically invisible, IA Messenians characteristically reoccupied Bronze Age sites. At Pylos, the inhabitants reused the former palace walls, and, more strikingly, built a tholos tomb to the south in a conscious

attempt to emulate BA practice. The site continued to be occupied until the 8th century, at a time when intra-regional contact would have sufficiently reintensified to permit the diffusion of its preserved traditions. Another possibility is that such traditions were transmitted through the movement of upper-class Mycenaeans in the late IIIB and IIIC Mycenaean *diaspora*, reflected in aristocratic traditions about the affiliation of leading Attic *gene* with the Neleid dynasty.