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AN INSCRIBED SHERD FROM MYCENAE

Perhaps one of the most remarkable results of the excavations conducted at Mycenae in the summer of 1962 was the discovery of a series of corridors running along the north Cyclopean Wall. Through these corridors access was obtained to a number of rooms constructed within the thickness of the Cyclopean Wall, recalling the famous galleries of Tiryns. Already three rooms have been cleared. However, it seems that from Corridors B and C access was also obtained to a number of rooms built against the slope of the hillside. One of those rooms (Room TC), partially excavated in 1962, yielded a great quantity of shattered pottery. Among the sherds found is the fragment illustrated in Figure 1. It belongs to the well-known type of a two-handled deep bowl, or to a one-handled deep cup, and dates from the second half of the Late Helladic III B period. To that period belongs the bulk of the pottery found in Room TC.

Clearly to be seen on the fragment is a painted short inscription in Linear B Script. The space preserved on either side will prove that the inscription is complete. It is composed of three signs which find their counterparts in the signs from the Pylian and Knossian tablets. Thus, sign 1 from the left can be equated with sign No. 39 of the Mycenaean Syllabary as published by the members of the Third International Colloquium for Mycenaean Studies¹. The second sign can be compared to sign No. 60, and the third sign can be equated with sign No. 67. There are slight differences between the painted signs on our fragment and the corresponding incised signs of the tablets, but these perhaps should be attributed to the different means employed for the writing, paint instead of incision. There can be no doubt that the signs on the sherd should be equated with signs 39, 60, and 67. It seems safe therefore to attribute to the painted signs the syllabic values prescribed for their counterparts on the tablets, and to transcribe our inscription as: *pi-ra-ki*. It could, of course, be read *phi-ra-ki*, or *pi-la-ki*, or *phi-la-ki*, etc. I prefer the reading *phi-la-ki*.

¹ Nestor, 1 January 1962, pp. 165—168

The ending "i" may indicate that on our fragment we have the name of a woman. Ventris and Chadwick have collected a group of ten names of women ending in "i" and they suggested that the group formed the exception to the general use of the ending "a" for names of women. Ours then could be the eleventh name with the ending "i" which presumably would correspond to the later Greek form in "is"². We may read then the name Phylakis on our fragment.

Unfortunately, this reading does not seem to recall a name known from the heroic period of Greece and its legends, a name associated with the Perseid dynasty or that of the Atreidae. It could not be linked to the name of Pero (of the Θαῦμα βροτοῖσι), or to that of Phylo, the hand-maiden of Helen, mentioned in the Homeric poems³. But its root is identical to that of a woman's name known from a Knossian tablet (KN Ap 639): *pi-ra-ka* = Philagra⁴, meaning fond of the country. Could we perhaps derive our Philakis from the verb φιλακίζομαι which, according to Liddell and Scott, is "an obscure, prob. corrupt, word; Struve conjectures φιλ'ἀκίζομαι" and which is equated with χαριεντίζομαι? The obscurity of the word may be due to the fact that it was in use in the prehistoric era, and gradually its frequency was diminished. Could then Philakis be roughly interpreted as χαρίεσσα, "the elegant, the beautiful"? In which case, one may wonder whether the name is that of the owner of the cup or stands for "a beautiful woman" even "a courtesan". This speculation will conjure up memories of the "love names" on vases of the historic period. However, it may be safer to conclude that Phylakis is the name of the woman to whom the cup belonged.

The newly found fragment from Mycenae is the second example of a sherd bearing a painted inscription in Linear B-Script, which belongs to a bowl in shape different than that of the stirrup amphora. Years ago Sir Arthur Evans found the first example "within the high well of the Hall of Colonnades" at Knossos⁵. It, too, has an inscription of three sign (Nos. 54, 89, 08) that seems to be complete.

² M. Ventris and J. Chadwick, Documents in Mycenaean Greek, p. 101

³ Odyssey, 11, 287, 288 and 4, 125 and 133

⁴ Ventris-Chadwick, op.cit. p. 102

⁵ Sir Arthur Evans, Palace of Minos IV, pp. 738—739, fig. 722. The Mycenaean origin of the sherd has been recently rejected by Jacques Raison, BCH, LXXXV (1961—II) pp. 408—417. Its inscription, Professor E. Bennett informs me, could also be read: 57, 89, 08. For the shape of the pot to which our fragment belonged cf. A.J.B. Wace, Mycenae, fig. 76a, b, d, and A. Furtwaengler-G. Loeschke, Mykenische Vasen, pl. XXVIII, 246

Since the value of the middle sign 89 is not determined, the meaning of that inscription remains uncertain. Evans, however, suggested that the sherd belongs to a deep bowl, placed it in LM III times, and accepted it as an importation from the Mycenaean world. In our example we now have a definite specimen from Mycenae itself, whose date, the second half of LH III B, cannot be questioned seriously. Furthermore, our specimen seems to indicate that the script was used for purposes other than to keep the records of a bureaucratic state.