

MARGARET A. V. GILL

HM 1259 — A MINOAN 'DOODLE'

Most strange of all the clay tablets excavated by Evans from Knossos is Herakleion 1259<sup>1</sup>. There is no record of its exact context and provenance, neither in the Excavation Notebooks, nor in Evans's publications. The caption in *Scripta Minoa II* describing the tablets of Plate XVIII as from the Arsenal site does not apply to Tablet 1720, its photograph having been inserted here for convenience.

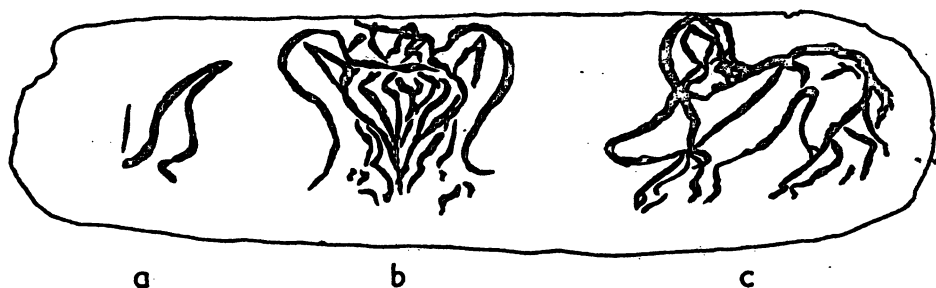


Fig. 1

In respect of shape and dimensions, Herakleion 1259 is like many Linear B tablets from Knossos, the only difference being the series of incised pictures in place of an inscription. Myres, possibly following Evans, interpreted these drawings as designs for seal-stones, and Marinatos<sup>2</sup> more recently as graffiti to pass an idle hour. The individual motifs were seen by the former as (a) a lateral petal of the cat's head sign, rather than script sign  $\vee$  (B\* 73), (b) a

<sup>1</sup> These comments and Figs. 1—3 are based on A. J. Evans and J. L. Myres, *Scripta Minoa II*, Oxford 1952, p. 66, last page of line drawings, Pl. XVIII No. 1720. An enlarged photograph (Pl. I) has been used to study the sequence of the component lines of the designs. Lines to the right of motif c are omitted, as it is impossible from the photograph to distinguish between the scribe's incisions and cracks in the clay.

<sup>2</sup> S. Marinatos, *The 'Volcanic' Origin of Linear B*, Europa, Festschrift Ernst Grumach, Berlin 1967, 207

heraldic design with vegetational axis between rampant animals and combatant men above, and (c) an ungulate looking backward, probably a bull. Marinatos saw the sketches as developments of a common theme, (a) unfinished lion's head, (b) complete head, (c) similar head attached to lion's body<sup>3</sup>.

To each of these interpretations there are objections. The sinuous lines of *a* in no way resemble the straight or C-curved outlines of ears in linear or glyptic versions of the cat's-head motif; as script sign *V* it would not only be upside down, but back-to-front. A single composition incorporating heraldically disposed animals and a group of fighters would be incongruous as a seal design and without parallel; nor would this explanation account for every line of *b*. While *c* probably does depict a bull, its head is not looking backward, for the horn is indicated by a curving line along the animal's back, not by the wavy line in front which continues in a long loop across the body. As for Marinatos's explanation, I see no resemblance of a lion's head in *a* nor *c*.

Both authorities are probably correct in assuming the designs to have something in common other than their physical juxtaposition on the tablet. Glyptic compositions may have influenced the drawing of *b*<sup>4</sup> and *c*<sup>5</sup>, but the tablet was not an engraver's pattern-book, for *a* is inexplicable as a seal motif. Neither may *a* be dismissed as a false start; in this medium an error may quickly be erased by wiping a finger across the offending line — the normal reaction of a scribe.

The sketches seem to be mere doodles. The scribe prepared his tablet in the usual way, the clay was of the right consistency to receive an inscription, then there was an interruption. Maybe information had to be fetched from elsewhere, or the scribe lapsed into a daydream! While waiting, he tried his stylo in the clay, perhaps to check its plasticity, first tentatively with a straight line<sup>6</sup>, followed by deliberate curvilinear incisions (Fig. 1*a*). These lines were non-representational; but they reminded him of an animal's ear, and this thought led him to consider an ear in relation to the rest of the head. It is the nature of doodles to be abandoned and not

<sup>3</sup> L. Deroy, however, in *Initiation à l'Épigr. myc.*, Roma 1962, 126—127, speaks of "un lion passant et une sorte de tête bovine".

<sup>4</sup> E. g. D. G. Hogarth, *The Zakro Sealings*, JHS 22, 1902, Pl. VIII, 58, 82

<sup>5</sup> Hogarth, loc. cit. supra n. 3, Pl. X, 120, although, among the numerous bull types, there is no exact parallel for the position of the neck and head.

<sup>6</sup> It is uncertain from the photograph whether this light incision is intentional.

obliterated, so he abandoned *a* and moved on to *b*. He drew the left ear and side of a head, followed by the right side and ear. As the resultant shape (Fig. 2i) was short and pointed, he built it up with more lines round the snout, balancing their weight with markings on the face and bristles between the ears (Fig. 2ii). He completed it with bold framing curves on either side, like horns, which he then transformed into the shoulders and legs of a crouching beast, by adding claws (Fig. 2iii). Now he became aware of the empty space on the right of the tablet, and filled it with a long undulating

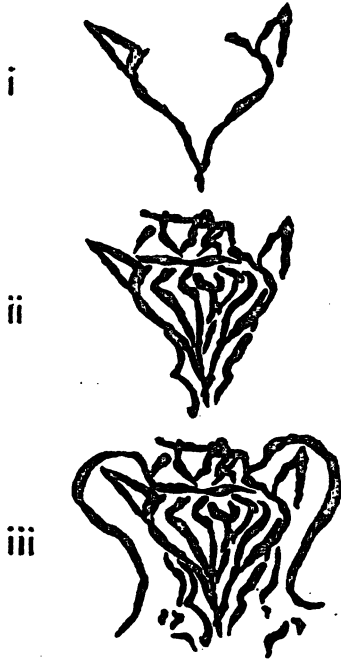


Fig. 2

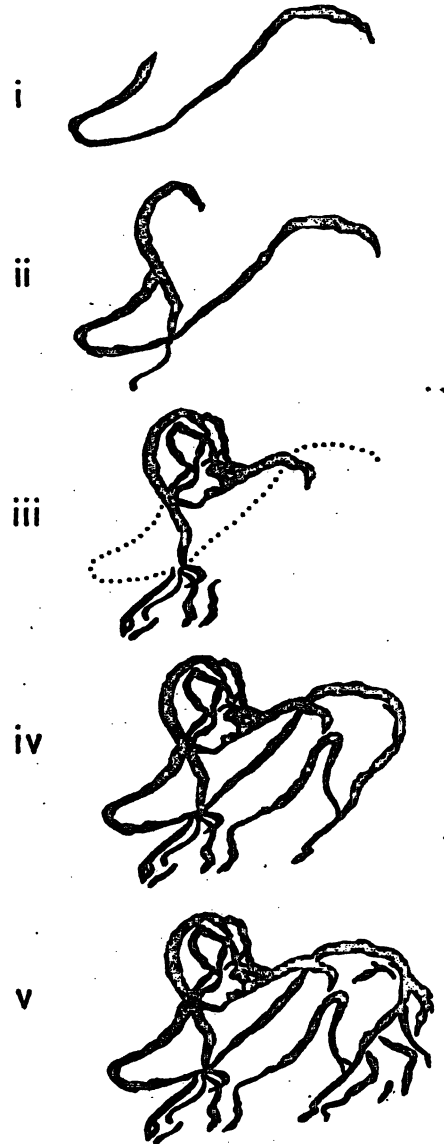


Fig. 3



Plate I — Tablet from Knossos, HM 1259 (= SM II No. 1720)

line (Fig. 3i). Curved incisions seem to have given him satisfaction, and this led him to repeat the same curve that he had used to frame the left side of *b* (Fig. 3ii). These initial lines were probably meaningless, until his thoughts rejoined his hand. Either, having just repeated the horn-like curve of *b*, he was reminded of a whole horned animal, or the resemblance of *b* to a crouching beast of prey caused him to consider a bull, as the common prey of lions. So he started to convert his third 'doodle'. Temporarily ignoring the first line, he added a head at the top of the second and hooved legs at the bottom (Fig. 3iii); then, using part of the first line for the animal's back, he drew an echoing curve to form the underside of the body and top of the back leg (Fig. 3iv). The lion-like hind quarters were, like the peculiarly thin neck, a result of the scribe's delight in curves and the influence of existing lines in the 'doodle' (Fig. 3v)<sup>7</sup>. The loop in front (Myres's horn) probably remained without meaning, or possibly as his 'doodle' developed he may have thought of it as a rope or part of a net used in the trapping of wild bulls. Though the designs on Herakleion 1259 may appear at first sight to be the products of an incompetent draughtsman at work, they are rather those of a competent scribe at play.

---

<sup>7</sup> *c* is therefore not a Mischwesen like V. E. G. Kenna, *Die Englischen Privatsammlungen*, CMS VIII, p. 193 No. 141 — head of bull, with body of lion.