

DAMOS: Database of Mycenaean at Oslo

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In this paper I will present some results of my PhD research, namely the creation of an annotated electronic corpus of all the published Mycenaean texts, the earliest written evidence of the Greek language (ca. 1450-1100 B.C.), comprised of inscriptions in the Linear B syllabic script.

The content and the the script

Linear B texts are generally administrative documents, written mostly on clay tablets. They have been found within the rests of the Mycenaean palaces both on Crete and mainland Greece. They amount to something less than 6000 documents, although many of them are brief or fragmentary texts.

Linear B is a syllabic script not related to the later Greek alphabets. It belongs to a family of writing systems used in the Aegean area in the II and I millennium B.C., of which only Linear B and the Cypriot syllabary of the I millennium have been satisfactorily deciphered. It is important to remark that although Linear B as a writing system seems to have worked well as a tool for recording administrative information, it is not in fact a very efficient instrument for rendering the phonetic system of Greek, presenting many inaccuracies and deficiencies in this regard.

This fact, together with the nature of the texts, sometimes makes our interpretation of the texts and of their language quite uncertain. This, in turn, shows well how important the opportunity is, which an annotated electronic corpus offers, of systematically crossing all the information available at the different levels of analysis and within the whole of the extant Mycenaean texts.

The language

The language of the documents, being the oldest attestation of an Indo-European language after Hittite and the only attestation of a Greek dialect in the II millennium B.C., presents several archaic and interesting linguistic features and poses some questions crucial for the history of the Greek language (and for the field of comparative Indo-European linguistics in general), which, especially because of the mentioned limitations of the content of the documents and the shortcomings of the writing system, are still in need of an appropriate, if not definitive, answer. To mention only one of such questions, which has been central in my work with the database: how many cases can we acknowledge for Mycenaean, and how does its case system work?

The database

DAMOS collects for the first time in a searchable, annotated electronic corpus all the published Mycenaean texts.

For scholarly use the Linear B texts are usually published transliterated into Latin letters according to the conventions established by CIPM (*Comité International Permanent des Études Mycéniennes*, affiliated with UNESCO): text files reproducing such current paper editions have been imported into an Sql database and the epigraphical data which are usually conveyed by the transliteration conventions have also been imported along with the texts, so that important epigraphical information relative to the contexts of syllable/syllabogram, word, line and text (e.g. the chronology of a given text and its attribution to a particular scribe) is available for searches.

The texts are then being manually annotated for morphology and syntax (with particular attention to case and case syntax) and provided a translation and additional lexical information (e.g. the

Indo-European root, if reconstructible) for each word (in addition, we plan to link the word entries in the database to the word entry in the online Dictionary of Mycenaean Greek, which is under development as a joint project of various Spanish universities).

One feature of DAMOS that particularly deserves to be mentioned is that its structure allows for multiple simultaneous analyses of a given linguistic unity: for example different hypotheses for the meaning or the grammatical value of a word can be entered and ranged according to their grade of probability. This feature is essential for work with a corpus like the Mycenaean one, where the deficiencies of the script and the fragmentary state of many texts make many interpretations uncertain and dependent on context and comparison with other texts of the corpus.

Another important feature of DAMOS is that it aims at looking at Mycenaean in its entirety, and, consequently, at being as complete as possible: working with as scanty data as Linear B texts provide us with, it is important to try to gather all the existing material and available information about it. To that effect the files reproducing the current editions, before being imported in the database, have been extensively revised and updated with the many new joins of fragmentary tablet, new readings and new findings (both from old and new sites) which are otherwise scattered in the literature. Especially the current edition of the documents (ca. 1000 tablets) from Pylos is quite outdated (Bennett & Olivier 1973) and needed to be updated, and important data coming from later studies, as Thomas Palaima's study on scribal attribution (Palaima 1988), had to be added; but also the edition (Chadwick et al. 1986-1998) of the biggest collection of texts, those coming from Knossos (ca. 4150 tablets) was in need of some revision in light of more recent publications, like studies on the chronology of the texts (Driessen 2000; 2008). In this way DAMOS gives us the important possibility to work on a complete and updated data set for Mycenaean.

DAMOS has originally been built in order to provide an efficient and innovative tool for a PhD thesis on the case system of Mycenaean, but its content should make it of primary interest for anyone working with this language. The aim is thus to eventually make it freely (barring any copyright issues) accessible online.

References

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