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THE MINOAN PITHOS INSCRIPTION FROM ZAKRO

In 1965 an inscribed pithos and other vessels were excavated in Store-room Theta of a Minoan mansion at Epano Zakros in Eastern Crete. The two line inscription on the pithos, in Linear A, was incised before firing between two of its upper row of handles, J. G. P. Best¹ published a preliminary partial interpretation of this text, in which he proposed East Semitic cognates for some of the terms in the first line, while reading the last word of the second line as a personal name. Having examined the pithos at the Heraklion Museum in 1976 and in 1981,² we can now propose the following reading of the text, with its word dividers:³

1) WINE 22 DI.DI.KA.SE / A.SA.MU.NE₂ / A.SE

2) A.[TO].NO.L88 DE.KA / A.RE.MA.RE.NA / TI.TI.KU

The inscription is complete, except for one badly damaged sign in the second line. This sign may be restored, since parts of it are visible to the right of the break on the pithos, and also below the break. On the right there are clearly visible the ends of two parallel horizontal lines, and below them the stem of a single vertical line. These remains enable us to restore the broken sign as TO (= L39). The word dividers within the text are indicated by short vertical strokes. Accordingly, we would propose the following interpretation of this inscription:

Line 1. DI.DI.KA.SE /: it seems best to analyze this term as consisting of two elements – DI and DI.KA.SE. In this case, Minoan DI would be the relative pronoun 'that (of)',⁴ like the Aramaic *dī* and Ugaritic *dū* (vs. Hebrew *zū*). The second element here would then be a place-name *Dikase*. The initial phrase of our inscription, WINE 22 DI.

¹ Talanta 4, 1972, 82–84.

² The research on Crete was made possible by a supplemental Harriet Pomerance Fellowship (1975–76), awarded by the Archaeological Institute of America to whom I should like to express my sincere gratefulness.

³ My reading, based on examination of the pithos, includes two additional word-dividers not noted by Best.

⁴ C. H. Gordon, Evidence for the Minoan Language, Ventnor 1966, 36.

DI.KA.SE /, must be compared to a similar text on a rim of a vase from Knossos, which reads: DI.ZA.TI WINE 6. The first element in this text, apparently, is also a place-name, indicating whence the wine came.⁵

A.SA.MU.NE₂ /: Best⁶ first proposed to identify the word, which he read as A.SA.MU, with Akkadian *assammû* 'large drinking vessel'. According to our reading, the Minoan word is actually A.SA.MU.NE₂, but a Semitic comparison is still valid.⁷ The last syllable in the Minoan term may be analyzed as an affirmative /-n/, which also occurs with other Semitic vessel names: thus, we have Akkadian *karpû* vs. Ugaritic *krpn*; and Hebrew *mimsāk* vs. Ugaritic *mmskn*.⁸ Minoan A.SA.MU.NE₂ 'vat, pithos' is also cognate to Biblical Hebrew *'āsām* 'magazine' (for grain).

A.SE: appears to be a place- or personal-name, also attested in HT 93a:3 and HT 132:1. In HT 115a:4 we have the form A.SE.YA, with what appears to be an adjectival suffix *-ya* (like the Semitic *nisba*-ending), suggesting that A.SE is a place-name.

Line 2. also has two word dividers, and, a rather prominent space between the 4th and 5th signs, which suggests that the 5th and 6th signs constitute a separate word; we have, therefore, so rendered it.

A.[TO].NO.L88 : this word must be compared to the well-known Minoan term A.TA.NO.L88 and its orthographic variant YA.TA.NO.L88. These two terms are attested in Minoan as part of the so-called libation formula, which occurs on several ritual objects. Our word A.(TO).NO.L88, then, is yet another variant spelling of this term, also derived from the same West-Semitic verbal root *ytn/ntn* 'to give, donate'.⁹ The word A.(TO).NO.L88 is a noun, and may be compared to the Ugaritic terms *ytn* and *itnn*, both meaning 'gift'. The Biblical Hebrew cognates are *'etnāb* (<*'atnt*) in Hosea 2:14 and *'etnān* (*passim*). The cognates suggest that the syllabic value of sign L88 is T+vowel or N+vowel.

DE.KA /: seems to be a demonstrative pronoun, like the Biblical Aramaic masculine singular *dēk*- 'this, that'. In our text it modifies the preceding masculine noun.

⁵ See text II,5 in W. C. Brice, *Inscriptions in the Minoan Linear Script of Class A*, Oxford, 1961.

⁶ Op. cit., 83.

⁷ Akkadian *assammû* is a loanword from Sumerian, in which this word is written variously as A.SA.AM, AN.ZA.AM, and AN.ZA.AM.MA; cf. CAD A/II, 340.

⁸ R. R. Stieglitz, *Kadmos* 10, 1971, 110.

⁹ C. H. Gordon, *EML*, 28, 37.

A.RE.MA.RE.NA / : Gordon¹⁰ suggested to interpret this phrase as A.RE MA.RE.NA 'for our lord', with the first element being the preposition A.RE = Northwest Semitic 'alēy- 'to, for',¹¹ while MA.RE.NA must be compared to Aramaic *mārēnā* 'our lord'. The latter brings to mind the name of the Philistine deity Marna, who was still worshipped at Gaza – a city which called itself Minoa – during the Roman period. Coins of Gaza portray this god,¹² who was identified by Stephanus of Byzantium with Zeus, the Cretan-born.¹³

TI.TI.KU : the last word of the inscription is a personal name, which is also attested at Hagia Triada (HT 35:1), as already noted by Best.¹⁴ This personal name, also attested at Alalakh, is evidently non-Semitic but rather of Hurrian (or possibly Anatolian) derivation.¹⁵

We may, therefore, now tentatively translate the entire inscription on the Epano Zakros pithos as follows:

(1) Wine, 22 (measures), of Dikase, (and) the pithos of Ase, (2) this donation (is) for our lord Titiku.¹⁶

If this interpretation proves to be correct, then we have a reading of a complete Minoan text containing unmistakable grammatical and lexical features which identify the language of this inscription as a West Semitic dialect with strong Aramaic affinities.

¹⁰ Kadmos 15, 1976, 28–29.

¹¹ In Biblical Hebrew, when a personal pronoun is suffixed to this preposition, it is vocalized as 'alēy- or 'elēy-.

¹² R. A. S. Macalister, *The Philistines: Their History and Civilization*, London 1914, 111ff.

¹³ Stephanus Byzantinus, *Ethnica*, s.v. Gaza, who also recorded that Gaza called itself Minoa after Minos of Crete.

¹⁴ The reference by Best, op. cit., 84 n. 2., to the personal name Ti-ti-ku-ni in HT 96a:1 is incorrect. That text reads I.TI.TI / KU.NI / . . .

¹⁵ C. H. Gordon, EML, 31, found two good Hurrian names in Linear A: SU.KI.RI.TE.SE.YA = *Šukri-Tešeya* (Brice, II, 7b from Hagia Triada pithos), and DA.KU.SE.NE₂ = *Daku-šenni* (HT 103:2, 4–5) as well as DA.KU.SE.NE₂.TI (HT 104:1–2).

¹⁶ If we translate 'Our Lord', i.e., a divine name or epithet, like the later Marna, we may have to read: ' . . . for Our Lord; (signed) Titiku.' In this case Titiku would be the name of the official who supervised the transaction, not the landlord to whom the donation was presented.