

JOHN CHADWICK

THE LINEAR B IDEOGRAM FOR 'WOMAN' (No. 102)

In a recent article E. Grumach¹ has suggested that the various forms of the Linear B ideogram No. 102 (MULIER) in use at Knossos has two forms each of which conveys a different meaning. It is proposed to review the evidence to see whether this suggestion can be verified.

The sign consists basically of a circle to represent the head, usually incomplete at the right and often quite rudimentary, as in the case of No. 101 VIR. Below this two short oblique strokes represent the arms and shoulders. The lower part is made up of two longer lines, nearer the vertical in position, sometimes almost parallel, often diverging towards the foot. Almost all the examples sufficiently well preserved at Knossos, and as far as I know elsewhere, show these features. The exception is KN Ap 694, where the sign, repeated three times, has a horizontal bar replacing the two „arms”.

Optionally other details may be added. Ai 632 shows a horizontal bar below the head and surmounting the arms.² A number of tablets have a short horizontal bar joining the legs at the foot, to represent the hem of a long skirt (e. g. Ai 632, Ai 754, Ak 781, Ak 824; in Ap 769, five examples, this bar is placed below the legs and extends beyond them). In Ai 754 and Ai 825 there is a horizontal line below the arms making a triangle with them; a similar form appears on PY Ae 634. In a number of cases two dots are added below the arms to represent the breasts; it is these, and these alone, which Grumach believes to constitute a distinguishing element. They are visible in Ak 612, Ak 613, Ak 614, Ak 616 (first example only), Ak 617 (two examples), Ak 621, Ak 628, Ak 631, Ak 824³; at Pylos apparently only to be found on Ae 629.

¹ "The question of ligatured signs in the Cretan linear Scripts" (Studies in the Structure of some Ancient Scripts II) = Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, 45 (1962), pp. 47—48

² On Ap 8162 it is hard to distinguish which strokes are due to accidental damage; the lower of the two ideograms appears to be normal.

³ In Ak 613 drawing and photograph in Scripta Minoa II show the dots clearly; they are less clear in a recent photograph. Ak 631 rests on the authority of the drawing in Scripta Minoa II only; the tablet is now missing. In Ak 628 the tablet is broken at the critical point, but one dot is clearly visible on the left.

The only reason for supposing a distinction between the two forms of the ideogram is that in Ak 616 the sign occurs twice, first with dots, then without them. There are three other Ak tablets where the sign appears twice: 610 and 611 (no dots in either instance), and 617 (with dots in both instances). Since the identical sign occurs twice on the same tablet in these three cases, it follows that the difference between the women here recorded must have been expressed by the words or abbreviations preceding the ideogram. These adjuncts or abbreviations are: Ak 610 *de*; Ak 611 *ḏe-di-ku-ja*; Ak 617 *85. In Ak 616 too, the second ideogram is qualified by an annotation⁴, and therefore there is no need to postulate a difference in the meaning of the ideogram. It is in my opinion more likely that on repeating the ideogram the scribe failed to add this minor feature by an oversight, or merely to save time.

It must also be observed that the alleged variants occur in exactly parallel contexts; this will be clear from a comparison of Ak 610 and Ak 611, both without dots, with Ak 612 and Ak 614, both with dots. The tablets are similar in format and wording; in each case the sign for "woman" stands in the top line, is preceded by the entries DA and TA with numerals, and is itself followed by a numeral. Moreover it is probable that these four tablets were all written by the same scribe.

There are other cases where minor details of a complicated sign are at times omitted, either through carelessness or more likely due to a desire for speed of writing; the fact that the same sign had already been written in its fuller form would effectively prevent the intelligent reader from making an error, and we must not forget that these documents were intended only for use in the office where they were written. A good example is the use of the syllabic sign *ma* in place of ideogram No. 145 (LANA), from which it is distinguished by the absence of the small upper element.⁵

Grumach goes on to suggest that the form of the ideogram with dots is to be associated with the well known Cretan representations of women with bare breasts, which are interpreted by some archaeologists as depicting goddesses or women in ritual garments. But the women of the Knossos Ak tablets can hardly be goddesses or even

⁴ In this case there are two adjuncts, *di. za*, the second raised above the level of the first to prevent them being read as making up a word.

⁵ "In several of the Mycenae tablets, although Wool seems certainly intended, there is no trace of it." E. L. Bennett, *Mycenae Tablets II*, p. 97. Cf. J. T. Killen, *The Wool ideogram in Linear B texts*, *Hermathena* 96 (1962), pp. 38—72

priestesses, since in Ap 628 an ideogram of this type with dots is preceded by the annotation, raised above the line and clearly intended to refer to it, *do-e-ra* = *doelai* "slaves".

The suggestion that two forms of the 'women' sign need to be distinguished is therefore not supported by an examination of the variant forms and the contexts in which they occur. While we cannot offer a definitive proof that they are identical in meaning, it seems reasonable to treat them as variants, until such time as further evidence is presented which will allow a clear distinction to be drawn between them.