

ROBERTA J. RICHARD

HT 31 — AN INTERPRETATION

As a result of the work of a number of scholars, but most notably that of Cyrus H. Gordon¹, there are only two or three sign-groups on tablet HT 31² that still remain to be interpreted. Most recently, in addition to his suggestions for pot-names, Gordon has proposed a convincing explanation for *ki-de-ma-wi-na* as a masculine plural adjective meaning "gold"³. He has also pointed out the Aramaic affinities of the Minoan language⁴. As a result of these two suggestions, interpretations of the tablet's remaining unread sign-groups can be proposed. All are drawn from Northwest Semitic sources, especially the Aramaic dialects.

In HT 31.3, the vessel designated *ka-ro-pà* is followed by 10 *sa-ya-ma-n* [a]. The final sign group can be read as a feminine plural adjective from Aramaic 𐤊𐤌𐤎, SYM- (saym-), meaning "silver"⁵. This interpretation parallels precisely the following line, HT 31.4, where an unknown number of vessels (because of the broken portion of the tablet) is described as "gold", or *ki-de-ma-wi-na*. In addition, the parallelism is reinforced by the contrasting masculine and feminine plural suffixes which exactly follow the regular Aramaic plural endings: feminine *-ân(a)* and masculine *-în(a)* respectively⁶. The word *saym-* ("silver") also

¹ C. H. Gordon, *Antiquity* 31, 1957, 124 ff. Also his *Evidence for the Minoan Language*, Ventnor 1966, 26 ff.

² Linear A text numbered according to W. C. Brice, *Inscriptions in the Minoan Linear Script of Class A*, Oxford 1961.

³ "*KI-DE-MA-WI-NA* (HT 31:4)" in *Kadmos* 8, 1969, 131 ff.

⁴ *Ibid* 133

⁵ M. Jastrow, *Dictionary of Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, Midrashic Literature and Targumim*, New York 1950, s.v. 𐤊𐤌𐤎. SYMN', 𐤊𐤌𐤎, is also cited with parallel meaning, pp. 980, 982.

⁶ Noted by Gordon in *Kadmos* 8, 133

appears as Persian *saim*⁷, reflecting the typically international character of words designating metals.

Thus, a small group of valuable vessels numbering ten are fashioned from a precious metal (silver) and probably an equally small sum precedes the word for “gold” on HT 31.4, in the missing section of the tablet. With this in mind, an interpretation may be suggested for the opening phrase of the text, *mi-ti-sa. pu-ko*, on HT 31.1. The word division is already indicated by a dot. *Ti-sa* is the Aramaic noun טישא, TYŠ’ (tiša) from the root טש, TWS or טשט, TŠ⁸, meaning “to hide”, “protect” or “reserve”. It is used like Hebrew צפן, ŠPN⁹, which implies “to hoard” or “treasure up” as well. The noun *ti-sa* is combined with the West Semitic prefix (י)נ, MY- (mi-)¹⁰, to signify: “from the stored reserve”, “warehouse”, “treasury”.

The second word of HT 31.1, *pu-ko*, may be a verb in the imperative plural, conveying a formal instruction. It is suggested that this verb comes from the root נפק, NPQ, which in Aramaic can mean “to take out” in the sense of “separate out” or “remove”, in the Pe‘al form¹¹ as well as in the causative conjugation. The normal Semitic form of the plural imperative, פוקו, PWQW (pûqū), is transcribed *pu-ko* in Linear A. Thus the complete opening phrase, “take out from the reserve”, suggests that the tablet is in the nature of a supply-order or a requisition, rather than an inventory tabulation. It is directed at those in charge of valuable stored property, perhaps both as instructions and also as a form of receipt for goods delivered.

A final comment is in order to suggest an explanation of the apparently huge supply of vessels requested in the two final lines of the text, HT 31.5 and 6. The last vessel designated, ordered by the thousands¹² in HT 31.6, is *pa-ta-qe*¹³. The Aramaic word פיתקא, pitqā (plural, pitqê) has the

⁷ F. Steingass, *English-Persian Dictionary*, Beirut 1892, 717, lists *saim* or *šim* for “pure silver”. Also, for references to the term in Old Persian texts, see R. Kent, *Old Persian: Grammar, Texts, and Lexicon*, New Haven 1953, 209, *siyamam* and *saiymam*, signifying “made of silver”, are discussed.

⁸ M. Jastrow, s.v. 527 and 558

⁹ Ibid. 527

¹⁰ Although the opening sign of HT 31:1 is partially obscured, Brice reads it as *mi* on Pl. Va of ILA.

¹¹ M. Jastrow, s.v. 926 and *Talmud Babli*, Sabb. 74a

¹² Brice in Table 2 and Ventris/Chadwick, *Documents* 36

¹³ M. Astour, in *JAOS* 87, 1967, 292, n. 13, suggested the connection with Akkadian *patāqu*, “casting metal”. A relationship may well exist between the two, but perhaps in the sense of ‘forming’, ‘shaping’ or ‘molding’ a vessel — of clay as well as metal.

meaning of winecup¹⁴ but also has the alternate meaning of "a decree" or "an inscription on a clay tablet"¹⁵. In the *Targum Sheni* of the Book of Esther I, 8, it is specifically defined as "a cup which contained four or five 'hymns' and which was called by the name 'Pitqā'."

These particular Minoan vessels, judging by their large quantities and lack of qualifying adjective, must surely have been made of inexpensive clay rather than precious metal. S. Hood describes conical clay cups without handles found by the thousands¹⁶, a very few with inscribed signs, some deposited upside down, as having a religious or ritual function. Two examples from Knossos have inscriptions in Linear A¹⁷. The pictogram accompanying *pa-ta-qe* on HT 31 could easily represent the Knossos cups in roughly stylized form¹⁸. Evans also considered these sacral in character, and mentioned the analogy of modern Semitic bowls, inscribed with quotations from the Koran to give them talismanic virtues¹⁹.

This practice could explain the presence of three thousand *pa-ta-qe* following smaller groups of apparently precious and valuable metal cultic or ritual vessels. The large supply would have been provided for individual use on various occasions, properly inscribed with incantations that had talismanic properties. Just so were Aramaic 'magic' bowls used millennia later²⁰.

¹⁴ R. Stieglitz, *Kadmos* 10, 1971, 110ff

¹⁵ M. Jastrow, s.v. 1173

¹⁶ Sinclair Hood, *Kadmos* 3, 1964, 112

¹⁷ Brice, Pl. XXIIa, II 1 and II 2

¹⁸ A. J. Evans, *The Palace of Minos at Knossos I*, New York 1964, 588, Fig. 431.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 616

²⁰ This relationship was early noted by Gordon in *Incantation Bowls at Knossos and Nippur*, *AJA* 68, 1964, 194—5, and again in *Evidence for the Minoan Language* 27 and n. 53.