

A SILVER PIN FROM PLATANOS WITH AN INSCRIPTION
IN LINEAR A : HER. MUS. 498

1. The Pin

by S.A.

A short while ago we published a silver pin from the British excavations at the Minoan necropolis of Mavro Spelio by Knossos, on which there was revealed, during the cleaning for purposes of preservation by Mr. Antonio Phountoulaki of metal objects in the Herakleion Museum, a long inscription in characters of the Linear Script A.¹

Another silver pin in the Herakleion Museum, of different provenance, was recently cleaned by the same specialist, and to our surprise we saw that this too was engraved with a long inscription of the same system of writing (Pl. I, Fig. 2).²

This pin (No. 498 in the register of the Herakleion Museum) came, according to the catalogue of metal objects, from the excavations in 1914 by Stephanos Xanthoudides of Tholos Tomb A at Platanos in the Mesarà. Xanthoudides writes of the piece in the catalogue: "Fragment of flat bar of silver. Pin? Extant length 0.07 m." In the publication³ of the objects from the excavation it is described as follows: "A flat bar of silver narrowing to one end where it is broken off. Possibly a hair pin. Extant length .07m."

¹ Kadmos 11, 1972, 113—124

² We remark here also that two dagger-blades of pre-palatial age (Her. Mus. Nos. 2247—2248), published by Sp. Marinatos, *Archäol. Anzeiger* 1933, 298, Abb. 14, as "Kupferdolche", have been shown through cleaning by the same technician, Mr. Phountoulaki, in the Herakleion Museum, to be of silver. The strange thing is that an analysis of No 2247 carried out in the Württemberg Landesmuseum in Stuttgart led to the conclusion that the blade contained silver in the minute proportion of less than one per cent. This is enough to prove how pointless are the chemical analyses of museum objects when they are conducted on fragments filed from their surfaces.

³ The Vaulted Tombs of Mesarà 110, Pl. LVI, No 497. This number is recorded in the publication by Xanthoudides inadvertently for the correct registration, 498, since the catalogue of metal objects in the Herakleion Museum records under the entry number 497: "numerous pieces of thin gold thread ornament, finely twisted."

This description is precise. It is only necessary to add that the pin has a lentoid section (Fig. 1); that it is assembled from two joined pieces; that it shows in all three lines of fracture; that its maximum breadth (at the wide end) is 5mm. and its minimum (at the surviving narrow end) 2mm.: also that the wide end does not terminate in a hook as in the cases of the pin from Mavro Spelio and of other pins of like antiquity, but is virtually straight with only a slight curve. It is possible that this pin too formerly ended in a hook which was later broken off, the exposed end then being hammered or filed smooth, as has been sometimes noticed as done to other broken metal objects from Minoan times. One hint that the piece was formerly of greater length is provided by the symbol which is evidently engraved right up to the preserved end.

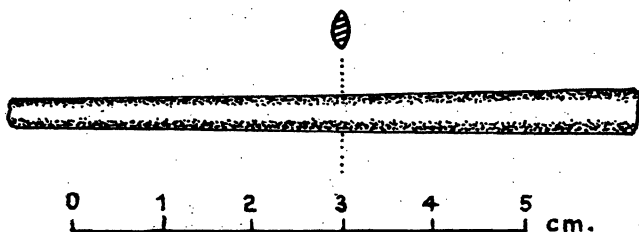


Fig. 1. The dimensions of the Platanos Pin

That pins of this type were not used for fastening clothing, as supposed in some publications, but rather for securing the high female coiffures that were usual in LM I times, has been argued at sufficient length in the publication of the pin from Mavro Spelio.⁴ It is to be understood that these pins were only used as a secondary means of fixing the coiffures (these were primarily held together by ribbons, as the figurines from Piskokephalo⁵ show clearly enough), and that their hooked ends which protruded from the hair were regarded as ornaments.

The pin from Platanos should also be assigned to the LM I period from consideration of its form, of its similarity to that from Mavro Spelio (clearly dated through its associated pottery), and of its inscription.

The exact provenance of the object is not mentioned by Xanthoudides, but I think that it forms part of the group of pins mentioned in the publication⁶ as "found outside the tholoi." It seems that our pin comes from

⁴ Kadmos 11, 1972, 113 ff.

⁵ N. Platon, *Cretica Chronica* 5, 1959, Pl. ΣΤ', Fig. 2, Nos. 7, 8, 9: Pl. Η', Fig. 1, Fig. 2, No. 4: Zervos, *L'Art de la Crète néol. et minoenne* 279 ff., Figs 397, 401, 403

⁶ Op. cit. 109 and Pl. LVI where is published one of these pins (No. 1957 of the catalogue of bronzes in the Herakleion Museum).

a burial made in neo-palatial times in the area outside the Tholos Tombs A and B of Platanos, when these were no longer in use.

Nowhere, either in the catalogue of the Herakleion Museum or in the report, does Xanthoudides refer to the signs of the Linear Script A engraved on the pin, and evidently he had no suspicion of the existence of the inscription. The cause of this oversight was the film of oxide which completely obscured the surface of the pin.

A final note may be added on the conclusion to which I have been led by a study of these two inscribed pins, from Mavro Spelio and Platanos: their definite form seems to have been intended to provide a surface suitable for the engraving of inscriptions. In future, archaeologists should remain constantly alert to the possibility of discovering similar objects.

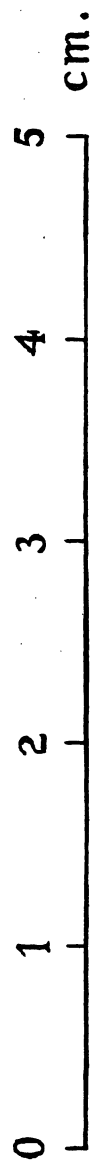
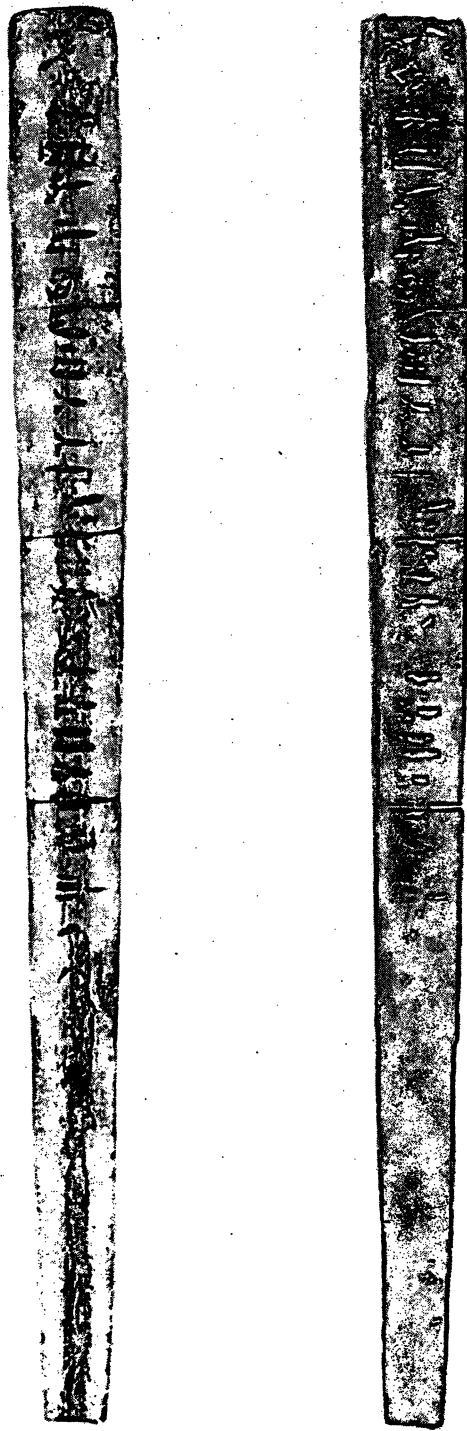
2. The Inscription,

by W.C.B.

This inscription (Fig. 2) naturally invites immediate comparison with that on the silver pin from Mavro Spelio which was published in *Kadmos* 11, 1972, 113—124. The cut of the signs on the newly cleaned piece is not so neat and elegant, nor is the inscription so clearly preserved. This fragment is only about half as long as the other, and it carries only twenty-four surviving signs (if the two lunate 'punctuations' to the left are ignored) in five possible groups, by comparison with thirty-seven signs within nine groups on the piece from Mavro Spelio: all in all, therefore, it would seem that a rather smaller proportion of the original inscription is preserved on the Platanos pin than on that from Mavro Spelio.

But the main contrast, which indeed sets apart the inscription on this pin not only from that of the Mavro Spelio pin but also from the whole known body of Aegean Linear inscriptions, of both the A class and the B, is in respect of the direction of writing, which is here evidently from right to left. So important is this novelty that the three reasons for adducing it must be clearly stated:

- (1) The blank space to the left with what appear to be closing punctuation marks.
- (2) The 'Libation Formula' (sign-group C) which runs clearly dextroverse in the other twelve recorded instances and is here inscribed in the opposite direction.



Pl. I. The inscribed pin from Platanos, Her. Mus. 498. Two prints at different densities

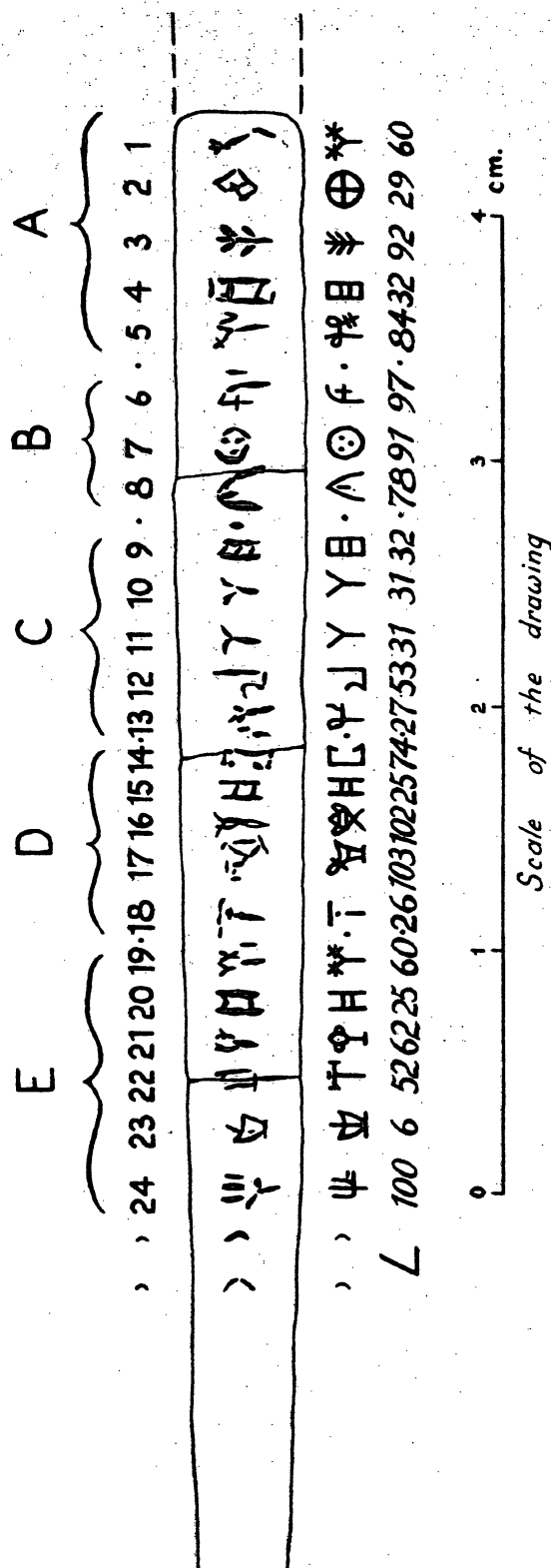


Fig. 2. Her. Mus. 498. Transcription and analysis

- (3) Of the six signs which are not of symmetrical form, three (L 27, 74, 100) face in a direction opposite from that in all cases hitherto recorded, while the other three (L 53, 84, 97) are already known to be variable in this regard⁷ (Fig. 3).

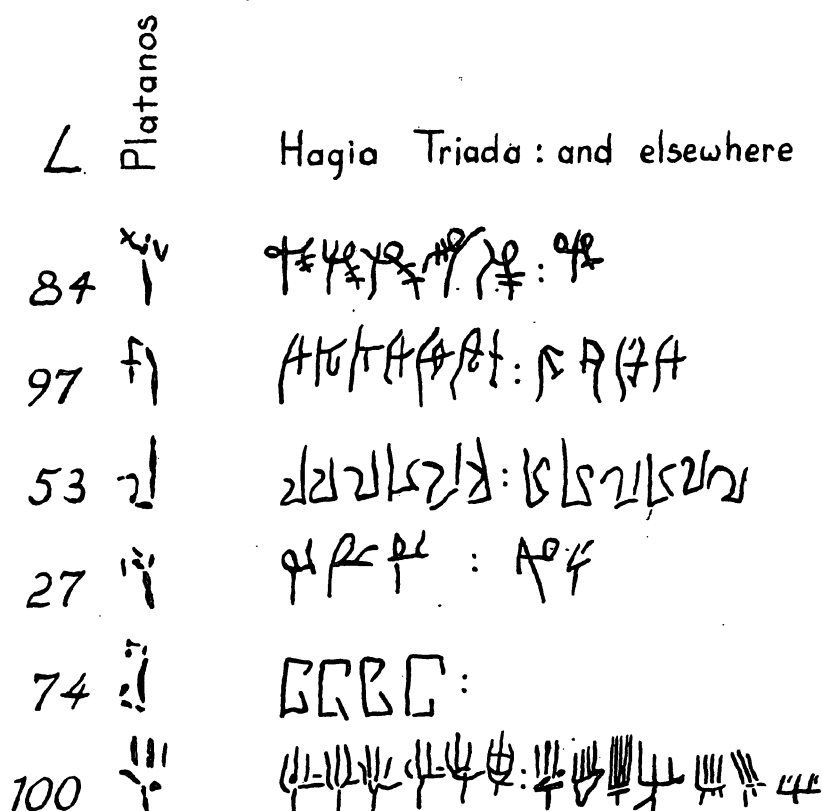


Fig. 3. To show the orientation of the six asymmetrical signs on the Platanos Pin, by comparison with the convention elsewhere

Figure 2 presents a drawing and analysis of the inscription. The signs are numbered in sequence from beginning to end, instead of group by group as in the publication of the pin from Mavro Spelio: the reason being that if other groupings of the signs are proposed (for the divisions between the groups are not here so clear as they are on the pin published earlier) this can be done without changing the system of reference which is here devised for the individual signs.

⁷ J. L. Myres saw the 'reversibility' of some Linear A signs as evidence of an earlier *boustrophedon* arrangement: ILA 1961, 1.

The inscription has been studied in photographs taken in different lights and printed to different densities (of which a contrasted pair is reproduced in Plate I) and the readings checked by autopsy.

There are no significant comparisons between the contents of the inscriptions on the two pins. The association L 100—6 at Mavro Spelio J 3—4 may be compared with L 6—100 at Platanos 23—24, but this seems only coincidental, and no other sign-pairs can be matched.

Sign-group A may of course not be complete, and it may not be the opening group of the inscription, as there is an ancient fracture, martelled in Minoan times, before Sign 1. The identifications of Signs 1 and 2 are by no means certain. With regard to Sign 2, the rectilinear outline of the proposed L 29 (which is more evident on the darker than on the lighter print on Plate I) may be compared with that of the sign on Cretule IV 19 (Fig. 4a). The variant of L 92 with four branches (Sign 3) instead of the more usual six is attested at Knossos (ILA IV 3*b*) and Mavro Spelio (V 14) (Fig. 4b).

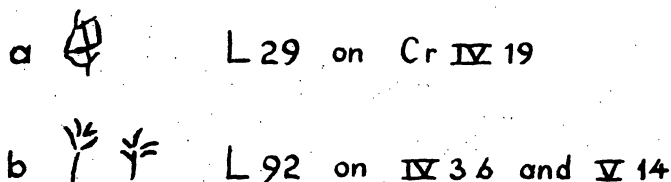


Fig. 4

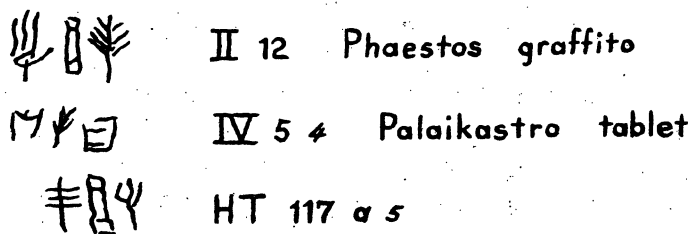


Fig. 5

L 92 and 32 (here Signs 3 and 4) are associated too at Phaestos, Palaikastro and Hagia Triada (Fig. 5).

The identification of Sign 5 as L 84 is admittedly somewhat speculative.

The next two groups, B and C, are the clearest of the whole inscription, and the dividing strokes between them leave little room for doubt. As for the form of the component signs, they are sufficiently regular not to call for any special comment, except in the case of Nos. 6 and 13. No. 6

is a standard L 97, but *sinistroverse*; the only other known instance where it faces so is on the inked cup from Knossos, ILA II 1. L 27 (Sign 13) is somewhat obscure, but can be considered certain through comparison with its equivalents in the other instances of the well-known sign-group which it terminates (Fig. 6).⁸













LINEAR A			HIEROGLYPHS	
	I 1 a	Psychro		P 41 b
	I 8	Knossos		P 49
	I 4 c	Palaikastro		HM 1868
	I 16	Troullos		HM 2245
	I 17 c	Prassà		HM 2266
	Sign 13	Platanos Pin		HM 2260

Fig. 6. The final sign of the 'Libation Group' in Linear A (L 27) and in Cretan Hieroglyphics (Evans No. 40)

As for the three-sign group B, it has not hitherto been recorded either in Linear A or Linear B. However, the signs L 91—78 (here Nos. 7 and 8) compose a group of two signs on HT 79 1.

Group C is of course the well-known 'Libation Formula',⁹ the thirteenth example in Linear Script to come to light. Ten are listed and illustrated by Kostis Davaras in *Kadmos* 11, 1972, 105—7, Fig. 1; the eleventh, from Petsophas, is published by him in the same article; while the twelfth, mentioned in his footnote 28a on page 107 consists of the first two signs of the same group on a sherd from Mallia.¹⁰ The most recent and systematic analysis of this sign-group and its connections was published just a year ago by Piero Meriggi in a brilliant essay of interpretation.¹¹

⁸ For convenience of comparison, six instances of the sign (Evans No. 40) which stands in the corresponding position in the hieroglyphic equivalents of this sign-group are also illustrated in Figure 6. Their contexts can be seen in *Kadmos* 11, 1972, 108, Fig. 2.

⁹ E. Grumach, *The Minoan Libation Formula*—again, *Kadmos* 7, 1968, 7—26

¹⁰ J. P. Olivier and O. Pelon, *BCH* 95, 1971, 433—6; cf. *Kadmos*, 11, 1972, 184

¹¹ P. Meriggi, *Die minoische Widmungsformeln*, *Kadmos* 13, 1975, 86—94.

He understands this so-called 'Libation Formula' as a word, and prefers to use the term 'Formula' to refer to the whole association of sign-groups. The word in question he reads in accordance with current convention as *aljasasara-me* and interprets it, following Leonard R. Palmer, as 'Ma-donna'.

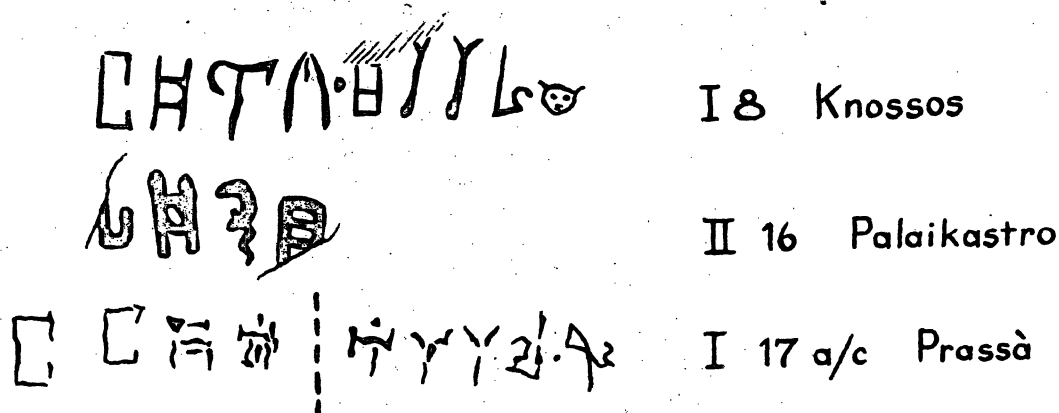


Fig. 7

We come now to Group D and its three intriguing parallels (Fig. 7):

- a* ILA I 8 is a limestone libation table from Knossos, inscribed with the familiar group of five signs which corresponds with our Group C discussed above, *preceded* by a four-sign group of which the first two signs, L 74—25, are identical with the two opening signs of the group which *follows* Group C here.
- b* The same two signs open a four-sign group on a small painted sherd from Palaikastro (ILA II 16). This may of course once have formed only part of a longer inscription.
- c* Of the three inscribed sides of the stone libation table from Prassà, I 17, one is incised (as in instance *a* above) with the five-sign-group which exactly matches our Group C, and a second with a duplicated L 74, followed by a sign hitherto read as L 1; but it must be admitted that the stone is so badly worn that this sign could possibly be L 25.

Sign 16 is read as L 102 rather than as L 45, the other possibility, on the strength of its two 'ears'. One may compare the simple forms of L 16 on HT 31, HT 115 *a* and IV 4 *a* (Fig. 8). The sign in the corresponding position in I 17 (*c* above) could also be so interpreted; but the corresponding signs on I 8 (*a* above) and II 16 (*b* above) are both more problematic.




 HT 31 4
 HT 115 α 1
 IV 4 α 1 Kato Zakro

Fig. 8

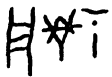
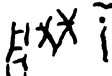


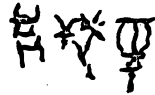
	HT
	6 6 6
	93 α 1
	93 α 8
	85 α 2
	102 2

Fig. 9

Sign 17 is tentatively identified as L 103.

Sign 20 appears on autopsy to have two rather than three horizontal strokes, and is thus to be identified as L 25 rather than as L 1. The signs L 60—26 are associated on three tablets from Hagia Triada, and are in each case preceded by L 1. L 1 and L 60 are also associated on two further tablets from Hagia Triada (Fig. 9). These parallels raise the question of whether the Platanos Sign 20 may not originally have been L 1 and have lost a cross-stroke through corrosion. But against this possibility must be ranged the considerations that the order of the signs is here reversed, and that they do not constitute a separate group.

Sign 22 is unfortunately scarred by a fracture, and leaves little to choose between the possibilities L 52 and L 57. The two signs L 52—6 (here Nos. 22—23) are found juxtaposed on HT 87 and II 4, and the final two signs, Nos. 23—24, constitute, as noted above, the only pair in the whole

inscription which is also found (though in reverse order) on the other pin-inscription.

The final two lunate signs look like closing punctuation marks. No such feature is known from elsewhere, but it may be recalled that the end of the inscribed pin from Mavro Spelio is missing.