

JOHN T. KILLEN

LINEAR B SIGN \*115 ON KN Ws 1703:  
COMMODITY OR WEIGHT?

In an excellent article in *Kadmos* 5, 1966, 1–24, on the Knossos sealings with Linear B inscriptions, Margaret Gill discusses the sealing Ws 1703. As she notes (page 4), no serious problems arise over sides  $\beta$  and  $\gamma$  of the sealing: these contain the words *ta-to-mo* and *o-nu-ke*, on which see further below. Where, however, she suggests a problem does arise is over side  $\alpha$ . She writes as follows:

“The inscription on Ox. 1938. 1080 . . . [= Ws 1703] is somewhat of a problem. The main difficulty in interpretation lies in the countersign [over the seal impression on side  $\alpha$ ], ostensibly \*115 WEIGHT. In this position a commodity rather than a unit of weight is expected; and that this sign can refer to an article seems to be confirmed by PY La 630 rev., on which it is followed by an alternative form of \*115 WEIGHT.”

For Gill, then, \*115 on the sealing does not have its usual value of a unit of weight (now transcribed as P), but denotes a commodity. This suggestion has gained some acceptance: in the critical apparatus of KT<sup>4</sup> we mention Gill's suggestion with approval; and in their *Index Généraux* J.-P. Olivier et al. list the \*115 on this record separately from the \*115s elsewhere in the archives (which they transcribe as P, offering no transcription for \*115 here). I now believe, however, that we should adopt considerable caution before we accept Gill's suggestion.

First, it is no longer possible to adduce the evidence of PY La 630. v in support of the view that \*115 sometimes denotes a commodity. It is true that Bennett in PT II did read this entry as ]\*115 \*115 7 PE 3[, which if correct would suggest that the first of the two \*115s denoted a commodity. In PTT, however, Bennett and Olivier now (and I believe correctly) read the line as ]do \*115 7 PE 4[. With this reading, \*115 can perfectly well have its usual value as a weight, with the commodity being recorded indicated either by the ]do preceding \*115 or by an ideogram understood, but not actually written. (For such omission of ideograms, see further below.)

Second, there is, I believe, some positive evidence in favour of the view that here as usual \*115 is a unit of weight.

I have recently show that the term *o-nu-ke*, on side γ of the sealing, is normally, and perhaps invariably, attested on the tablets in CLOTH finishing contexts. It is clearly Greek *onukhes*, 'nails', in a special technical sense, and evidently refers to a type of decoration of cloth made from wool, or to wool which is destined to be made into decorative items. [Among the terms which are regularly associated with *o-nu-ke* (the nominative singular of which can be spelt either as *o-nu-ka* or as *o-nu*) is *a-ze-ti-ri-ja* / *a-ke-ti-ri-ja*; and there is now good reason to believe that these are /askētriai/, '[female] decorators [of textiles]' (cf. Gr. ἄσκεώ)]<sup>1</sup>.

Now it is noticeable that when wool is listed in finishing contexts it is regularly recorded in extremely fine measure. Whereas the raw wool recorded on the Dk 'shearing' records is never listed in quantities finer than 1 M (= c. 1 kg.), wool in finishing contexts (which is presumably fine embroidery wool, etc.) is regularly recorded in terms of the much smaller P unit (= one forty-eighth of an M; = c. 20 gr.). This almost certainly includes wool qualified as *o-nu-ke*: see further below. The full evidence for this phenomenon is set out beneath. (In what follows, I list and discuss each of the records in which LANA P is likely to, or does, occur.)

- (a) L 590 (103)
- |           |                 |      |                     |
|-----------|-----------------|------|---------------------|
| .1        | po-]ki-ro-nu-ka | *161 | TELA <sup>1</sup> [ |
| .2        | ]rē-u-ko-nu-ka  | *161 | TELA <sup>1</sup> [ |
| lat. inf. | ]ke             | M 1  | P 3                 |

The recto of the tablet lists the \*161 sub-variety of 'plain' cloth (= *pa-we-a*) qualified as *po-ki-ro-nu-ka*, 'with variegated *o-nu-ke*' (l. 1) and *re-u-ko-nu-ka*, 'with white *o-nu-ke*' (l. 2). Given the presence of compounds of *o-nu(-ke)* on the recto of the record, it is attractive to restore ]*ke* on the lower edge of the tablet as *o-nu-]ke*, and to take this entry as relating to wool (perhaps a reference to some or all of the same *o-nu-ke* as are implied by the compound adjectives). For the omission of the WOOL ideogram in similar circumstances elsewhere, see (c), (d).

<sup>1</sup> J. T. Killen, 'The Knossos Ld(1) Tablets' in *Colloquium Mycenaeanum: Actes du Sixième Colloque International sur les Textes Mycéniens* . . ., Neuchâtel, Genève 1979 (hereafter Killen 1979), 165 ff.

- (b) Od 666 (115)  
 .a ] to-so o LANA 14  
 .b ]kē-me-no / au-u-te, a-pe-i-si  
 v. ]ke-re-wa LANA 9 M 1 P 6  
*lat. sup.* ] o-mu-ka-ra LANA 3 N 2 P 2

As noted above, the hand of this record is 115. This makes it likely that it deals with wool used in the finishing of cloth: see Killen 1979, 164. (As shown there, this scribe wrote both MEN and WOOL records, including the WOOL entries prefixed by *to-u-ka*, evidently /*toukhāi*/, 'for finishing', on the verso of the Lc(2) records; and we can demonstrate that all these records are likely to deal with the activities of male fullers/finishers and the materials they worked with.)

- (c) Od(1) 667 (103)  
 .1 ]LANA 1 M 2 P 4[  
 .2 ]ja M 2 P [  
*lat. inf.* ] 1 qo-ja-te P 1[

That this record may also have finishing connexions is suggested by the reappearance of the term *qo-ja-te* (perhaps a personal name), here on the lower edge of the record, on Od(1) 681:

- Od(1) 681 (103)  
 .a 'e-na-po-na, o-nu, pa-i-ti-jo' e-ti-wa-ja-qe LANA[  
 .b qo-ja-ṭe a-pu-do-ke, ti-ra [

There is no doubt of the finishing connexions of this record. Apart from its findspot (the North End of the Long Corridor, also the location of other cloth finishing records<sup>2</sup>), it contains the term *o-nu*, which is quite certainly the shorter, alternative spelling of the nominative singular of *o-nu-ke* viz. /*onuks*/<sup>3</sup>.

Given the WOOL reference on l. 1 of 667, there must obviously be a good chance that the commodity recorded, with similar fineness of measurement, on l. 2 and the lower edge of the tablet is also WOOL,

<sup>2</sup> Od(1) 682 (*o-nu-ke*), M(1) 683 (*a-ze-ti-ri-ja, o-nu-ke*), Od(1) 687 (*ti-ra, ne-ki-ri-si*), etc.

<sup>3</sup> Any possible doubts that *onuks* could be spelt *o-nu* (as well as *o-nu-ka*) have been removed by the recent discovery that the word written initially on KN Sk(1) 8100 (and doubtless on other records in the same series) is not *pa-ra*, as we give it in KT<sup>4</sup>, but *to-ra*: quite clearly, given the context, /*thōrāx*/, 'suit of armour' (which can also be spelt *to-ra-ka*).

even though no WOOL ideogram has been entered in these cases. For similar omission of an ideogram in circumstances where it is already clear what commodity is being dealt with in an entry, see e.g. KN L 693.2 (first entry: omission of AES).

(d) (i) L 695 (103)

- .1a ]ti-jō e-ta-wo-ne-wo
- .1b ] o-pa TELA<sup>1</sup> 6
- .2.3 ] *vacant*
- .4 ]2 P 2 e-ne-ro 're-u-ko' N 2

(ii) L 698 (103)

- .1 ]ne-we, pe-ko-to \*164<sup>1</sup>[
  - .2 ]i-jō-te, 'ku-su-a-ta-o' 11[
  - .3 ]jō-du-mi 'wo-ke' P 1[
- Possibly same tablet as Od 696.

(iii) Xe 7857 (103)

- sup. mut.*
- .1 ] e-ta[
  - .2 ]P [

Though none of these tablets show WOOL ideograms, all are in hand 103, the scribe par excellence of the cloth and wool records; 695 and 698 show CLOTH ideograms; and all three may well have finishing connexions. (695 mentions *e-ta-wo-ne-u*, the 'owner' vel sim. of a finishing workshop (see Killen 1979, 160f.); and there may also be references to this individual on 698.1 (?*e-ta-wo-]*ne-we) and 7857.1 (*e-ta[-wo-ne-?]*). Thus the chances that here also wool is being recorded with fine measurement in a cloth finishing context must clearly be fairly high.

Given this evidence that wool used for finishing cloth, including very likely wool qualified as *o-nu-ke*, is regularly measured in terms of P, and given that *o-nu-ke* appears on side γ of the sealing, it is difficult to believe that \*115 on side α of Ws 1703 does not have its normal value of a unit of weight (i. e. should be transcribed as P), in spite of the fact that ideograms found in this position on other sealings seem always to denote commodities. And further support for this contention is provided by the presence on side β of the sealing of the term *ta-to-mo*, evidently /*stathmos*/.

On its other appearances on the records, *ta-ta-mo* = *stathmos* appears to have the sense either of 'sheep-steading' (see PY Cn 4, 595) or of 'upright post' (see PY Vn 46). These are both of course among the Classical senses of the term. [σταθμός 'sheep-fold' Il. 5, 557 +; 'upright

post' Od. 1, 333 +.] But there is also a third Classical sense of σταθμός, viz. 'weight' [Hdt. +.] Given that neither of the other two senses of the word would seem to be at all appropriate to this context, and given the presence on side α of the sealing of \*115 (and the fact that *o-nu-ke* is a weighed substance), it would seem very attractive to give σταθμός here this sense of 'weight'<sup>4</sup>.

If, then, \*115 is as usual a unit of weight; if *ta-to-mo* is /*stathmos*/ (or /*stathmoi*/), 'weight(s)'; and if *o-nu-ke* are /*onukhes*/, in the technical sense of a kind of wool used for decorating cloth, how do the inscriptions on the three sides of the sealing relate to one another? One possibility which comes to mind is that the sealing might have been attached (by the usual piece of string) to one or more P weights which were used for weighing *o-nu-ke*, and that it is to this or these that sides α and β of the sealing refer. However, until we know much more than we do at present about the purpose of sealings, this suggestion must inevitably remain speculative.

---

<sup>4</sup> Cf. M. Ventris, J. Chadwick, *Documents in Mycenaean Greek*<sup>2</sup>, Cambridge 1973, Glossary p. 584: "[*ta-to-mo*] in KN Ws possibly 'weight'".