

The Classical Review

VOLUME 59 NO. 2

2009

LINEAR B

DUHOUX (Y.), MORPURGO DAVIES (A.) (edd.) *A Companion to Linear B. Mycenaean Greek Texts and their World. Volume 1.* (Bibliothèque des Cahiers de l'Institut de Linguistique de Louvain 120.) Pp. xii + 448, ills, maps. Louvain-la-Neuve, Paris and Dudley, MA: Éditions Peeters, 2008. Paper, €55. ISBN: 978-90-429-1848-1; 978-2-87723-955-4.

doi:10.1017/S0009840X09000018

As readers of this journal know, we are awash with companions of varying composition and quality. Arguably, many are superfluous; this one is not. Linear B is not an easily accessible field, for a variety of reasons, among which is the lack of up-to-date introductory texts. Most encounter Linear B through the 'bible' of Mycenaean studies first published in 1956, with a second edition in 1973 (M. Ventris, J. Chadwick, *Documents in Mycenaean Greek* [Cambridge]). '*Documents*' will always be a seminal publication, but it is 35 years old. A great deal has changed in the study of Mycenaean texts since then, most of it published in articles aimed at specialists. The companion under review seeks to make Linear B more accessible to students and interested scholars. It is far more complete, authoritative and up-to-date than any other sourcebook on the world of the Mycenaean texts. This volume, then, fills an important void in the scholarship on Linear B. It is actually the first of a pair of volumes; in volume 1, we are provided with chapters on the history of the decipherment, a primer on how to do research on the texts, the chronology of the documents, the historical background (society, economy, technology), the inscribed vases and an anthology of 44 Linear B texts with commentary. Volume 2, scheduled to be published in 2009, will include chapters on writing (by J. Melena), scribes and palaeography (by T. Palaima), Greek and the Linear B script (by R. Viredaz), language (by A. Morpurgo Davies), onomastics (by J.L. García Ramón), Mycenaean geography (by J. Bennet), religion (by S. Hiller), Mycenaean and Homeric language (by C.J. Ruijgh), the world of Homer (by J. Bennet), and guidelines to the interpretation of Linear B texts (by Y. Duhoux). Thus, these two volumes will provide a review of the main strains in scholarship on Linear B.

The first chapter of this volume, by M. Pope, is a succinct review of the decipherment. In a mere 13 pages of text, Pope skilfully sketches the major developments leading to the decipherment, from the discovery of the script by Arthur Evans, to Alice Kober's systematic and pioneering studies of inflection, to Michael Ventris' breakthrough in 1952. It is a story familiar to specialists, but many will be

unaware of the importance of the contributions made by Cowley, Kober, Bennett and others, all of which made the decipherment possible.

Next, R. Palmer introduces the uninitiated to the tools of the trade. This chapter guides the reader through all the information one needs to work directly with published Linear B texts. Palmer explains the classification system of the texts and the signs and the editing conventions used in the publication of texts, and describes the major research tools, including lexica, grammars, handbooks and bibliographic guides. Her figures are equally useful: tables of syllabograms, ideograms, signs for measure and numerals, with their values and abbreviations, are an invaluable reference. Also instructive for beginners will be drawings and transliterations of three tablets from Knossos, with labels detailing the relationship between the text and the transliteration. In some ways this is the most innovative and useful contribution of the entire volume, since Palmer here synthesises a mass of material which has not been set out in full.

The relative and absolute chronology of Linear B is the topic of the third chapter, by J. Driessen. He has contributed the most to this field of late, with his demonstration that the deposit of tablets from the Room of the Chariot Tablets at Knossos dates to an earlier phase of the palace, probably LM IIIA1 (in the first half of the fourteenth century B.C.). This has opened the door for a general reconsideration of the chronology of the Knossos tablets, which prior to Driessen's work had been dominated by the hypothesis that all dated to a single destruction.

These introductory chapters set the stage for four substantial chapters on major aspects of the Mycenaean world: history, society, economy and technology. P. de Fidio's chapter on Mycenaean history summarises the basics of Greek prehistory, from the 'coming of the Greeks' to the formation and collapse of Mycenaean palatial society. She attempts to fit the evidence, such as it is, into a coherent historical framework. In several cases, however, the data cannot support her narrative. For example, she argues that the destructions at the end of EH II (c. 2200 B.C.) are most plausibly associated with the 'coming of the Greeks', but she nowhere acknowledges the careful and systematic study of Jeannette Forsén, who in *The Twilight of the Early Helladics* (Jonsæred, 1992) showed that the archaeological evidence is not consistent with any single invasion or population movement. Elsewhere de Fidio asserts that steps are taken by Mycenaean centres at the end of the Bronze Age to protect themselves from danger, and cites as evidence the construction of a defensive wall across the Isthmus of Corinth. In a recent and thorough review of the evidence, however, Catherine Morgan showed that this view was untenable (*Isthmia VIII: the Late Bronze Age Settlement and Early Iron Age Sanctuary* [Princeton, 1999], pp. 362–5).

The chapter on Mycenaean society, written by C. Shelmerdine, contains short descriptions of the palatial centres and reviews the evidence for the organisation of the Mycenaean state and its relationship to society at large. It usefully synthesises much recent work – such as research on the 'collectors' – and is now the most complete and authoritative overview of Mycenaean society. Economy is the topic of the chapter by J. Killen; this is essentially a revised update of his classic article 'The Linear B Tablets and the Mycenaean Economy', in A. Morpurgo Davies and Y. Duhoux (edd.), *Linear B: a 1984 Survey* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1985), pp. 241–305. Killen has not altered his view that Mycenaean palace economies can be characterised as powerful redistributive systems that constituted the central and dominant economic institution in Mycenaean polities. Indeed, his paper is perhaps even more forceful in defence of this model, which has recently come under attack, largely from

archaeologists. Many will continue, no doubt, to take issue with Killen's influential model; this chapter will be the starting point for all subsequent work, however, since it demands serious engagement, both in theoretical terms and with respect to specific interpretations of the tablets.

Mycenaean technology is the subject of the next chapter, written by A. Bernabé and E. Luján. It consists largely of a catalogue of all the textual evidence for products and production processes recorded in Linear B. Furniture, chariots, ivory, weapons, textiles, leather, vessels and perfumes are discussed in detail. Since Mycenaean technology as such is rarely discussed in the secondary literature, this chapter will be an important reference for many. A particular Mycenaean product, the inscribed stirrup jar, is the topic of the next chapter, by P. van Alfen, who shows that the inscriptions served administrative functions dealing with the production and delivery of the commodities which the jars contained.

The last and longest chapter of this volume, by Y. Duhoux, is an anthology of 44 texts from Knossos, Pylos, Thebes and Mycenae, chosen for the light they shed on the Mycenaean world. Duhoux includes a wealth of information about each: not only a transliteration, translation and drawing of each document, but also a bibliography and detailed commentary. Few such collections have appeared since the publication of *'Documents'*, and the quantity and quality of Duhoux's commentary shows how far Linear B studies have come in the past 30 years. This chapter makes accessible to the non-specialist up-to-date discussions of a wide variety of documents and the issues they raise. Nor is this simply a general review of the state of the field: Duhoux does not hesitate, for instance, to provide new and challenging interpretations of the newly-discovered tablets from Odos Pelopidou in Thebes; indeed, this chapter would be important for this discussion alone.

This companion, then, is a significant contribution to the field. Specialists will consult it often, but its true value is to non-specialists, who now have an up-to-date and authoritative place to begin their study of Linear B. With the publication of the second volume, all major areas of study will be covered. It is to be hoped that the accessibility of these companions will result in greater use of Linear B among students and scholars of the Classical world.

University of Toronto

DIMITRI NAKASSIS
d.nakassis@utoronto.ca

FORMS OF GREEK

COLVIN (S.) *A Historical Greek Reader. Mycenaean to the Koiné*. Pp. xx + 302, ill. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Cased, £79 (Paper, £32). ISBN: 978-0-19-922659-7 (978-0-19-922660-3 pbk).
doi:10.1017/S0009840X0900002X

For many decades, Carl Darling Buck's *Greek Dialects* (2nd ed. 1955) was the most important book available in English for anyone wishing to have an illustrated overview of the historical Greek dialects, and it has remained a firm favourite among teachers and students, despite the fact that it is by now very much out of date in many respects.

C.'s book is not identical to Buck's in its conception but it goes quite some way towards superseding Buck's venerable work and, gratifyingly, avoids some of its weaknesses.