# A Mycenaean reflex in Homer: phorēnai

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A second look at a possible Mycenaean reflex in Homer: 
phorēnai

Gregory Nagy, 2015.03.01

Introduction


Although, as I just said, Part I replicates the content of the original printed article, there are two big changes in formatting: (1) the paragraphs are numbered and (2) the footnotes have been reorganized. The original numbering of the footnotes has changed, since most of the bibliographical references have now been integrated into the prose of my argumentation. Also, wherever the remaining footnotes in this online version contain any specific arguments left over from the printed version, I indicate the relevant page- and footnote-numbers.

Part I

§1. This inquiry is about finding survivals of Mycenaean Greek in Homeric diction. I focus on the Homeric infinitive phorēnai (φορῆναι), which I argue belongs to a dialectal group commonly known as Arcado-Cypriote. The form itself is a linguistic innovation, but the innovation is old, very old. I can say this if I succeed in showing that this form φορῆναι is already very old in terms of Homeric diction. And my case would be even stronger if I also succeeded in showing that φορῆναι is attested already in Mycenaean Greek. The evidence of the Linear B texts written in Mycenaean Greek shows a form spelled po-re-na, and this form, in terms of my argument, actually corresponds to the Homeric infinitive phorēnai (φορῆναι).
§2. This infinitive *phorēnai* (φορήναι) is attested four times in Homeric poetry (*Iliad* II 107, VII 149, X 270, *Odyssey* xvii 224). The internal evidence of the formulaic system underlying Homeric diction shows that the form is old, deeply embedded in that system, and not a newer artificial creation of the *Dichtersprache*.

§3. In saying what I just said, I am reviving arguments I first presented over forty years ago (Nagy 1972). Arguing against the claim of Ernst Risch (1958:92) that φορήναι is an artificial creation paired with φορήμεναι (as in XV 310), on the model of the athematic type μιγήναι (IX 133, etc.) as paired with μιγήμεναι (VI 161, etc.), I pointed out (Nagy 1972:64-65) that no other Homeric verbs with present forms ending in -έω have -ήναι for infinitive. Instead, we see -ήμεναι, as in καλήμεναι (X 125), πενθήμεναι (xviii 174), ποθήμεναι (xi 110), φιλήμεναι (XXII 265). Also, in the case of athematic aorist pairs like δαμήμεναι vs. δαμῆναι, δαήμεναι vs. δαῆναι, μιγήμεναι vs. μιγήναι, φανήμεναι vs. φανήναι, etc., “the type in -ήναι regularly occurs in the archaic slot of line-final position, or in the secondary conversion-slot immediately preceding the trochaic caesura; the type in -ήμεναι, on the other hand, regularly occurs immediately preceding the bucolic diaeresis” (Nagy 1972:64); further, “the latter slot tends to suit a relatively greater proportion of innovated forms” (again, Nagy 1972:64).

§4. As for the dialect features of *phorēnai* (φορήναι), they are clearly Arcado-Cypriote from the standpoint of reconstructing backward in time from the first to the second millennium BCE. We may compare such forms as Arcadian ἀπειθῆναι and Cypriote *ku-me-re-na-i* = κυμερῆναι (Nagy 1972:63, with reference to Thumb and Scherer 1959:133, 169). The two basic features are:

(1) athematic reshaping of contract-verb in -έω, thus *φόρημι* instead of φορέω

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1 Here and hereafter, I indicate “books” of the *Iliad/Odyssey* with upper-/lower-case roman numerals.
(2) infinitive ending in -ναι, thus φορῆναι.

§5. Since the displacement of the type φορέω by the type *φόρημι is a linguistic innovation, the attestation of the form φορῆναι in Homeric poetry can be seen as a most precious criterion for establishing the dialectal affinities of the earliest recoverable dialectal layer of Homeric diction as reconstructed backward in time, from the first to the second millennium BCE. I can say this because we have already seen that φορῆναι, as a linguistic innovation that is exclusive to Arcado-Cypriote, must have become part of Homeric diction at a very early stage in the evolution of that diction. In other words, Homeric φορῆναι has to be explained as belonging to the dialect family of Arcado-Cypriote. And, if I can show that Linear B po-re-na- can really be interpreted as phorēnai (φορῆναι), then we have evidence that the standard dialect of Mycenaean Greek was most closely akin to Arcado-Cypriote.

§6. In the part of their jointly-written book that goes back to the first edition, Michael Ventris and John Chadwick (1956:285) had entertained the possibility that phorēnai (φορῆναι) is attested in the component po-re-na- of the Linear B expression do-ra-qe pe-re po-re-na-qe a-ke in Pylos tablet Tn 316, to be interpreted as dōra-k’ē pherei phorēnai-k’ē agei. We may “translate” thus into classical Greek: δῶρα τε φέρει φορήναι τε ἄγει. This possibility was rejected by Leonard Palmer (1963:53, 63, 267, especially p. 63), who argued that po-re-na- is a noun and that a-ke is not to be interpreted as ἄγει.

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2 My use of the word “layer” here in the printed version of this article (p. 172) was certainly not meant to imply that I rule out the possible coexistence of earlier and later dialectal phases in the evolution of the Dichtersprache. On this point, I can now refer to Nagy 2011.

3 In the printed version of this article, Nagy 1994-1995:172n6, I noted that there is no need to assume that such an innovation could take place only after the contraction of vowels, e.g. *φορη as a new stem derived from *φορεε. See Ruijgh 1995:56n200.

4 In the printed version of this article, Nagy 1994-1995:172, I had said that Ventris and Chadwick “suggested” this possibility. My wording there needs to be corrected, since Ventris and Chadwick had merely entertained the possibility. Hence my rewording in this online version.
§7. Palmer’s judgment about po-re-na- (but not about a-ke) has in general prevailed. In the “Additional Commentary” of the second edition of the Ventris-Chadwick book (1973:461), Chadwick interprets po-re-na- as an accusative plural designating “the ten persons who are led to the rite.”

§8. My inquiry returns, with modifications, to the possible reading, first mentioned by Ventris and Chadwick, of po-re-na- as phorēnai. A relevant piece of evidence, I suggest, is the syntax of the following Homeric passage:

§9. The hero Diomedes has just won first prize in a chariot race that is featured as the first athletic contest of the Funeral Games honoring the dead Patroklos. Earlier, at Iliad XXIII 263-265, Achilles had determined that the first prize in this contest would be bipartite: to be given away will be a slave woman (263) and a tripod (264). In the text of the consequent narrative as I have just quoted it, the chariot driven by Diomedes is the first to reach the finish line, and we
see the victorious hero jumping down from the platform of the chariot (509) and leaving the
task of unharnessing the horse team to his companion Sthenelos (513), a hero who elsewhere
functions as the chariot driver of Diomedes whenever the two of them together engage in
chariot fighting, as in *Iliad* V. Here in *Iliad* XXIII, Sthenelos is left with the task of taking hold of
the first prize (511), which is bipartite: there is a slave woman to be taken away, *agein* (512),
and there is a tripod to be carried away, *pherein* (513).⁵

§10. The collocation of *dōke* (δόκε) ‘gave’ plus *agein* (ἀγεῖν) ‘to take away’ and *pherein*
(φέρειν) ‘to carry away’ in this Homeric passage is comparable with another collocation that
we find in four other Homeric passages. This other collocation involves (1) the same word for
‘give’ (*δῶκε* / δῶκε / δοίης / δῶκ’) and (2) the word *phorēnai* (φορήναι), already cited, which is
a derivative of *pherein* ‘carry’ and which likewise means ‘to carry’ - or ‘to wear’. In §2 above, I
have already listed the four Homeric attestations of the form *phorēnai*, but now I will also list
the direct objects indicating what is being ‘carried’ - or ‘worn’: a scepter to carry (*Iliad* II 107), a
set of armor to wear (VII 149), a helmet to wear (X 270), and fodder for a herdsman to carry for
feeding a herd of goats (*Odyssey* xvii 224).

§11. Now that I have these Homeric comparanda in place, I am ready to consider the text
written in Mycenaean Greek:

**The text of PY Tn 316 transcribed**
recto:⁶

| r₁ po-ro-wi-to-jo | r₂,₃ pu-ro | r₂ i-je-to-qe pa-ki-ja-si do-ra-qe pe-re po-re-na-qe | r₃ a-ke

verso:⁷

| v₁-2,₃ pu-ro | v₁ i-je-to-qe po-si-da-i-jo a-ke-qa wa-tu | v₂ do-ra-qe pe-re po-re-na-qe a-ke | v₃
GOLD CUP [type *215] 1 WOMAN 2 qo-wi-ja | [--] ko-ma-we-te-ja | v₄-5,6,7 pu-ro | v₄ i-je-to-qe pe-re-*82 jo i-pe-me-de-ja-qa di-u-ja-jo-qa | v₄ do-ra-qe pe-re-po-re-na-qe a<-ke>
pe-re-*82 GOLD BOWL [type *213] 1 WOMAN 1 | v₅ i-pe-me-de-ja GOLD BOWL [type *213] 1 WOMAN 1 | v₆-7 e-ma-a₂ a-re-ja GOLD CUP [type *216] 1 MAN 1 | v₇-9,10-11 pu-ro | v₸ i-je-to-qe di-u-jo do-ra-qe pe-re po-re-na-qe a-ke
| v₹ di-we GOLD BOWL [type *213] 1 MAN 1 e-ra GOLD BOWL [type *213] 1 WOMAN 1 | v₁₀ di-ri-mi-jo di-wo i-je-we GOLD BOWL [type *213] 1 |

Pyllos tablet Tn 316, r(ecto) lines 1-5 and v(erso) lines 1-10

A working translation of the transcribed text

recto:

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⁶ The heading pu-ro is written in larger characters for recto lines 2+3 and 5.
⁷ The heading pu-ro is written in larger characters for verso lines 1+2+3 and 4+5+6+7 and 8+9+10+.

verso:


Pylos tablet Tn 316, r(ecto) lines 1-5 and v(erso) lines 1-10
§12. Focusing on the expression *do-ra-qe pe-re po-re-na-qe a-ke*, at lines r2–r3 of the recto and at lines v2, v5, and v8 of the verso, I highlight the following formal correspondences with the Homeric passage that I already quoted:

- The form *do-ra*, to be read as the noun *dōra* in the accusative plural, corresponds to Homeric *dōra* (Δῶρα).

- The form *pe-re*, to be read as the verb *pherei* in the third-person singular, corresponds to Homeric *pherei* (φέρει).

- The form *a-ke*, to be read as the verb *agei* in the third-person singular, corresponds to Homeric *agei* (ἄγει).

- The form *po-re-na-*, if it could be read as the infinitive *phorēnai*, would correspond to Homeric *phorēnai* (φορῆναι).

§13. Of these four correspondences, the first three are straightforward. Only the fourth one involves uncertainties and calls for debate.

**Part II**

§14. That said, I focus here on my reading of *do-ra-qe pe-re po-re-na-qe a-ke* at lines 2–3 of one side and at reverse lines 2, 5, and 8 of the other side of the tablet Τn 316. I read *dōra-kʷe pherei phorēnai-kʷe agei*, the equivalent of which in classical Greek would be δῶρα τε φέρει φορῆναι τε ἄγει. I translate ‘carries [pherei] gifts [dōra] and takes-along [agei] for the carrying [phorēnai] (of the gifts) …’. In terms of this reading, the subject of the verbs *pherei* ‘carries’ and *agei* ‘takes-along’ here is impersonal, in line the prescriptiveness of the ritual instructions.
Similarly, I read *i-je-to* as a prescriptive impersonal statement, translating it as ‘makes sacrifice’.

§15. Although the verbs *pherei* (pe-*re*) ‘carries’ and *agei* (a-*ke*) ‘takes along’ and *hietoi* (*i-je-to*) ‘makes sacrifice’ are all impersonal, deprived of a personal subject, they all nevertheless share what I call an *impersonal subject*. The verb *i-je-to* at lines r2 and v1 and v4 and v8 is correlated with the place-name *pu-ro* that we read at lines r2+3 and v1+2+3 and v4+5+6+7 and v8+9+10+11. This is the name for the city of Pylos, *pu-ro*, which would be *Pulos* in the nominative case. As García-Ramón observes, a nominative *Pulos* at lines r2+3 and v1+2+3 and v4+5+6+7 and v8+9+10+11 could in theory function as the subject of the verb *i-je-to* at lines r2 and v1 and v4 and v8. And here is where I apply the idea of an *impersonal subject*.

§16. In support of this idea, I note that the formatting of the word *pu-ro* as a headline, as it were, at lines r2+3 and v1+2+3 and v4+5+6+7 and v8+9+10+11, written in larger characters than the rest of the text, could indicate that it functions as the subject not only for *i-je-to* but also for *do-ra-qe pe-re po-re-na-qe a-ke* at lines r2+3 and v2 and v5 and v8. As we will see in a moment, an essential piece of evidence in favor of this syntactical interpretation is the expression *a-ke-qe wa-tu* at line v1.

§17. The ritual procedure of taking gifts to divinities is well known from the evidence of fifth-century Greek: an ideal example is ἄγειν … δῶρα ἐς τὰ ἱρά ‘to take *agein* gifts *dōra* to the sacred precincts *hiera*’ in Herodotus 1.53.1. In the text of the Pylos tablet, however, we see that the ritual of *agein* or ‘taking’ the offerings to a sacred precinct is subdivided into ‘carrying’

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8 I am persuaded by the analysis of García-Ramón 1996:262, who connects *hietoi* (*i-je-to*) with the adjective *hierós* ‘sacred’. In Nagy 1994-1995:175, I had entertained the possibility that *i-je-to* may be interpreted as impersonal (prescriptive) *hietoi* ‘a procession takes place’. In terms of this reading, *hietoi* would correspond to classical Greek ἰημι ‘send’, and the meaning would be comparable to that of πέμπω ‘send’ in the special sense of ‘arrange a procession’.

objects, as expressed by way of *pherein*, and ‘taking’ persons, as expressed by *agein*. We see a comparable subdivision in the Homeric passage that I cited, *Iliad* XXIII 512-513, where the prize that is given as a gift consists of a tripod for the recipient ‘to carry away’, *pherein* (513), plus a slave woman for the recipient ‘to take away’, *agein* (512).

§18. The fact that the recipients of the gifts are divinities in the text of the Pylos tablet helps us understand the status of the persons who are being taken to these divinities. In this text, the gift of a votive object or objects is optionally supplemented by the gift of a votive person or persons. And this person or these persons must be votive gifts just as the corresponding objects are votive gifts. So, in terms of my interpretation, these persons are slaves who can be given away as consecrated property, just as the objects are being given away as consecrated property. In the case of the persons who are being given as consecrated gifts, the consecration itself is indicated by the fact that the gender of the persons given consistently matches the gender of the divine recipients.

§19. Still to be explained is the expression *a-ke-qe wa-tu* at line v1 of Pylos tablet Tn 316, which I have translated ‘and the city [*wastu*] takes-along [*agei*] (the gifts)’. This way of referring to the idea of offering gifts would be the least specific way of expressing such an idea. In other words, *agei* ‘takes-along’ would be an unmarked way of referring to the act of offering gifts; by contrast, *pherei* ‘carries’ would be the marked way. In the prescriptive formula *a-ke-qe wa-tu*, I argue, *wastu* ‘city’ functions as a common noun in apposition to the proper noun *Pulos* ‘Pylos’. In terms of my argument, *wastu* ‘the city’ is an impersonal subject of *agei* ‘takes along (the gifts)’, just as *Pulos* is the subject of *hieto* ‘makes sacrifice’. And the use of the noun *wastu* (*wa-tu*) ‘city’ as the impersonal subject of the verb *agei* ‘takes along’ here at line v1 is parallel to the

10 I use here the terms *marked* and *unmarked* along the lines formulated by Jakobson (especially 1957); details in Nagy 1990 Introduction §§12-16.
juridical use of *dāmos (da-mo) ‘district’ as the impersonal subject of the verb *phāsi ‘says’ at line 5 of the Pylos tablet Ep 704.

§20. Although I have replicated in Part I most of my argumentation in the original printed version of my work in Nagy 1994-1995, I have left out, until now, what I said in footnote 10 on the printed page 173 there. In that footnote, I attempted to counter some possible objections to my argumentation about po-re-na-. Here I repeat my wording:

We need to reckon, however, with the form po-re-si in the Theban tablet Of 26. For the text, see Spyropoulos and Chadwick (1975:99). This form may be unrelated to po-re-na-. If it were related, however, I would raise the possibility, albeit remote, that it stands for *phōrensi, third person plural of *phórēmi. Such an interpretation of po-re-si in the Theban tablet Of 26 as *phōrensi ‘they carry’ might help explain the collocation with do-de, occurring at lines 2 and 3, which Chadwick (1975:104; see also his p. 88) interprets as ‘to the house of’. There remain major obstacles, though. For one thing, the word po-re-si occurs immediately before the entry ku WOOL 1, and we may expect a dative. Chadwick (1975:105) interprets po-re-si as a dative plural meaning ‘victims’. Still, I would point out that the expression do-de, which is not a dative either, precedes ku WOOL at both lines 2 and 3. As for the attestation of Linear B po-re-no-ze-te-ri-ja (Pylos Un 443), I suggest that the element po-re-no- may also be unrelated to po-re-na-.

§21. The wording that I have just quoted here in §20 leaves room for further disagreement. In fact, this wording anticipates some important points made by Thomas G. Palaima in an article printed in Minos 1996-1997. In that article, Palaima disagrees both with my interpretation of po-re-na- and with that of Andreas Willi, who likewise reads po-re-na- as
phorēnai in an article published back-to-back with my article (Willi 1994-1995). Before publishing my article, I had already consulted Tom Palaima about po-re-na-, and so I knew about our mutual disagreement. Actually, in the paragraph I have just quoted, I was attempting to address some of his counterarguments as I had understood them. But now that I have read the printed version of these counterarguments, I see that I need to rethink further my own argumentation. And there is a serious need for me to do so, since, as we can see from remarks offered in passing by some linguists (such as Haug 2002:45n11), the counterarguments of Palaima have supposedly invalidated the arguments presented by myself and by Willi.

§22. While I have the greatest respect and admiration for the analysis done by Palaima 1996-1997 (also 1999) on Tn 316, I think that the case is not yet closed concerning the interpretation of do-ra-qe pe-re po-re-na-qe a-ke, and that is why I continue the debate here.

§23. For now, however, I offer only one of my many reasons for believing that the debate does need to be continued. I concentrate here on my skepticism concerning the idea, which goes all the way back to Chadwick, that po-re-na is the accusative plural of a third-declension noun that would look like *phorēn in the nominative singular, supposedly meaning something like ‘sacrificial victim’. The idea of such a noun *phorēn, which is considered by Palaima (1996-1997; also 1999:454-455), would require us to accept as a reality a form that has no viable morphological parallel throughout the history of the Greek language in all its attested phases.

§24. With regard to the Theban tablet Of 26, where we see the form po-re-si juxtaposed with the ideogram for WOOL, Palaima reads this form as a dative plural indicating that the hypothetical *phorēnes are “recipients” of wool. He cites in this connection the compound

formant *po-re-no-zo-ri-ja* WOOL 3 at Un 443.2, suggesting that -zo-ri-ja may be interpreted as *zōstēria*, having to do with ritualized girding. Then he cites *po-re-no-tu-te*-ri-ja at Un 1413, suggesting that the restored -tu-te-ri-ja may be interpreted as *thutēria*, which could mean ‘sacrificial victims’, as in Euripides (*Iphigeneia in Tauris* 243: θυτήριον). But the problem is, the morphology of *po-re-no-* remains to be justified.


**Bibliography**


