

Potnia Hera and Athena: a Connection between the Mycenaean *Wanax* and the Homeric *Anax*

The extent to which Homeric epic and the Linear B tablets can be used to elucidate elements of continuity between the Early Iron Age society and the Mycenaean civilization remains a point of contention. After the decipherment of Linear B by Ventris and Chadwick between 1951-1953, many lexical similarities between Homer and the tablets became apparent, and Chadwick (1956) in particular hypothesized many points of connection between the two bodies of work which he later redacted in a second edition after legitimate criticism (1973). As a result, some scholars have cautioned against using Homer in conjunction with Linear B and have even gone so far as to argue that the world of Homer reflects very little of the Mycenaean past (Bennet 2014). To conclude this is to ignore the wealth of lexical similarities, at the very least, and the possible aspects of Homeric and Mycenaean society which can be illuminated through these similarities.

Two obvious lexical similarities found in both Homeric epic and the Linear B tablets are the words *potnia* (LB: *po-ti-ni-ja*; Homer: *πότνια*) and (*w*)*anax* (LB: *wa-na-ka*; Homer: *ἄναξ*). The power structure of a Mycenaean palatial center, in the most basic sense, consists of the *wanax*, king, and the *lawagetas*, leader of the *laōs* (Palmer 1963). In the Linear B tablets, especially those from Pylos, a special religious connection can be detected between the *wanax* and the goddess *Potnia* (Antonaccio 2006; Palaima 1995). In Homeric epic, three Greek heroes (Agamemnon, Achilles, and Odysseus) are most often called *ἄναξ*, (Agamemnon fifty-one times, Achilles six, and Odysseus twenty-five). These heroes also enjoy a special relationship with a female goddess in which the hero receives divine assistance, messages, or intervention from either Hera, Athena, or both. Interestingly, Hera is given the epithet *potnia* twenty-six times, and

she often works in conjunction with Athena, either exhorting Athena to action, plotting against the Trojans together, or openly fighting on the battlefield. The pair either intercede on behalf of one hero, as when Hera sends Athena to stop Achilles from striking down Agamemnon (*Il.* 1.194-95) or are invoked as a source of strength, as Peleus tells Achilles (*Il.* 9.254).

In my paper I will argue that the connection the three aforementioned heroes in Homer enjoy with the goddesses Hera and Athena remembers the affiliation between the *wanax* of a Mycenaean citadel and the goddess *Potnia*. In order to do so, I will lay out the Linear B evidence for the religious connection between the *wanax* and *Potnia* and then I will characterize the relationship between the three Homeric heroes and Athena/Hera thereby demonstrating that the Homeric relationship has a Mycenaean precedent. The similarity between the two relationships also helps elucidate a cultural shift in the identity of *Potnia*. I will argue that Hera is a Homeric memory of the Mycenaean *Potnia*, and although Athena is only called *potnia* once (*Il.* 6.305), she, originally a local goddess of the Athenian citadel, becomes associated with the Mycenaean *Potnia* through the rise of Athens in the 9th-8th centuries BCE and the dissemination of the epic tradition by the Ionians (Ruijgh 2011).

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