Scribes as Editors: Tracking Changes in the Linear B Documents

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A wide variety of edits can be identified in the Linear B administrative documents from Mycenaean Greece. The writers of these documents (the Mycenaean scribes) can be seen to have made changes to their texts by erasing, rewriting, or adding signs, words, or whole entries. The edits include not only correcting errors and updating information (as might be expected for these administrative documents) but also a wide variety of changes that affect the texts’ presentation rather than their content, such as alterations to their layout, textual structure, and orthography, and even the forms of individual signs. By analyzing these edits and the motivations behind them, this article sheds light on the priorities of the Mycenaean scribes in creating and using their administrative documents and the choices they made in the process of doing so. The results demonstrate that despite these records’ short-term nature (tablets were kept for no longer than a year) they were not merely rough or preliminary texts over which relatively little care was taken but were active documents designed for ongoing use and consultation within the Mycenaean palatial administrations’ yearly administrative cycles.1

INTRODUCTION

This article investigates the ways in which the writers of the Linear B tablets made changes to their documents, what these edits reveal about the scribes’ choices and priorities in creating and using these administrative records, and the impact these findings have on our understanding of the role played by the tablets in the Mycenaean administrative systems.2 These originally

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2 The Linear B tablets from the sites discussed here are located in the following museums: Knossos: Archaeological Museum of Heraklion and Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (excavated between 1900 and 1905); Mycenae: National Archaeological Museum, Athens, and Archaeological Museum of Nauplion (excavated in 1954 and 1958); Pylos: National Archaeological Museum, Athens (excavated between 1939 and 1963); Thebes: Archaeological Museum of Thebes (excavated in 1982 and 1993–1995); Tiryns: Archaeological Museum of Nauplion (excavated in 1978). For full details, see the relevant corpora (infra n. 4).