LINEAR B IN THE BAY OF NAPLES

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Two new fragments of Linear B tablets were discovered in the storerooms of the archaeological museum in Naples during repair work following recent earthquakes. Their discovery mirrors that reported at Knossos by L. Septimius during the time of Nero, when earthquakes on Crete unearthed eye-witness chronicles of the Trojan War by Dictys Cretensis, written on lime bark and stored for the ages in tin chests. Sir Arthur Evans thought that this report referred possibly to the chance find of Linear B tablets from one of the lead-lined *kaselles* at the site. As in Roman imperial times, the new texts were immediately presented to a group of scholars for examination and interpretation, although we felt none of the pressures associated with an order from a severely disturbed and willful Roman emperor. Our international team consisted of such sober-minded scholars (Olivier, Hajnal, Ruijgh, Kolosimo and myself – Palaima) that any possibility of a hoax is completely ruled out. We all were attending the Second International Mycenological Colloquium, held in Naples and Rome from October 14-20, 1991. We worked long into the night to draw, transcribe and explain the documents, feeling little pressure since the hospitality lavished on us by the conference organizers made us all feel as if we were on holidays. Here follows our report on the palaeography, dialect, and contents of these two tablet fragments (cf. figure 1).

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Az 91    0.   vacat
         1.   de-ko-to-jo, me-no 14-20
         inf. mut.

Az 19    0.   sup. mut.
         1.   de-mi-ro, ko-da-ka-qe, za-ko-ni-qe,
         2.   a-ko-si, a-me, ne-wa-po-to-ri-de,
         3.   ro-ma-de-qe, di-ja, ro-zo,
         4.   pe-ri-te-ma-to, mu-ke-na-i-ko,
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5. pi-ri-ja, pe-ri, ke-re-di-jo-jo-qe,
6. MUL 200[
7. *vacat*[
inf. mut.
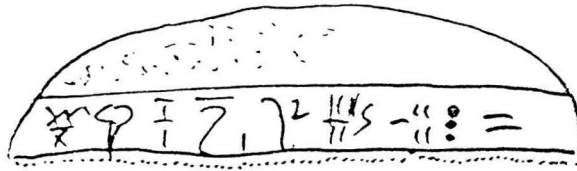
Az 91
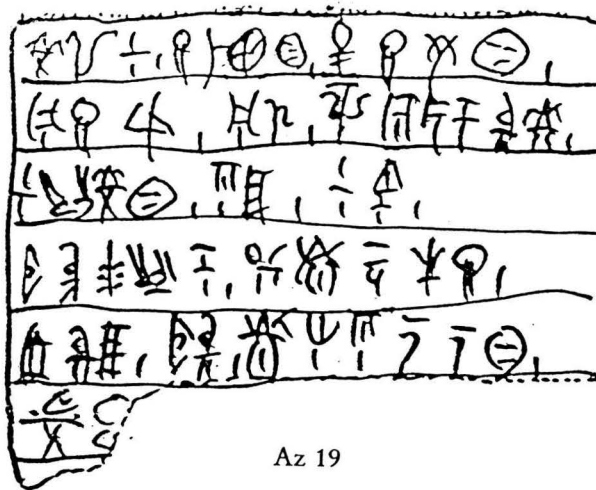
Az 19

Figure 1.

Palaeography

The scribal hand of these two tablet fragments, which have now been joined to form a single tablet Az 1991, *resembles* that of Knossos Scribe 115 whose palaeographical style we now know had a distinctive westward drift. We conjecture that this scribe or one of his pupils or descendants took a trip from Knossos to the harbor-town Khania and then decided to keep going and to visit the bay of Naples, an area marked by natural beauty and a known meeting place in later periods for persons wanting to 'wheel and deal' in new writing systems. The smiling MUL is a new variant, perhaps distinctive to the Italian peninsula.

Greek text of the joined tablet Az 1991

Az 91.1	δεκότοιο μηνός 14-20
Az 19.1	Δε Μιρο, Γοδαρτ τε, Τσακονι τε
.2	ἄγονσι ἄμμες ΝεϜαπτόλινδε
.3	Ῥώμᾱνδε διὰ λόγγων
.4	περὶ θεμάτων Μυκηναικῶν
.5	φιλίας περὶ γλεντίγογό τε
.6	ΓΥΝΑΙΚΕΣ 200[
.7	*vacat*

Our English translation of the joined tablet Az 1991

In the month of October, 14-20
De Miro, Godart and Sacconi
lead us to Naples
and to Rome for talks
about Mycenaean subjects
for friendship and for γλέντι.
200 women...

Commentary

The preserved line on fragment Az 91 clearly serves as a brief heading to the tablet. It provides us with another Knossian month name to supplement the half dozen we already know. Since this month is designated by an ordinal number, we can now conjecture that there were at least ten months either in the Knossian calendar or in the local calendar of the Naples area. Of course, we are in a quandary as to whether the tenth month corresponds to our *December* (etymologically) or *October* (in numerical sequence). The month designation is followed by numbers separated by a vertical line of dots, which we have interpreted as a first instance of the long-awaited Mycenaean dash or hyphen.

There then follows a five-line Mycenaean text which constitutes our first textual confirmation that a poetic tradition already existed in the Bronze Age. It will disappoint Homeric scholars to learn that our analysis indicates that the verses written here, far from being an epic fragment in dactylic hexameter, are a complete limerick, a poetic form known to have been practiced in Crete mostly after conferences of the Swedish School in Athens. The rhyme scheme conforms to that of the limerick (a-a-b-b-a: *qe-de-zo-ko-qe*) allowing for certain recalcitrancies of the Mycenaean script and the peculiar

dialect of our itinerant scribe whose own speech seems to have been the kind of artificial patois that would have put Homer to shame.

In keeping with the statistical tendencies of Mycenaean texts, we have tried to interpret at least 70% of the sign-groups on the joined tablet as personal or place names. Thus in the first line we have come up with three reasonable personal names: De Miro, Godart and Sacconi, scholars of Mycenaean and Anatolian subjects with well-deserved reputations as flawless organizers of international conferences. We finally rejected a first hypothesis that the sequence *ko-da-ka* referred to the omnipresent tool of tourists for capturing photographic images in Greece and Italy. The variant *za-ko-ni* undoubtedly stems from our wandering scribe having spent time in the Peloponnese, where he picked up elements of the Tsakonian dialect. This hypothesis is supported by the known association of Sacconi with the corpus of tablets from Mycenae, where the scribe would have encountered her name.

The same Argolic flavor is attested in Az 19.3 *ro-zo*. This word occurs on the new inscribed nodule from Midea and shows what we take to be a Neapolitan palatalization of the guttural consonants. Another interesting dialect feature is the scribe's rendering of the second syllable of the important word γλέντι as *di*. This confirms the theory of Chadwick about the oral-aural procedures by which scribes obtained and wrote down information.

The ideogram for woman has two interesting features: conspicuous raised breasts and a broad smile. The latter perhaps indicates that at least one man is to be restored on this broken line. The former brought the exclamation «Cheɣ̂!» from a Spanish colleague who has concerned himself with the close study of Mycenaean ideograms.