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LINEAR A *DU* AND CYPRIOT *SU*: A CASE OF DIACHRONIC
ACROPHONY?*

1. Introduction: the acrophonic nature of some Linear A signs

It has long been known that at least some ideograms of Linear A, and consequently their Linear B counterparts, were designed by acrophonic abbreviation. The most cited example is that of sign AB30, which represents not only the commodity ‘figs’ but also the phonetic value of *ni*, from the later attested Cretan gloss *nikuleon* (see Neumann 1962 and Duhoux 1989: 97). Among others, an example of a pure syllabogram following this principle may be AB78, *qe*, i.e. **k^we* (and **g^we?*): whether it represents a wheel, a shield or any other round object, it may be related to PIE *k^we-k^wl-o-* ‘circle’. The latter represents a Wanderwort spread through ancient Eastern Mediterranean and West Asian languages (cf. Sumerian *gigir*, Semitic **galgal-*, Kartvelian **grgar-*; see Rubio 1999: 10, with references) even though the PIE reconstructed shape – with labiovelar **/k^w/* – is the one that more closely relates to the Cretan syllabogram. We also know that in Linear B some innovative syllabograms may have also been derived by acrophony: e.g., *qo*, resembles a bovine head (Mycenaean *qo-o* = Classical Greek βούς), and *dwo*, is taken to be a representation of ‘two’ (Greek δύο) *wo* signs placed side by side (see Palaima and Sikkenga 1999: 605 for the interpretation).

In light of these examples, it seems plausible to think that the syllabograms of Linear A were assigned phonetic values corresponding to initial syllables of actual words of its underlying language. A writing system built on this principle, when used to write the language

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of its inventors, allows the creation of simple mnemonics (through the association of the graphic sign to a real object and thus to its phonological value) that would greatly facilitate the task of a master scribe teaching his students.

2. The source of syllabogram A51 (*du*)

I have argued in this journal that the Linear A element (-)*du-pu₂-re* should be rendered as ‘ruler, master (dat.)’ (vel sim.) (see Valério 2007). This reading may now help explain syllabogram A51 *du* in light of the acrophonic principle. I will attempt to demonstrate that the sign in question evolved from the idealized depiction of a Minoan leader: a man holding a staff or crook.

The latter description corresponds exactly to the characteristics of Egyptian hieroglyph A7, which stands for both the ideogram *sr* ‘official’ and the determinative ‘official’ (fig. 1, Collier and Manley 2004: 132). The metaphor of the “shepherd king” and the idea of a shepherd’s crook as a symbol of rulership were widespread in the ancient Eastern Mediterranean and Near East: for neighboring Anatolia one may cite, for example, the curved staff of Hittite kings (Hittite ^{GIS}*kalmuš*), commonly designated in the literature by the Latin term *lituus* (see Bryce 2002: 20).

This symbolic representation is not unprecedented in Crete: it is well known from the Minoan depictions of men and women in the “Commanding Gesture”, of which we have several examples (fig. 2–5). There is, for instance, a seal (fig. 2; HM 2374) from Archanes, Building E (MM IB), published in Yule (1981: 14, 47 b. 76, motif 1.18, shape 9), either faience or, less probably, metal. The cylinder is Minoan but it imitates a Near Eastern type, and suitably features the symbol of Egyptian hieroglyph A7. It was originally a Syrian cylinder but the seal seems to have been remade in Crete, as suggested by the poor state of the surface of the object as well as by the typically Minoan palm leaves in X motif (see Aruz 1995: 5–6). The figure’s pose is not only similar to the Egyptian and Near Eastern archetypes but also conforms to the Minoan “Commanding Gesture”. Aruz also dates Funerary Building 5 as “occupied probably through the Protopalatial period, with many of its seals datable to EM III-MM I”. Thus, the cylinder seal dates precisely to the period when Cretan Hieroglyphic was being formed, even though there is

no known hieroglyphic sign comparable to Linear A B51 *du*¹. It is nevertheless important because it demonstrates an early presence of this iconic archetype in Crete.

In order to defend that A51 *du* is based on such an icon one needs a thorough survey of every instance of the sign. Effectively, I have compiled those instances in which the drawing of the syllabogram was not seriously damaged and the reading of it not doubtful. It can be shown that many of them, regardless of their chronological or geographical distribution, possess graphical characteristics that support the abovementioned interpretation:





























- Perceptible and well-marked crook (HT 19.3; HT 42.5; HT 110a.1; KN Zc 7; PK 12.d; TY 3a.6; ZA 10a.3/5; ZA 10b.1/7; ZA Wc 2);
- Crook recognizable as separated from the man's body or hand, i.e. an object independent of the human depiction (HT 19.3; HT 39.6; HT 51b.2; HT 85a.1; HT 85b.4; HT 108.2; HT 110a.1; HT 123b.3; HT 127a.2; HT We 1021.α; KN 1b.1; ZA Wc 2);
- More perceptible drawing of hand holding the crook (HT 5.3; HT 49a.4; PK 1.2; PK 12.d; ZA 10b.1/7);
- Perceptible human anatomy, namely less linear drawing of limbs and head (HT 6b.1; HT 7a.3; HT 19.3; HT 40.1; HT 42.5; HT 85a.1; TY 3a.6).

Some signs cumulate many or all the above characteristics, i.e. are straightforward depictions of a man holding a crook: HT 19.3; HT 42.5; HT 85a.1; TY 3a.6; ZA 10b.1/7². With respect to geographical variations of the motif, it can be observed that in Eastern Crete, namely at Palaikastro (PK 12.d) and Zakros (ZA 10a.3/5; ZA 10b.1; ZA Wc 2), most signs seem to depict a second, not curved object, held by the human figure in its other hand. More curious is the example from PK 1.2, in which the man holds the crook not on his right hand, as customary, but on the left one.

¹ Note, however, that sign CHIC 54 depicts a crook, much like Egyptian hieroglyph E11, which is the ideogram for *ḥkꜣ* 'ruler' (Collier and Manley 2004: 139).

² It is noteworthy that a number of these traits persisted even in some instances of B51 (see, for instance, Melena 1987: 23).

Table 1 – Instances of A51 at Aghia Triadha

			
HT 4.2	HT 5.3	HT 6b.1	HT 6b.4
			
HT 7a.3	HT 13.5	HT 14.3	HT 15.1
			
HT 19.3	HT 25a.4	HT 29.6	HT 36.2
			
HT 39.6	HT 40.1	HT 42.5	HT 43.1
			
HT 47a.3	HT 49a.4	HT 51b.2	HT 58.1
			
HT 85a.1	HT 85b.4	HT 86a.4	HT 88.1
			
HT 92.1	HT 95a.1	HT 99a.1	HT 99b.2































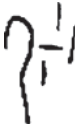
			
HT 104.3	HT 108.2	HT 110a.1	HT 115b.2
			
HT 122a.7	HT 123b.3	HT 123b.4	HT 123b.5
			
HT 127a.2	HT 133.1	HT Zb 160	HT We 1021.alpha
			
HT Wc3020.a			

Table 2 – Instances of A51 elsewhere on Crete (other than Aghia Triadha)

		
ARKH 5.1	KH 4.1	KH 5.3
		
KH 11.1	KN 1b.1	KN Zc 7

 KN Zf 31	 KO Za 1	 MA 1a.1
 PK 1.2	 PK 12.d	 TY 3a.6
 ZA 10a.3	 ZA 10a.5	 ZA 10b.1
 ZA 10b.7	 ZA 20.1	 ZA Wc 2

3. The source of Cypriot *su*

In the Neopalatial period both Linear B and Cypro-Minoan began differentiating from Linear A (Palaima 1988) – as the name implies, Cypro-Minoan was developed by Bronze Age Cypriots. The earliest Cypro-Minoan document, the “Grand” tablet from Enkomi comes from a 16th century context, but unfortunately inscriptions in this script remain incomprehensible, largely because no accepted signary has yet been devised (see Hiller 1985). However, the script was adapted to write Greek in the first millennium BC: this is called Cypro-Syllabic (henceforth CS), a script for which we have long had an accepted signary. Although ultimately derived from Linear A, CS presents only eleven signs that match Linear A signs in form and only eight or nine that match in form and phonetic value.³ One of

³ In Linear A and B and in Cypro-Syllabic, the following syllabograms match in form and value: *na, pa, po, se, te, ti, to*; the following match in value approximately: AB *da* and CS *ta*, AB *ro* and CS *lo*, AB *ra* and CS *ru*; and the following match only in form: AB *du* and CS *su*, AB *pu*₂ and CS *pu*, and AB *ra*₂ and CS *zo*.

the oddities is that CS *su* (fig. 7), whose predecessor is likely Cypro-Minoan sign 47 (Hiller 1985: 63, 78), is clearly a development of A51 (*du*) even though the phonetic values do not match. Up to now the reasons for such a disparity remain obscure. It is not difficult to imagine Bronze Age scribes adapting a foreign script in face of the particularities of their own language:⁴ as defended above, the principle of acrophonic derivation would have facilitated the task of masters in charge of teaching new lines of scribes.

I wish to put forward a hypothesis for the Cypriot sign in question. If A51 *du* was based on the Minoan word for ‘ruler’ (vel sim.), perhaps a similar mechanism operated in its Cypriot counterpart. Given the connections of Cyprus with Ugarit, one may hypothesize that Cypriots borrowed a form of the Ugaritic word *srn* ‘prince (also a personal name)’. This word was transliterated to Akkadian as *suranu* and was, according to the most satisfactory explanation, a Wanderwort derived from Hieroglyphic Luvian *tarwani-* ‘justice; judge, ruler’ that spread throughout the Eastern Mediterranean: cf. Greek *τύραννος* ‘ruler, tyrant’ and Hebrew *srn* ‘prince of the Philistines’ (Yakubovich 2002: 111–2 with references). If we assume a relationship between Cypriot *su* and the Ugaritic word *srn*, then Late Bronze Age Cypriots may have taken, during the period when Cypro-Minoan was being adapted to write the local language(s), the first syllable of their own word for ‘prince’ and applied it to their adaptation of Linear A51 *du*, replicating the original Minoan process.

This idea brings forward a problem, however: Ugaritic *s* was pronounced approximately as an affricate [ts], according to Tropper (1994: 31–33). Therefore, the correct pronunciation of the word *srn* (which was Akkadianized as *suranu*) was probably /tsuranu/. Similarly, Greek *πρόεδρος* ‘president’ is related to Ugaritic PN *prsn*, rendered as *pur-sà-nu* in Akkadian (Furnée 1972: 63, apud Yakubovich 2002: 112, fn. 50). I think it is a plausible solution positing that this Wanderwort had a (Cypriot?) dialectal form with sibilant [s] instead of [ts]. In fact, it is Tropper’s (2000: 102–104) opinion that Ugaritic [ts] became [s] in some environments, and that the new letter *s*³ was designed to mark [ts] because *s* had come to write [s]⁵. However I may offer this to specialists as a working hypothesis, given the absence of further evidence I must forego any additional analysis.

⁴ It should be noted to this respect that the Cypriot syllabary has no *D*-series.

⁵ I thank Peter T. Daniels for providing this reference to me in a personal communication.



Fig. 1 – Egyptian hieroglyph A7 (Collier and Manley 2004: 132)



Fig. 2 – Cylinder seal HM 2374 (Yule 1981: 14, 47 b. 76, motif 1.18, shape 9)



Fig. 3 – Shell plaque from Phaistos: four deities with theriomorphic heads wearing petticoats (in Egyptian style) and holding staves (Hood 1973: 263, 284)



Fig. 4 – Seal impression from Knossos: depiction of a female figure (“goddess”) holding a staff in the company of a lion, an animal which cross-culturally symbolizes power (Hood 1973: 106–107)



Fig. 5 – The “Master Impression” from Chania, LM I-II context (CMS V Suppl. 1A, no. 142)



Fig. 6 – CM 47 (Hiller 1985: 78)

Fig. 7 – CS *su* (Hiller 1985: 78)

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