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Agamemnon's Human Resources: An Examination of Mycenae's Palatial Workforce

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This paper integrates textual and architectural evidence in order to explore the organization, administration, and deployment of the labor force at the Palace of Mycenae during the Late Bronze Age, when the Mycenaean palaces were at the height of their power (ca. 1400–1200 BCE). Evidence for the organization of the workforce and the quantities of labor needed by the central authority at Mycenae during this time is derived from Linear B texts and from estimations of labor expenditures required for the construction of palatial monuments. By outlining this data, we can begin to understand changes in the way the palatial workforce was organized, including the palace's role in organizing labor; variations in the size of the workforce; subsequent changes in the palace's subsistence needs; and evolving social and economic relationships that resulted from the production process, particularly from resource acquisition related to the construction of monumental architecture. It is suggested here that changes in labor organization and palatial methods of administering the workforce reflect changes to the palace's relationship with its immediate and distant hinterland with regards to the exploitation of natural resources. The construction of a formal road network that made the hinterland more accessible, for example, may have been related to demands for agricultural land and building materials.

The palace was dependent on cultivation for subsistence as well as for rations distributed to laborers in the form of consumable goods. Many of the Linear B texts found at Mycenae, both in areas within the cyclopean fortification wall and in extramural structures outside the wall, record the range of cultivated goods paid by the palace to both individuals and groups of workers (Bennett 1958, Chadwick et al. 1963, Tournavitou 1995). An examination of the building processes and labor needs required to complete substantial construction projects, such as the cyclopean wall or the network of roads, also illustrates changes in the palace's labor

requirements (Erasmus 1965, Mee and Cavanagh 1999). Changes in the estimated labor expended by the palace, when viewed chronologically, indicate not only an increase in labor expenditure overtime, but a period contraction towards the end of the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1250-1200 BCE), when palatial labor requirements appear to diminish. This paper connects these fluctuations to other changes perceptible in the palatial administration at Mycenae (Tournavitou 1995, Shelmerdine 1997).

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