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AN INSCRIBED MYCENAEAN AMULET

At Perati, on the north side of the Portorafti bay, midway between Sounion and Marathon on the east coast of Attica, an extensive cemetery of Late Helladic III C date has been excavated during the years 1953—1963 on behalf of the Archaeological Society at Athens.

In the course of the 1954 campaign, chamber tomb 24 was discovered and investigated. The roof of the small, roughly circular chamber had collapsed long ago, possibly even while the cemetery was still in use, crushing the contents under its weight while, at the same time, keeping them more or less in their original position.

It contained a small skeleton, probably that of a young girl, lying on its back with the knees drawn upwards and the skull fallen on its left side. On the chest lay the pieces of a stirrup jar and, next to the right side of the skull, a small straight-sided pyxis. In the space between this vase and the right shoulder, a few beads were found, lying in a circle, belonging to a necklace worn by the interred person (fig. 1). There are four beads of glass paste, one of rock crystal and a button-shaped steatite sealstone. But the biggest and most important of them all, obviously the centre-piece of the necklace, was the inscribed stone lying on its side next to the upper end of the right humerus<sup>1</sup>. It has been carved out of a piece of dark red, almost purple, haematite, full of fissures and tiny veins of softer matter, which have caused parts of its surface to flake off. But constant use over what was obviously a great length of time has smoothed away the edges of the breaks and given its surface a

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<sup>1</sup> For preliminary reports concerning the discovery of this stone see *Praktika* 1954, p. 98, *AJA* 1955, p. 225, 1956, p. 269, *BCH* 79, 1955, p. 224, *JHS* 1955, *Arch. reports* p. 5, *Anzeiger für die Altertumswissenschaft* X, 1957, p. 105, *A f O* 17, II, p. 450, 18, p. 204. These reports have roused the interest of many scholars to whom I am indebted for their help. Mr. K. D. Ktistopoulos examined the signs engraved on it and encouraged me in publishing it. Mr. N. Boufidis, of the National Museum, drew my attention to the graffito on the Boghazköy tablet and to the probability of the Cyprominoan origin of the signs. To Dr. P. Dikaios I owe valuable information about his discovery of the Enkomi tablet, published in the meantime in *Antiquity* XXX, 1956, p. 40ff. The drawing fig. 3 is the work of the artist of the National Museum Mr. A. Papaeliopoulos.

well-worn and highly polished look (fig. 2 a, b). Roughly lentoid in shape, with a broad, almost cylindrical edge, doubly incised along its perimeter (fig. 3, side view), it has a diameter of 25–26 mm. and is 13 mm. thick. It is laterally perforated by a hole 3.5 mm. wide. Along the edge of each face runs a continuous row of small engraved signs, turned towards the centre. At a distance of about 4 mm. from the edge an inner circle, formed by 1 mm. long, straight, spokelike incisions separated these signs from a number of others, which fill the central part of the surface. Many of these signs, rather carelessly engraved to begin with, have become more or less extinct by the wear of the stone. Those that remain, however, are enough to indicate the sort of inscription it bears. They are the following (fig. 3):

Face A. The signs in the middle are perfectly clear. On the left there are four short and shallow horizontal scratchings, the uppermost two close together. The third has at its ends two vertical upright strokes. The fourth, less than a millimeter in length, is the shortest of them all.

Next to them, occupying the centre of the stone, is a group of signs divided into two registers: To the upper belong an upright narrow triangle and two slightly oblique lines to its right. The lower is formed by four vertical lines. To the right-hand one a long horizontal bar is attached, giving it the appearance of an inclined T. The signs of this central group are comparatively large ( $\Delta = 2.5 \times 4$  mm.,  $\pi = 2$  mm. long,  $\text{III} = 3\text{--}4$  mm.) and broadly carved.

The signs along the edge of the stone are smaller ( $2 \times 2$  mm. at the most), less deeply incised and generally more worn. The text they form seems to be a continuous one, since no divider appears among them. Starting from the lower left and proceeding anti-clockwise<sup>2</sup> they read as follows:

- 1.— An oblong sign standing on three vertical bars
- 2.— An angle with its point downwards, in the form of a V
- 3.— A triangle on two vertical bars, one of which is slightly bent outwards. The inside of the triangle has flaked off leaving it roughly concave.
- 4.— An erosion of the surface has obliterated the next sign, leaving only part of a vertical stroke.

<sup>2</sup> Since there is no indication of any break in the course of the inscription, the beginning and the sequence of the reading had to be fixed arbitrarily, starting on both faces on the left, from the sign next to the end of the hole bored through the stone (as shown on fig. 3 by the broken line).



Fig. 1



Fig. 2a



Fig. 2b

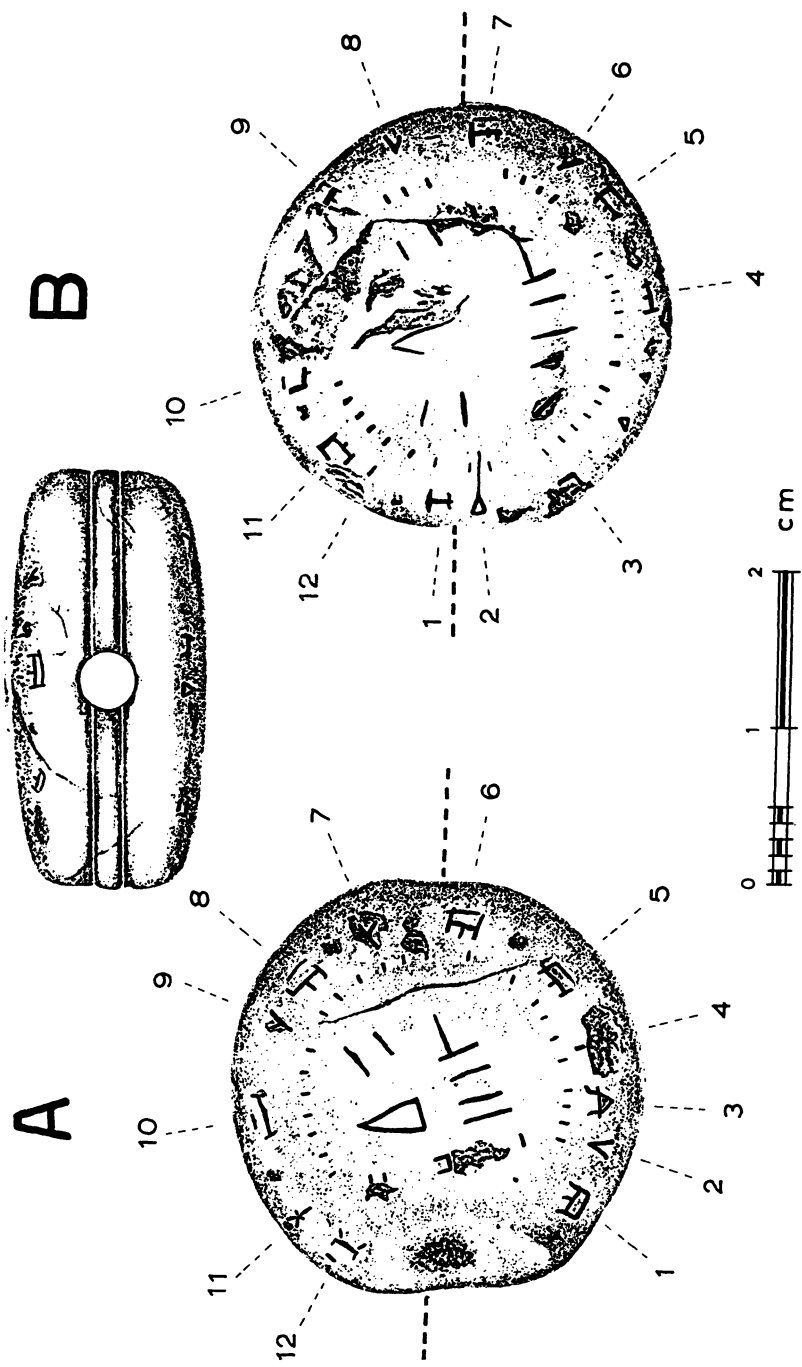


Fig. 3

A.Π.

I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
⌘	Y Y Y	V	⌘	⌘	Y	⌘

Fig. 4

FACE A	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	⌘	V	⌘	-	⌘	⌘	Y	⌘	Y	⌘	Y	⌘ [ ]
FACE B	1	2	3	△ △	⌘	⌘	Y	⌘	V	⌘	[ ]	⌘ -
	1	2	3		4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11 12

Fig. 5

- 5.— Similar to sign No 1. The upper corners as well as the inside of the oblong at the top are broken away.
- 6.— The same as Nos 1 and 5. The upper right-hand corner has been left open. The second cross-bar very deeply incised.
- 7.— Although the surface is damaged at this point, the carving was deep enough to leave unmistakable traces of a sign, consisting of a slightly oblique stroke, to the upper part of which a shorter slanting bar is attached, the whole looking like a Y with its left side straight.
- 8.— An imperfect version of the signs Nos 1, 5 and 6. The left-hand vertical stroke is altogether missing and the upper cross-bar, very thinly scratched, does not close with the vertical strokes at the corners.
- 9.— Similar to No 7, with its right side in a straight line. Its upper part damaged.
- 10.— A very sketchy rendering of Nos 1, 5 and 6. The central vertical stroke is barely suggested by a thickening in the middle of the second cross-bar. The upper horizontal bar, carelessly engraved, has been made too short to reach the ends of the vertical strokes.
- 11.— A Y-shaped sign, similar to Nos 7 and 9, badly damaged at the top. On each side of the upper end of its vertical stroke a small point has been engraved, rather like the beginning of a horizontal bar. This is much more apparent on its right side than on the left.
- 12.— A variant of Nos 1, 5 and 6, even sketchier than No 10. It consists of two horizontal bars, of which the upper is short and very thinly scratched. The other, much longer, is deeply incised and clearly perceptible, with two faint vertical strokes at its ends.

Face B. The arrangement of the signs on this face is much the same as on the former. The group in the centre, much more worn than that on face A, is an almost exact replica of it. Instead of four horizontal strokes on the left there are two, longer and deeper, with a third beneath them slanting in such a way that it almost forms part of the four vertical strokes of the lower register. The greater part of the central triangle has been rubbed off, so that only parts of its sides are still to be seen. Otherwise there is no difference either in the lay-out of the signs or in their size. As for the smaller signs along the edge, they, too, seem to follow more or less the same pattern as those already described:


- 1.— A horizontal bar with a short vertical stroke at each end. The stone around it bears no trace of any more incisions.
- 2.— A small wedgelike triangle ending in a long, thin, not very straight line, obviously due in part to a slip of the engraving tool. The inside of the triangle has flaked off, leaving it hollow.
- 3.— Part of an oblong, still visible within an eroded spot on the edge of the stone. There are no vertical strokes to be seen but the state of the stone makes it impossible to say with any degree of certainty whether this was intentional or due to the wear of the surface.
  - This sign is followed by two very small triangles, scarcely 1 mm. wide, which cannot be considered as proper signs.
- 4.— A horizontal bar with two vertical strokes at its ends and a shorter one in the middle. An upper cross-bar does not appear to have been engraved.
- 5.— Similar to sign A 1. The upper right-hand corner worn off.
- 6.— At this point the stone is a little damaged but the shape of the Y-like sign, similar to A 9, is apparent.
- 7.— A careless version of No 5. The upper right-hand corner has been overlooked by the engraver.
- 8.— A V-like sign (see A 2) on a spot where the surface of the stone has flaked off.
- 9.— The right-hand half of the sign already observed in No 5. Its left-hand part has been obliterated by a major break of the stone surface.
- 10.— The left-hand half of a similar sign, on the opposite edge of the hollow in the stone.
- 11.— The same sign with its upper left corner worn off.
- 12.— As in the case of A 4, the damage of the surface has left only part of a vertical stroke.

These, then, are the signs carved on the stone. It is evident that they do not belong to either one of the contemporary Egyptian scripts or to any of the hieroglyphs of the East. Neither do they look, as a whole, like cuneiform. So, in order to investigate their meaning, if any, we will have to compare them to the linear scripts used at the time in Greece and the Levant.

As already shown (see also figures 2 and 3) the two centre groups consist of a triangle, some horizontal strokes (six on face A, four or five on face B, according to whether the slanting scratch on the



lower left is considered as such or not) three (or, possibly, four) vertical lines and an upright stroke with a crossbar to their right. Now the triangle as a linear sign occurs very rarely and is considered<sup>3</sup> to belong to Linear B. The single strokes, whether Linear A or B, cannot be anything but numerals (| = 1, — = 10). The vertical stroke with the cross-bar looks like a sign common to Linear A and B<sup>4</sup> and Cyprominoan<sup>5</sup>, surviving into classical Cypriot. In Linear B it has the phonetical value *da*<sup>6</sup>. But in all these scripts, Linear A, B, Cyprominoan and classical Cypriot, the cross-bar is a very short one, attached to the middle of the vertical stroke, whereas on the Perati stone it meets the latter high up and is of the same length as it. Now, even if this is the sign for *da* (or its equivalent in Linear A or Cyprominoan) the whole group, if taken as belonging to one of those scripts, does not make sense: Obviously, a text consisting of two phonetic signs mixed up with numerals of different size, although of the same value, as on face A, or slanting in such a way as to signify either a digit or a ten (or neither) as on face B, the whole arranged on both faces haphazardly, cannot have had a clear meaning even at the time it was carved. It looks much more like the imitation of an inscription, imperfectly understood, than like a proper text. As it happens, there is a group of Hittite cuneiform signs so very similar to this that it could very well have been, indirectly, the prototype: On a clay tablet found at Boghazköy<sup>7</sup>

the group  has been scratched twice (once with simple

vertical lines and the second time with T-like signs in their stead) added under a text dealing with ritual. According to Dow, who follows Güterbocks' opinion<sup>8</sup>, the signs are cuneiform numerals and the group stands for the number 14. Although it differs in the number of the signs and in their arrangement from the Perati group, their similarity is highly suggestive, and more especially, as we shall see, the fact that they are similar but not identical.

From the text along the edge of both faces twenty-four characters (12 on each) have been preserved, wholly or partially. Most of them are repetitions and three (A 4, B 3 and B 12) are so damaged

<sup>3</sup> Sundwall, JDAI 1915, p. 50, No 77

<sup>4</sup> Myres, SM II, p. 6, AB 1

<sup>5</sup> Myres, op. cit., and Dikaios, Antiquity XXVII, 1953, p. 236, fig. 3, No 2

<sup>6</sup> Deroy, Initiation à l'Épigraphie mycénienne, list on p. 31, No 1

<sup>7</sup> Bossert, Altanatolien, p. 66, No 725, Pl. 163

<sup>8</sup> S. Dow, AJA 1954, pp. 101—105, Pl. 16—17

that their shape is not apparent. Counting all these out, we are left with seven signs (fig. 4). Of these, sign No I occurs eleven times (A 1, A 5, A 6, A 8, A 10, A 12, B 5, B 7, B 9, B 10, B 11), sign No II four times (A 7, A 9, A 11, B 6), sign No III twice (A 2, B 8) and signs Nos IV, V, VI, and VII once each (B 4, B 1, B 2, A 3 respectively).

Sign I, the most frequent, belongs to Linear A<sup>9</sup> as well as to Cyprominoan<sup>10</sup> and to Linear B, where it has the value *wa*<sup>11</sup>. Sign II occurs in Linear A<sup>12</sup> and in Cyprominoan<sup>13</sup>. Sign III is found only in the Cyprominoan script<sup>14</sup>. Signs IV, V, VI and VII, unknown to all contemporary scripts, appear only on this stone. Of these, IV and V are, no doubt, sketchy variants of No I, incised by an artisan for whom the script-sign, as such, had no meaning. No VI might be an imitation of a cuneiform wedge or a variant of II. As for VII, it looks as if its shape is due entirely to the creative imagination of its engraver.

Those of the characters, then, that are real script-signs belong to different scripts and appear sometimes in abbreviated or slightly changed forms. The rest are no proper signs at all. Like the quasi-cuneiform in the centre, they are similar to script-characters without being such. Clearly, the signs on both faces taken as a whole represent the attempt of an illiterate craftsman to imitate the appearance of writing as he saw it<sup>15</sup>.

Such an "inscription" cannot have made any sense, literarily speaking. This would have been true even if the signs, all of them, were real and from one and the same script, that is, even if it were a readable inscription. The sequence of the characters, almost identical on both faces (fig. 5), makes this evident. Apart from the fact that no attempt has been made to divide them into words, the constant repetition of the sign No I, either alternating with one of the

<sup>9</sup> Myres, *op. cit.* p. 10, AB 21

<sup>10</sup> Dikaïos, *Antiquity* XXVII, 1953, p. 233—237, fig. 1, 2 and No 29 on list fig. 3, *Antiquity* XXX, 1956, p. 40ff. and Pl. IX

<sup>11</sup> Deroy, *op. cit.*, list on page 31, No 54

<sup>12</sup> Evans, *PM* IV, p. 677, fig. 659, No 7

<sup>13</sup> Daniel, *AJA* 1941, p. 280, app. II, No 46

<sup>14</sup> Daniel, *op. cit.*, p. 280, app. II, No 47

<sup>15</sup> Similar to it is the lentoid engraved steatite from chamber tomb 523 at Mycenae, obviously an amulet, too. It has "a narrow edging of cuneiform marks all round and within a series of symbols in some from of script" not identifiable (Wace, *Chamber Tombs*, pp. 37, 203—204, Pl. XX, 16. Also Evans, *Times Literary Supplement* 1922, p. 747)

others or even following upon itself, would result in a rigmarole that cannot have belonged to any articulate language.

It could belong, however, and in fact it was clearly supposed to stand for the sort of repetitive unintelligible chant found on amulets and in exorcisms and other magical texts in general. What the engraver must have had in mind were evidently "words" like the  $\pi\pi\iota\alpha\ \tau\alpha\omega\alpha\omega\epsilon\iota\omega\eta\delta\eta\eta\delta\eta\pi\alpha\chi\pi\alpha\chi$  or  $\beta\alpha\rho\beta\alpha\phi\omicron\rho\phi\omicron\rho\beta\alpha\rho\phi\omicron\rho\beta\alpha\rho$ <sup>16</sup> of later times.

The study of the signs incised on the Perati stone shows beyond doubt that it was not merely the centrepiece of a necklace but also, and chiefly, an amulet. It derived its magical powers not from any figures or scenes represented on it but solely from written signs supposedly forming a cryptic inscription. The time at which it was made cannot be determined easily, since it had obviously been used for an indefinite number of years before being put into the grave. But a date around the middle of the 12th cent. B. C. cannot be far wrong.

As to its provenance, it must have been a country where the authentic script-signs used by the engraver would be current, even if not widely known. As already mentioned, the scripts to which these signs belong are Linear A, B, Cyprominoan and some version of cuneiform. Of these all, Linear A should be left out since it had been out of use for about two centuries at the time the amulet was made. Now most of these signs (Nos I, II and III, fig. 4) belong to Cyprominoan, either exclusively (Nos II and III) or in common with Linear B (No I). There are also the centre-groups as well as sign No VI which may belong to a cuneiform of sorts. Cyprus, therefore, suggests itself as the most likely place of origin, although the Syrian coast cannot be altogether excluded. In any case, this amulet, found in a late Mycenaean grave in Attica, is one more proof of the lively contacts maintained between the Greek mainland and the Levant during the last years of the Mycenaean era.

<sup>16</sup> Elderkin, *Hesperia* VI, 1937, p. 382 ff.