



# Women in Mycenaean Greece: The Linear B Tablets from Pylos and Knossos

By Barbara A. Olsen

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*Women in Mycenaean Greece* is the first book-length study of women in the Linear B tablets from Mycenaean Greece and the only to collect and compile all the references to women in the documents of the two best attested sites of Late Bronze Age Greece - Pylos on the Greek mainland and Knossos on the island of Crete. The book offers a systematic analysis of women's tasks, holdings, and social and economic status in the Linear B tablets dating from the 14th and 13th centuries BCE, identifying how Mycenaean women functioned in the economic institutions where they were best attested - production, property control, land tenure, and cult. Analysing all references to women in the Mycenaean documents, the book focuses on the ways in which the economic institutions of these Bronze Age palace states were gendered and effectively extends the framework for the study of women in Greek antiquity back more than 400 years.

Throughout, the book seeks to establish whether gender practices were uniform in the Mycenaean states or differed from site to site and to gauge the relationship of the roles and status of Mycenaean women to their Archaic and Classical counterparts to test if the often-proposed theories of a more egalitarian Bronze Age accurately reflect the textual evidence. The Linear B tablets offer a unique, if under-utilized, point of entry into women's history in ancient Greece, documenting nearly 2000 women performing over fifty task assignments. From their decipherment in 1952 one major gap in the scholarly record remained: a full accounting of the women who inhabited the palace states and their tasks, ranks, and economic contributions. *Women in Mycenaean Greece* fills that gap recovering how class, rank, and other social markers created status hierarchies among women, how women as a group functioned relative to men, and where different localities conformed or diverged in their gender practices.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"...this book is a valuable examination of an important and understudied issue. Although rich in technical detail, its topic and argument will doubtless appeal to a broad audience of Aegean prehistorians and ancient historians. The project is an important one, and Olsen does a good job pulling together all of the textual evidence, demonstrating how differently Pylian and Knossian women appear in the Linear B tablets, and relating these differences to social practices. We need more studies like these: studies that use the rich Mycenaean textual evidence to contribute to broader debates in Greek history and prehistory."

*-Dimitri Nakassis, University of Toronto in Bryn Mawr Classical Review*

"This book addresses a great need in the study of women in antiquity. Olsen brings together textual analyses from 60 years of scholarship on women in Linear B, and sets them into the broader socio-economic context of Mycenaean Greece and Crete."

*- Ruth Palmer, Ohio University, in The Classical Review*

#### About the Author

**Barbara A. Olsen** is Associate Professor of Greek & Roman Studies, and Director of Women's Studies at Vassar College, New York, USA.

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