

A LINEAR A TABLET FROM PIRGOS, MIRTOS, CRETE

In October 1970 a broken Linear A tablet was found during the first season of excavations in a Minoan country house on the hill of Pirkos near the village of Mirtos in the eparchy of Ierapetra in South Crete. This country house was probably built in Middle Minoan III and, on the evidence of some Marine Style sherds in its destruction debris, was burnt down in Late Minoan IB. It is similar to other country houses of the period of the New Palaces such as Nirou Khani or Vathipetro¹.

Archaeological context

The tablet was found among the destruction debris in what was probably the main entrance passage of the house. Together with a faience conch shell and five broken clay tubes, it was resting on the collapsed gypsum flagstones of an upper floor. The clay tubes were lying more or less in a row across the passage and had probably been standing in a row when the building collapsed. With relief decoration of cordons, chevrons and spiralling pie-crust, they are similar to the tubes from the shrines at Gazi, Gournia, Koumasa and Prinias, and, with the faience conch shell, are strong evidence that there was a household shrine on the floor above, and that the tablet was part of its contents². Near these finds but higher in the fill

¹ We should like to thank the Editor of *Kadmos* for inviting us to publish the tablet here and the Managing Committee of the British School at Athens for permission to do so. We should also like to thank Mrs. Pat Clarke who drew the tablet (with the help of drawings by Miss Monica Cadogan and Miss Penny Mountjoy), the Hon. Mrs. Henry Hankey who took the photograph, and Professor Maurice Pope for his kind help in interpreting it.

Preliminary accounts of the excavations which were directed by Cadogan will appear in the usual publications. The site has been described by Hood, Warren and Cadogan, *BSA* 59, 1964, 93ff.

² The clay tubes: *AE* 1937, 284ff. fig. 6 (Gazi); Gournia 47f. pl. 11. 11—13; *VTM* 50 pl. 33. 5001—5005 (Koumasa); *AM* 26, 1901, 247ff. figs. 4, 5 (Prinias); cf. also Gournia 28 pl. 1. 6—8 and *AE* 1906 144f. pl. 8. 1 (Khamaizi), discussions in *PM* 4, 140ff. and *MMR*² 316, and a possible stone example in Warren, *Minoan Stone Vases* 1969, 102 P584.

For the faience conch shell cf. stone shell vases, Warren's Type 35, op. cit. 91.

For Linear A tablets in a religious context cf. Kato Zakro (Platon in von Matt et al., *Ancient Crete* 1968, 166).

came a bronze rosette, which also could have been part of the suggested shrine's equipment — it may have been intended to be pinned on to the wall or a beam, or perhaps on to the forehead of a bull destined for sacrifice.

The tablet

The tablet (Pl. I) (excavation no. MP/70/78; now in the Ayios Nikolaos Museum) is a fragment from the top of the original which was broken in antiquity, as is shown by the gypsum incrustation which had to be removed particularly from the broken surface. (Some incrustation can still be seen in Pl. Ia.) It is 4.9 cm. wide and 0.8—1.0 cm. thick, and the preserved length is 3.2—3.4 cm. It is made of a fairly bright red to orange-red coarse clay which has white limestone and minute black grits and a smoothed surface which was cracked in places in the (presumably accidental) firing. Before this firing it was incised with seven syllabic or ideographic signs arranged on two lines and followed at the end of the second line by the number '90.' It is possible that there was a further line of signs of which a minute trace may be preserved near the bottom right corner of the fragment in a nick on the broken surface. The signs on the first line are from 0.6 to 1.2 cm. high and on the second line from 0.75 to 1.1 cm.

The inscription

With one exception the classification of the signs does not present great difficulty. From left to right it is possible to recognise:

1.	L 78	L 95	L 55	L 28	L 92
2.	?	L 82	90.		

Since this is the first tablet in Linear A found in this part of Crete to the south of the Lasithi mountains, it may be worth while to compare closely the ductus and shape of the signs with those of the other Linear A documents.

In many respects the fragment is similar to the Linear A tablets of Ayia Triadha, though it is perhaps distinguished by a clearer arrangement of the signs and by a general impression of greater 'tidiness.' Some observations may be made on the individual signs: 1. L 78 here appears in the forms c/d of Pugliese Carratelli's list. This is characterized by a vertical hasta in the middle of the sign and has been studied by Peruzzi who concludes that at Ayia Triadha

L 78 c/d is attested only once, in the tablet 87,1³. However, if we follow Raison and Brice in actually *reading* L 79 in HT 87,1⁴ it follows that L 78 c/d is in fact only attested outside Ayia Triadha⁵. Evidence for it is available in Palaikastro I 3,1; ? I 4c (libation tables); IV 5 passim; IV 6 b (clay tablets, but the vertical is rather short); in Kato Zakro III 8,1 (a roundel: here too the vertical is not very long); in Knossos I 8 a (a libation table: the vertical is not much more than a dot); II 1 signs 2 and 8 (a clay cup); [?? II 2 (a clay cup)]; ? II 4 (a graffito on a vase, but L 78 c is only a *varia lectio*⁶); ?? III 1 (a roundel⁷); IV 1 a1 and 1 b1 (a clay tablet, but the signs are not very clear on Brice's photograph); in Tyliссos ?? II 18 (a graffito on a pithos)⁸.

2. L 95 is attested in Ayia Triadha and elsewhere, but the shape is often simpler. Frequently (though not always) it consists of two sloping or vertical strokes above a badly drawn circle: there may or may not be (i) a vertical line bisecting the circle, and (ii) a dot in each half of the circle. Here the form is slightly more complex; we have not found any exact equivalent, but one may compare L 95 in IV 11 c, a clay bar from Mallia; IV 17 iii, a fragment of a Phaistos tablet; and V 17 iii and iv, two axes from Arkalokhori.

3. L 55 calls for little comment. The part above the vertical hasta has no marked curve. Parallels may be found in Ayia Triadha (e. g. 10 b3; 115 a5) and elsewhere (e. g. Palaikastro I 4 d; Phaistos IV 1 4,3; Phylakopi II 22 iv), though more frequently the sign is somewhat kidney-shaped.

4. L 28 is not a very common sign, but is attested in a similar form at Ayia Triadha (e. g. 5,3; 25 a4; 28 a5 etc.) and at Mallia (IV 10 a) etc.

5. L 92 appears at Ayia Triadha and elsewhere in a variety of shapes. There may be as few as two, or as many as four (or more),

³ Iscrizioni Minoiche 1960, 43 ff.

⁴ Raison: Kadmos 1, 1962, 52; Brice ad locum. Peruzzi (loc. cit.) argues that L 78 c has in fact the same value as L 79. Here we are not concerned with this point, but simply with the fact that in all probability L 79 and not L 78 c must be read in HT 87,1.

⁵ In Ayia Triadha too, however, there is some evidence for a type in which a dot is found between the two sloping hastae; it could be argued that this is only a simplified form of the sign with the vertical hasta.

⁶ Cf. Raison, Kadmos 1, 1962, 56

⁷ Other readings are possible: cf. Raison, loc. cit.

⁸ A possible example of L 78 c/d is found in Phaistos: cf. Pugliese Carratelli, Annuario n. s. 19—20, 1957—58, 368 No. 9. There are few other cases in which it would be possible to see L 78 c/d, but the evidence is unsatisfactory.

branches on each side; these may meet the main stem at a right angle or at an acute angle. The type found here with non-horizontal branches seems to be the only one certainly attested outside Ayia Triadha, but obviously this may be due to chance⁹.

6. The first sign of the second line remains mysterious. We have not found any exact parallels: that it is simply a variant of L 92 is made unlikely by the different shape of L 92 in the line above. It could conceivably be a ligature. If so, the lower part should include L 22

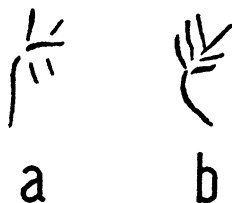


Fig. 1

(+)¹⁰. The nearest parallels which we can quote for the upper part of the sign come from Phaistos: cf. the second sign of line 2 in IV 13 a (Fig. 1a), which Brice interprets as a variant of L 71, and the first sign of Phaistos 3b (Fig. 1b)¹¹, a tablet composed entirely, or almost entirely, of hieroglyphic signs and numbers. Even so, the identification of the upper part of the sign is not easy: L 71 seems to be excluded by its shape and, all things considered, it seems better either to plead ignorance and to admit a hapax or to assume that we have here a ligature of a deviant form of L 92 with L 22. Another argument in favour of this suggestion is adduced below.

7. L 82 appears frequently in ideographic use at Ayia Triadha. The only other occurrences registered by Brice outside Ayia Triadha are on two pithoi from Knossos (II 6 ii and iii), where the shape of the sign, or rather of the internal strokes, is slightly different.

8. The number '90' is easily legible: the arrangement of the signs, with four strokes on the left and five on the right, is slightly surprising. We would expect rather five strokes on the left and four on the right.

⁹ There could be a doubtful case in Phaistos IV 17 ii, where there is undoubtedly a sign formed by four horizontal bars which cross a vertical hasta. Brice identifies the sign with L 92, but Pugliese Carratelli (*Annuario loc. cit.* 369, 383) stresses the importance of the small strokes at the top, above the vertical hasta, and compares (rightly, in our opinion) L 10.

¹⁰ At first sight L 2 may also seem a possibility, but a closer look at the tablet excludes it.

¹¹ Pugliese Carratelli, *Annuario loc. cit.* 365

Interpretation

The present state of our knowledge of Linear A precludes any useful comment on the content of the tablet. Furthermore, in the absence of any sign of word division, it is impossible even to distinguish more than one sign group¹². However, some observations may be made starting from the ideogram. L 82 has long been identified with the VINUM ideogram of Linear B (*131)¹³. In Ayia Triadha the sign often occurs among other ideograms and is followed by a number or a fraction sign. In a few cases, however, it seems to be the only ideogram on the tablet; when this is so, the tablet also includes other sign groups followed by a number, and a total may or may not be indicated at the end ('31' in HT 9; '130' in HT 13). In the four tablets which satisfy this description (HT 9 a, 13, 17, 19) the ideogram is either preceded or followed (13,1) by a so-called 'transaction' sign¹⁴, L 92. In those tablets division dots indicate that L 92 does not belong to the previous word. This may lend some support to the suggestion that the ligature which precedes the ideogram in our tablet includes a variant of L 92. If this were so, it would be possible to speculate further and to argue that both our ligature and L 92 have the same 'transaction' value. The 'transaction' use of L 92 in Ayia Triadha could then count as an abbreviation of a ligature. However, it should be stressed that none of this is more than speculation¹⁵. We may hope that the rest of the tablet, and maybe others, will be found in the remaining seasons of work at Pirgos.

¹² To apply to the signs of our tablet the values of the equivalent Linear B signs does not help particularly: we should obtain a reading: 1. ?*ti-ma-ru-wi-te* 2. ? VINUM 90.

¹³ Cf. Peruzzi, *op. cit.* 90ff.

¹⁴ For these signs see Myres, *Minos* 1, 1951, 26ff.; Peruzzi, *op. cit.* 50ff.

¹⁵ We owe to Professor Pope the observation that, if in fact L 92 of Ayia Triadha were an abbreviation of our ligature, this would probably show that the upper sign of the ligature was meant to be read first.