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A COMPARATIVE LOOK AT MYCENAEAN AND NEAR EASTERN BUREAUCRACIES: 'BILATERAL' DOCUMENTATION IN THE LINEAR B ARCHIVES?[*]

It has long been acknowledged that the administrations of the ancient Near East provide important comparanda when considering the workings of the Mycenaean bureaucracy. This paper seeks to establish some of the ways in which such comparisons may continue to be useful in the study of the Mycenaean world.

One particular point of interest is the type of documentation generated by the central administration within a redistributive economy. In certain Near Eastern systems, 'bilateral' documentation was used to provide legal or quasi-legal proof of the fulfilment of liabilities to the palace. However, it is here argued that there is no evidence for the employment of such records in the Linear B archives.

From the earliest days of Mycenaean scholarship following the decipherment of the Linear B script in 1952, the ancient Near East has provided important comparanda: in 1956, Ventris and Chadwick asserted that Near Eastern cuneiform records 'present the most useful and significant analogies with the Mycenaean tablets'.[1] A comparison is justified by a number of factors: the Near Eastern records deal with similar economic and bureaucratic activities to the Mycenaean and can be classified as 'archives',[2] we see similar issues of literacy, and the civilisations are at a similar stage of technological advancement (vis-à-vis metallurgy, transport, etc.). The Near Eastern material has been the subject of study for a far longer period, and the administrative systems it represents are more fully understood thanks to the sheer amount of data surviving in cuneiform records, and the wealth

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[*] I would like to thank Torsten Meissner, John Killen and Nicholas Postgate for their help and comments when I was preparing this paper. Any mistakes or omissions are entirely mine.

[1] Docs¹ p. 106; Killen 1985 p. 241–242 discusses the early history of Near Eastern comparisons.

[2] See Palaima 2003 p. 169, p. 173 for deposits of Mycenaean texts as 'archives', and Posner 1972 p. 12ff. for 'archives' in the Near East.

of scholarship on them. A number of Mycenaean scholars have used a Near Eastern comparison (sometimes as the focus of their work,[3] sometimes providing comparative data to resolve a particular isolated issue[4]), often elucidating obscure Linear B tablets by comparing texts directly; however my focus here will be on whole systems and typology.[5]

The Mycenaean archives present important interpretive problems. Relatively few tablets have been found (c. 5,500), and the Linear B script is syllabic and ill-suited to the Greek language, often rendering meaning obscure. Furthermore, the archives are far from complete, and records have survived only by chance[6] and probably date to the last few months before the destruction of each palace, so that we do not even have a whole year's tablets; the resulting 'holes' in our knowledge make it difficult to reconstruct the workings of the Mycenaean administration.[7] Better understood Near Eastern systems may shed light on the Mycenaean world precisely because of the problems associated with the Linear B archives: Near Eastern documents, whose role within their systems is better understood because of the survival of far greater proportions of the original archives and the more transparent wording and formulae of texts, may provide a typological comparison with the incompletely attested Mycenaean administration if the systems are shown to be suitably similar.

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[3] For example, Uchitel 1988 favours comparing similarities in isolated documents (p. 19); also de Fidio 1992.

[4] For example, Killen 1964 in his analysis of shepherding and bureaucratic documentation relating to it.

[5] A possible 'genetic' relationship cannot be ruled out (contact around the Eastern Mediterranean is of course well attested), but it also cannot be proved (the scant records in the undeciphered Linear A script render it difficult to study the Linear A administration, and the presumably 'genetic' links between the Linear A and B administrations), and so I shall confine this study to the typological method (advocated explicitly by Finley 1957/8).

[6] Mycenaean records were not deliberately baked, in contrast to the Near Eastern practice; the resulting debate about the permanency of records is problematic, particularly in the fact that very little ground can be gained over the question of whether the Mycenaean administration employed any perishable materials (see Palaima 2003 p. 170–171 for an overview).

[7] It should be noted that there may have been substantial differences between the workings of the administrations in the various Mycenaean centres; however, for the purposes of this article, since scope is limited, it is assumed that the different administrations were broadly similar. Thus the singular mention of 'the Mycenaean administration' is not intended to imply bureaucratic or political unity across the Mycenaean world but rather to represent a generalisation on the part of the author. The differences between the bureaucratic mechanisms of the various Mycenaean centres must be considered elsewhere.

I employ the typological method here in order to illuminate one particular aspect of Mycenaean documentation. Postgate[8] has pointed out that it is important for Near Eastern documentation to determine for whom records were produced. Many are for the centre's own archives, but others have a quasi-legal function of proving the existence and fulfilment of administrative duties on behalf of both the centre and the extra-palatial parties bound to it; these latter records may be termed 'bilateral', and I shall determine here whether we see 'bilateral' documentation in the Linear B archives.

A typological comparison of the Mycenaean and Near Eastern material relies on first establishing that the systems within which they are attested were similar. Similarities have long been noted, not only on a text-by-text basis, but also between the administrations and bureaucratic methods themselves. After Ventris and Chadwick, Finley and others, Killen's seminal 1985 article on the Mycenaean economy expounded the most important systematic similarities: the Linear B and cuneiform records resemble each other superficially because they are the bureaucratic product of a specifically 'redistributive' non-money and non-market economy, focused around a (usually) 'palatial' centre, and featuring high levels of craft specialisation. As he says, 'there can be little question that the palaces in the Mycenaean kingdoms, like the central palaces and temples in the ancient Neat East, are functioning as redistributive centres'.[9] While Near Eastern systems of course show some variations in their bureaucratic mechanisms,[10] there are many that certainly functioned as centralised, redistributive economies with high levels of craft specialisation. Perhaps the best example, the epitome of redistributive economy, is the Ur III state (2100–2000 B.C.), particularly following the reforms of King Šulgi:[11] he focused on centralising the administration, redistributing goods and land (the bala system), and thus created 'huge industrial complexes devoted to highly specialized commodity production and run directly by the central government.'[12] Centralised Near Eastern administrations tended to employ a bureaucracy that could be described as 'a form of administration or management that

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[8] Postgate 2001.
[9] Killen 1985 p. 251–252 (emphasis original); Killen 2008 shows that Parkinson 1999 (contra redistribution) is highly flawed.
[10] See Oppenheim 1964 and 1965, Brosius 2003 and Postgate 1992 and 2001.
[11] See Steinkeller 1987.
[12] Ibid. p. 22.

combines the use of written records, hierarchic chain of command, and professionalism with specialization.'[13]

The Linear B records attest just such a centralised administration as is found in Ur III: the location of the archives and the presence of 'palace' complexes attest centralisation, the many tablets featuring lists of various commodities and references to workshops and occasionally personnel 'owing' services (such as the return of finished goods to the palace[14]) attest a redistributive system, and high levels of craft specialisation are attested not only by the range of artefacts (including prestige items) found by archaeologists,[15] but also textual references to such occupations as 'unguent-boiler' and 'cyanos-worker'. The Mycenaean and Near Eastern economies are also demonstrably non-money and non-market:[16] there is no evidence of commercial trade or a 'private sector' within the Mycenaean state, nor that any 'standard' was in use;[17] the tablets point towards the central authority controlling the allocation of important commodities (and also land[18]) to its people.

We are not, however, simply determining which Near Eastern system's records provide the 'best fit' with the Mycenaean, since this would tell us little about the Mycenaean administration unless we are trying to determine a 'genetic' relationship. I rather aim to look first at the Near Eastern material, which is more complete and better understood, and use this to highlight specific issues of the Mycenaean records. As a starting point, we may look at Postgate's[19] very clear exposition of the workings of three particular centralised Near Eastern bureaucratic systems: the Ur III, the Old Babylonian (1800–1550 B.C.) and the Middle Assyrian (c. 13 B.C.). These systems are largely similar but present important variations in bureaucratic and administrative practice. First let me summarise the terminology employed by Postgate, which I shall use here:

i.   transaction: a transmission of commodities between individuals or groups (not in the modern sense of commerce, in which the exchange of 'money' might be expected).

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[13] Morony 1987 p. 7.
[14] See Killen 1999 and 2001.
[15] See Halstead 1992 p. 62–3.
[16] See Killen 1985.
[17] See de Fidio 1992.
[18] The Pylos E-series indicates a complex land-allocation system (illustrated *infra*). See Killen 2008, Palmer 1998/9 and de Fidio 1992.
[19] Postgate 2001.

ii. transmission of instruction: how a duty or liability is known to exist.
iii. duties and liabilities: 'transactions' expected of various personnel.
iv. administrative reach: the proportion of 'transactions' controlled by the centre.
v. documentary coverage: the proportion of 'transactions' documented.
vi. bilateral/unilateral documentation: a 'unilateral' document is 'generated within an institution for its own reference'; a 'bilateral' document 'records and provides legal evidence for a transaction' (often documenting 'an individual's liability').[20]

The Ur III state was characterised by full administrative reach and documentary coverage and 'unilateral' documentation; the Old Babylonian by reduced administrative reach and documentary coverage (because of the delegation of administrative responsibility) and correspondingly 'unilateral' and 'bilateral' documentation (because extra-palatial parties had to be able to prove that they had fulfilled their duties); and the Middle Assyrian by full administrative reach and documentary coverage but also 'unilateral' and 'bilateral' documentation, necessitated not by delegation of administrative responsibility but by the central authority's emphasis on formulating the duties of personnel as strict liabilities for which proof of fulfilment had to be provided.

Postgate's assessment throws up an important question regarding the Mycenaean data: do the Linear B records attest any 'bilateral'-type documentation? He showed that it was not employed in the administration that I previously marked out as remarkably similar to the Mycenaean, Ur III. However, 'bilateral' documentation was necessitated by the Old Babylonian system for 'legal' reasons (proof of duties fulfilled that were not overseen by the centre but ultimately answerable to it), and the Middle Assyrian for different, 'commercialist' reasons (if the centre had full administrative reach over its redistributive system, then 'bilateral' documents would not have been necessary, but Postgate asserts, based on the similarity of administrative documents to those in the commercial sphere, that the necessity came about from an adoption of 'mercantile' ethos in public administration, with the palace deliberately imitating commercial administrative techniques and formulation[21]). Thus, if we can find

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[20] Ibid. p. 185.
[21] Ibid. p. 193.

traces of 'bilateral' documentation in the Linear B archives, we can attempt to ascertain whether this arose out of 'legal' necessity or some sort of 'commercialism'; since 'bilateralism' (though without using this terminology) has been asserted to be attested in some Mycenaean material,[22] it will be fruitful to explore this issue. If, however, we find no traces of 'bilateralism' in the LB archives, is this because of our fragmentary knowledge of the whole system, or because the central authority exercised complete authority over the state?

Before I look in detail at 'bilateral' documents in Near Eastern administrations, and thus assess our comparanda before moving on to the Mycenaean data with which they can be compared, we must be clear about the form of 'unilateral' and 'bilateral' documents so that we may recognise them. Postgate's own description is worth quoting in full:

> 'A *unilateral* document is generated within an institution for its own reference. It may record a transaction, and it may state the existence of liabilities, but since it is not authenticated by the party liable, it cannot be said to create the liability or even to prove it (i.e. it is neither a constitutive nor an evidentiary or quasi-legal document). In contrast, a *bilateral* document records and provides legal evidence for a transaction, and most of those we meet in administrative contexts document an individual's liability. To be valid, it normally requires the party placed under the liability to acknowledge the liability by the application of his seal or some comparable act.'[23]

In another article, he further stated that the question at stake is 'whether it is a record produced and kept by one person (or institution) for their own purposes [i.e. 'unilateral'], or one that records a transaction or other relationship between two parties and is acknowledged as valid by each side, and retained by one side (or sometimes both) as evidence for the resulting liability [i.e. 'bilateral']. Normally the bilateral nature of a document is implicit in the wording of the text, but by the late second millennium BC the acknowledgement of liability was usually also expressed physically on the document, with a seal impression.'[24]

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[22] These are discussed in the section on 'Bilateral' documents in the Mycenaean administration? *infra*.

[23] Ibid. p. 185.

[24] Postgate 2003 p. 130.

The difference between 'unilateral' and 'bilateral' documentation is one of purpose. A 'unilateral' document may record the liabilities of individuals, but its purpose is not to provide the individual with a means of proving that he has fulfilled his duty, but to provide the centre with a record of, for example, commodities that it requires to be delivered. A 'bilateral' document is best recognised by its emphasis on *proving* the existence or fulfilment of a liability; this emphasis may appear as the formulation of a way of proving the liability's existence or fulfilment (for example the breaking of a tablet upon fulfilment, common in some Near Eastern records), or in the use of some method of authenticating the liability, such as a seal (perhaps of the responsible official, or the person or group accepting the liability). In practice it may be difficult to distinguish between 'unilateral' and 'bilateral' documents, though this will be more apparent on a case-by-case basis.

'Bilateral' documents in Near Eastern administrations

There are various types of 'bilateral' Near Eastern record, the most obvious occurring in the 'private' or 'commercial' sector and including records of sales, receipts and legal documents. In such cases, we tend to see two parties agreeing to the contract in question (whether of sale, debt, marriage, etc.) and acknowledging it by the impression of their seal (either one party or both) and the seals of witnesses on the document. One party (for example the buyer in a sale) would then keep the record itself, which would be placed within a clay envelope on which the text of the contract was repeated; sometimes only the envelope was sealed, sometimes both the envelope and the tablet. If any dispute arose over the contract, a judge would be called to arbitrate and the document could be used as evidence (as well as the testimonies of the witnesses who sealed it).[25]

Private and commercial documents, of course, are not ones that we would wish to compare with the Mycenaean material given the absence of evidence for any private or commercial sector. However, the authentication provided by such sealed contracts was employed in other Near Eastern documents, including those in administration. The Old Babylonian state delegated a great deal of administrative authority (accordingly reducing the amount of documentation it generated) to various extra-palatial parties, including *iššiakum* (private entrepreneurs to whom the palace would grant fields, expecting duty

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[25] See Renger 1977 p. 75–6.

from the crop yield in return[26]), *nāqidum* (shepherding contractors who would allocate flocks to shepherds and handle the contractual relationship[27]) and *tamkārum* (independent merchants who took on various kinds of contracts, including palatial 'subcontracts' requiring them to oversee workers producing goods ultimately expected by the palace[28]); such parties would expect some profit, but benefited the palace by reducing its administrative reach and burden of bureaucratic documentation. The delegation of administrative duty necessitated 'bilateral' documentation not only of the palace's relationship with outside agents, but also of the agents' relationships with other parties including craft-workers, farmers and shepherds; the complex system of proof of these relationships by the use of written, sealed documents is attested in the Edict of Ammi-saduqa.[29]

The use of seal impressions to authenticate administrative documents is not confined to the Old Babylonian period. The Ur III state, which as we noted appears similar to the Mycenaean in its administrative mechanisms, made use of seal impressions, though 'almost exclusively on receipts and disbursements';[30] these documents would bear not only the seal impression and a record of the commodity involved but also often a formula such as 'he received' (*šu ba-ti* with inanimate and *ì-dab₅* with animate objects). The use of a seal in such cases would probably not render the document 'bilateral' since it would merely record an official (the seal owner) taking responsibility for the delivery. This suggests that a seal in itself is not enough to render a document 'bilateral': perhaps sealing such documents became a standardised administrative process that played no real role in 'proving' liabilities or their fulfilment, even if it may originally have been used for 'legal' evidentiary purposes (one of Gelb's criteria for identifying a seal is its purpose of 'legalizing or validating the object (document) bearing the impression' by identifying the seal's user[31]).

There are other methods than sealing that might be used to render a document 'bilateral' by authenticating it to the extent that it could be used as proof of a liability or its fulfilment. The Middle Assyrian

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[26] See Renger 1978 p. 253.
[27] See Postgate 2001 p. 189.
[28] See Leemans 1950, and Postgate 2001 p. 189. *Tamkārum* have sometimes been likened to the Mycenaean 'collectors' (see, for example, Killen 1995); it has also been suggested that the Mycenaean title *da-mo-ko-ro* is directly related (Astour 1965 p. 338; Lindgren 1973 Vol.II p. 32–3 is sceptical).
[29] See Postgate 1992 p. 197.
[30] Steinkeller 1977 p. 42.
[31] Gelb 1977 p. 111.

system (within which administrative 'bilateral' documentation was not necessitated by the delegation of administrative duty but rather was probably related to its employment in the private and commercial sectors) made use of often elaborate and highly complex methods of sealing,[32] but also other authentication mechanisms. A common way of rendering a contract 'legally' binding was the inclusion in the tablet of a formula stating that, upon fulfilment, the party liable may break his tablet (having retrieved it from the person to whom the liability was owed once they were satisfied). Such tablets were commonly witnessed and sealed, providing 'legal' evidence of the existence of the liability; however, the breaking of the tablet alone would provide evidence of the fulfilment of the liability.

There is, then, a range of methods of authenticating a document such that it could be considered 'bilateral', providing proof that the parties involved agreed to a contract, or that one party had fulfilled a liability. Administrative 'bilateral' documentation was sometimes employed in contracts between the palace and extra-palatial parties, or sometimes between two extra-palatial parties, depending on the reasons for its use.

'Bilateral' documents in the Mycenaean administration?

The overwhelming majority of Mycenaean documents are undoubtedly 'unilateral' in nature. Most deposits of texts come from palatial complexes, where it is likely they were kept by the administration for its own reference. The texts often list commodities, and although they might include the names and locations of individuals contributing commodities or taxes, liabilities are very rarely formulated and could not be said to be 'authenticated'; it is far more likely that the centre's records merely document its interests in various commodities, than that they are intended to provide proof that could be called on by extra-palatial parties as evidence of the fulfilment of their duties. References to liabilities do occur (the terms *o-pe-ro-ta* /ophellonta/, *o-pe-ro-te* /ophellontes/, 'owing'), and tend to be oblique (in tablets that record information indirectly related to the individuals' duties, rather than those setting out what the duties are):[33] much of such evidence comes from landholding records, where the liability is prob-

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[32] See Postgate 2001 p. 193.
[33] Except, perhaps, in cases where *o* may be an abbreviated form denoting the liability in the context of the individual's contribution, listed in a tablet that makes specific mention of the individual's duties.

ably mentioned because the land is held in return for services (usually a certain type of land allotment, the *o-na-to* /onaton/). However, there is nothing to suggest that the extra-palatial parties referred to would have access to the information recorded and kept by the palace, or that they could call on it to prove that they had fulfilled their duties if a situation arose in which such a means of proof would be desirable (for example, a dispute). Thus we cannot look to the Linear B tablets for 'bilateral' documentation and must consider other document types. Two other sources of Linear B inscriptions, sealings and stirrup jars, have been argued to constitute contractual records, perhaps to be seen as 'bilateral' documents.

Mycenaean sealings are small and usually three-sided nodules of clay (often with a hole for a piece of string), impressed with a seal and bearing inscriptions that tend to include a commodity and an anthroponym, and sometimes a toponym or transactional term. The Mycenaean practice of sealing to some extent doubtless followed the Minoan tradition, but we should also note that the number of sealing-types was reduced (from Minoan nodules, roundels and *scellés* to Mycenaean nodules and only a few examples of *scellés*), possibly corresponding to a reduced range of administrative functions.[34] Palaima has expounded the administrative use of sealings: he is surely correct to assert that sealings were 'apparently devised for and used within a single transactional procedure ... [and] intentionally exploited as sources of information at 'higher' levels of administration',[35] i.e. a sealing might record the supply of a commodity (the fulfilment of a liability) to the palace, and the scribes could then take down the information onto their longer tablets.

Palaima further suggests that the sealings constitute 'contractual "performance records"',[36] implying that they are not merely records of single transactions, documenting, for example, the delivery to the palace of a commodity that it expected from a particular individual; they are also 'basic records of personal identification indicating that a party ... saw to the fulfilment of an obligation within the terms of a standard arrangement or contract.'[37] This would confer onto them a quasi-legal status, implying that the sealing could be used after the event as evidence of the liability's fulfilment should this be questioned. The evidence, however, is not in Palaima's favour:

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[34] See Palaima 1987 p. 254–5.
[35] Palaima 2000a p. 221–2.
[36] Palaima 1987 p. 259.
[37] Ibid. p. 260.

he himself admits that 'it is the nature of sealings to be 'transitory' and 'temporary'',[38] since they would be used only to note down the fulfilment of the liability and then discarded.[39] This suggests that the sealings were not retained as quasi-legal records that could be accessed in the event of a dispute over the fulfilment of a liability, and there is furthermore no evidence that the information from the sealings generated anything other than a unilateral tablet (containing a redaction of the data collected from a number of sealings) that would be kept by the palace for its own reference.

What then was the function of the seal impression itself on the Mycenaean sealings? It seems likely that the seals themselves belonged to officials employed by the palace; however, it has not been possible to identify any sealing with any particular individual, as is sometimes possible in the Near East.[40] Some attempts have been made to ascertain whether a known scribal hand was responsible for inscribing particular sealings, and although this is methodologically problematic (because sealings normally consist of a very small number of signs), the results have sometimes been convincing; for example, it is possible that one sealing found in the central archives complex at Pylos was written by Hand 2, who is known from his corpus of tablets to have engaged in the highest level of administrative duties.[41] Aravantinos concludes that, on sealings, 'the impressions and the ideograms were both, it seems, used for the labelling and identification of the commodities sent from one place to the other under the direct control of the Mycenaean palatial officials'.[42] If so, the seal impression is a means of authentication, but also probably a temporary one; the emphasis was probably not on the liable party being able to prove he had fulfilled his duty (in any legal sense), but rather on the particular official taking responsibility for the delivery (and possibly ensuring that it reached the appropriate storehouse *vel sim.*, and was entered into the palace's official archives). We could not argue, then, that Mycenaean sealings constitute 'bilateral' documentation.

Van Alfen has suggested that the painted inscriptions found on a number of inscribed stirrup jars (hereafter ISJs) 'provide official

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[38] Palaima 2000a p. 227.
[39] This is proven by the discovery of large numbers of sealings, their inscriptions contextually unrelated to each other, in single archaeological deposits (bureaucratic 'rubbish dumps'?).
[40] See Gibson/Biggs 1977.
[41] See Palaima 2000a p. 228.
[42] Aravantinos 1984 p. 48.

documentation of an individual's fulfilment of a specific delivery or obligation, whether he be a worker or a collector.'[43] His theory that ISJs served as contractual records between various parties (without any means of authentication such as a seal impression) is based on evidence that is very difficult to interpret, not least because the ISJ inscriptions, of which c. 180 examples survive, tend to be short, obscure and palaeographically problematic (frequent mistakes indicate that those who painted them, probably in the workshop since the inscriptions were added before firing, were not themselves literate but working from a template *vel sim*.). He argues that the brevity of inscriptions and lack of ideograms and transactional vocabulary is due to the 'closed' system within which ISJs were used: he asserts that the commodity and transaction type would have been constant and predictable, and the parties involved (usually, he says, a 'manager' and 'collector'[44]) often knew each other and so their names would not need to be recorded; the few longer inscriptions, then, must have been necessitated by a transaction between parties who did not know each other so well, perhaps a 'collector' and a palace official; at the other extreme, uninscribed stirrup jars did not require an inscription because the parties knew each other so well that no information at all need be recorded! The argument seems somewhat contrived, precisely because of the problematic material on which it is based (which the author to some extent acknowledges).[45] The evidence is insufficient to suggest that the ISJs are contractual records of any sort, and for our present purposes we may at least say that they do not constitute examples of 'bilateral' documentation.

We may conclude that none of the records or inscriptions in the Linear B corpus constitutes a 'bilateral' document. However, this does not in itself prove that the Mycenaean administration did not employ 'bilateral' documentation. With Near Eastern examples, we saw that 'bilateral' documents could be employed at different levels: between the palace and extra-palatial parties, between two extra-palatial parties (liability ultimately owed to the palace), or between two extra-palatial parties ('private'/'commercial' contract). The excavations of Mycenaean sites have concentrated largely on 'palatial' buildings and complexes (even the 'houses' at Mycenae seem to have been used in central administrative activity) and high-status tombs, and so more emphasis is often put on textual references than

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[43] Van Alfen 1996/7 p. 266.
[44] See ibid. p. 269.
[45] See also Van Alfen 2008.

archaeological evidence *vis-à-vis* extra-palatial individuals; indications that, for example, seals were restricted to the higher strata of society is based on data possibly skewed by selective excavation.[46] The limited attestations of Linear B inscriptions furthermore may give us a skewed picture of the extent of Mycenaean literacy. Because of the nature of our evidence, it is extremely difficult to determine whether there might have been contractual relationships between extra-palatial parties (or between extra-palatial parties and the palace) that were formulated in such a way that quasi-legal evidence of the relationship was created: if such documents did exist, it is perhaps likely that the individual fulfilling a liability would be issued with the document that provided the evidence of this fact, and so such records would more likely be found in private houses than palatial complexes (and are thus missing from the archaeological record).

Although there is no direct evidence for the presence, or indeed absence, of 'bilateral' documentation in Mycenaean administration, oblique references may give us further insight into this issue. The most important example may be found in two related Pylian landholding documents that record a dispute (the relevant lines only are quoted):

PY Ep 704.5-6:
.5 e-ri-ta , i-je-re-ja , e-ke , e-u-ke-to-qe , e-to-ni-jo , e-ke-e , te-o ,
                                  da-mo-de-mi , pa-si , ko-to-na-o ,
.6 ke-ke-me-na-o , o-na-to , e-ke-e , to-so pe-mo GRA 3 T 9

(Eritha the priestess has and claims to have an etonion *for the god, but the* dāmos *says she has an* onaton *of* ktoinai kekemenai ...)

PY Eb 297:
.1 i-je-re-ja , e-ke-qe , e-u-ke-to-qe , e-to-ni-jo , e-ke-e , te-o
.2 ko-to-no-o-ko-de , ko-to-na-o , ke-ke-me-na-o , o-na-ta , e-ke-e
.3   GRA 3 T 9 V 3

(The priestess both has and claims to have an etonion *for the god, but the* ktoina-*holders [say] she has* onata *of* ktoinai kekemenai ...)

The dispute might be called 'legal' or 'quasi-legal' in nature:[47] the *dāmos* (or the *ktoina*-holders, who apparently have a relation to the *dāmos* or may even be equivalent to it[48]) is one of the parties involved and is asserting that the priestess has a sort of leasehold (there is evidence that an *o-na-to* would be held by an individual in

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[46] As Palaima 1987 p. 253 warns, though see Halstead 1992.
[47] See Palaima 2000b p. 9.
[48] See Palmer 1998/9 p. 249, de Fidio 2001, and Lejeune 1972.

return for services rendered to the palace), while the priestess claims that she has an *e-to-ni-jo* (a landholding exempt from services).[49] The palace is probably in a position to adjudicate, since it keeps a record of the dispute, but it also appears that the dispute was not settled between the time of writing of Eb 297 (on which it is first recorded) and Ep 704 (a redaction).

These intriguing texts give an insight into the workings of the Mycenaean state outside the palatial sphere: we can see that disputes could arise over landholding between extra-palatial parties, perhaps suggesting reduced administrative reach by the centre, although it seems that the palace was the ultimate authority and would presumably conclude the dispute itself. The quasi-legal nature of the dispute is interesting: the priestess makes a claim regarding her landholding, and the *dāmos*, blatantly because it has an interest in the land, is disputing the terms on which she holds it.

One question raised here is that of how the 'liability', by which the *dāmos* claims *e-ri-ta* is bound, would have been known to the parties involved. If the land had been granted to the priestess by the palace, or some other body (a 'landholder', or the *dāmos* itself?), then this would surely be a contractual relationship (whether there was an exemption from, or a duty to render, services). Contractual relationships of this nature in a number of Near Eastern administrations would have generated 'bilateral' documentation intended to provide evidence of the original contract should a dispute arise. However, this Mycenaean case suggests that the parties involved did not have any written, sealed or otherwise authenticated (for example by witnesses) means of proving that they were telling the truth: there is no mention of any means of evidence, and we have references only to the spoken statements (the verbs *e-u-ke-to* and *pa-si*) of the parties involved. This in turn suggests that no 'bilateral' documentation had been employed in the formulation of this particular land contract, and suggests it was not employed elsewhere.

Conclusion

In this article, I have used the typology of Near Eastern administrations to illustrate a specific aspect of the Mycenaean system. A study of Near Eastern bureaucratic mechanisms in different areas and periods provides us with important examples of the ways in which

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[49] See Docs² p. 232–9 and Palmer 1998/9 (an overview of the scholarship) for the meanings of landholding terminology.

societies at a similar stage of development as the Mycenaean, and employing a similar centralised and redistributive economy with a high degree of craft specialisation, documented state administration. Sometimes 'bilateral' documentation was employed in order to provide quasi-legal evidence of the existence and fulfilment of liabilities owed to the palace (and its subordinate agents), whether this was necessitated by the delegation of administrative responsibility to outside parties, or a particularly commercial ethos adopted in public administration.

With the Near Eastern cases, it is sometimes difficult to determine whether a particular document type is 'bilateral' or 'unilateral', since the emphasis of 'bilateral' documentation on providing proof of the liability's existence or fulfilment to both parties is difficult to trace in reality. Even a seal impression, which would authenticate a document's contents by associating it with a particular individual (the owner of the seal) who could then be consulted in the event of a dispute, does not always result in rendering the document 'bilateral', as with the Ur III cases. The terminology of 'unilateral' and 'bilateral' documentation itself may be problematic. It may be better to think of the issue as a scale of responsibility on which, at one end, documents are kept purely for an institution's own benefit, and at the other, documents are generated as evidence to be used in disputes over the contractual agreements or fulfilments documented within.

However, the terminology should not altogether be abandoned. In this article, I have employed the term "'bilateral' documentation' because it is a useful and insightful way of thinking about bureaucratic records. The issue of for whom documents are generated and kept is important if we wish to understand as completely as possible the Mycenaean administrative system as it worked at various levels.[50] An examination of legal or quasi-legal documents in Near Eastern administrations demonstrates the types of evidentiary documents that could have been employed within the Mycenaean system.

As I have shown, however, there is no evidence that the Mycenaean administration made use of 'bilateral' documentation. Palaima and Van Alfen's theories regarding sealings and ISJs respectively as contractual documents contain certain flaws: while Palaima's discussion of the functions of sealings is elucidating, his conclusion that sealings were contractual performance records intended to prove the fulfilment of liabilities is unconvincing; Van Alfen's discussion of ISJs

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[50] See Palaima 1987 and 2000a for the 'micro-' and 'macro-' levels of the Mycenaean economy.

as administrative documents is misguided, especially considering the problematic nature of his material, and his suggestion that ISJs are contractual records lacks credibility. Most importantly for this discussion, neither of their arguments is a convincing exposition of the existence of 'bilateral' documentation in the Mycenaean archives. Furthermore, there is some evidence that 'bilateral' documentation was not known or employed at least in the case of the priestess' land dispute; if this is correct, then it is not unreasonable to assume that it was also not employed in other areas of the administration.

Finally, we must ask what is the implication of the lack of attested 'bilateral' documentation in the Mycenaean world. It is possible that the central administration did not feel the need for 'bilateral' documentation because it had a high degree of control over the economy and redistributive mechanisms. However, the administrative reach of a Mycenaean palace may have varied: for example, the centre might not document outlying areas in as much detail as those close to the centre,[51] and activities such as shepherding would, by their nature, be outside of the administrative sphere.[52] The Pylian land records referring to Eritha the priestess show that it was possible for disputes to arise over liabilities to the palace, in turn indicating that 'bilateral' documentation could have been usefully employed within the Mycenaean system. The evidence suggesting that it was not indicates, perhaps, a certain inefficiency in the Mycenaean administration as compared with those of the Near East.

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[51] See Killen 1985 p. 260, though he also notes that PY Nn 831 (a taxation record listing individuals in an outlying area) shows that the palace was at least capable of collecting such information.

[52] See Postgate 2001 p. 188.

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