

MA TN 249: A LINEAR B TABLET FROM MARBURG WITH RITUAL INFORMATION AND GRAFFITI

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I present here the *editio princeps* of a small page-shaped Linear B tablet from Marburg, only the second such document found on German soil.¹

CIRCUMSTANCES OF DISCOVERY

The tablet was discovered in the old traditional pottery quarter of Marburg above the Lahn when I became disoriented while strolling home from a reception at the world-famous headquarters of the CMS on Schwanallee. The name of Schwanallee put me into a reverie of thoughts about swans that I had seen in Germany on the Kocher River in Schwäbisch Hall during my days at the Goethe Institut in the summer of 1973 and most recently in a central park in Munich where I had done some nude sunbathing with the local population and Prof. Fred Schwink in the early autumn of 1996. My mind then ran on to think about Monsieur Swann in Marcel Proust's famous novel, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, and eventually about Proust himself. So captivated was I by my thoughts about an author who lived his days, not unlike the two eminent scholars who run the CMS, in an isolated cork-lined apartment cell, that I began to wander rather aimlessly in search of my own lost time with German water fowls. As fate would have it, I found myself in not unfamiliar surroundings in the pottery quarter and noticed there in the clayish soil beneath a loose cobblestone, the outline of an object that looked very familiar. I reached down, glanced at it rather absent-mindedly, and walked on kneading it in my left hand in the manner of Greek *kobeloi*.

CIRCUMSTANCES OF LOSS

My wanderings in the vague direction of my lodgings in the Botanischer Garten, took me eventually to the sacred environs of the Elisabethkirche. In this atmosphere, late at night and after having imbibed generously at the CMS reception, I was in a state conducive to a religious experience. My state was no doubt enhanced by the discussions I had been hearing

¹ The first was discovered in Heidelberg. Cf. T.G. Palaima in: Laffineur – Niemeier, *Politeia* 699–670.



Fig. 1 MA Tn 249 A Linear B Tablet from Marburg.

among my fellow conferees about the iconography of divine epiphany on Minoan seals. At that very moment, I was startled to see before me a 'voluptuous lady' who asked me whether I had any needs she might fulfill. While considering her question, I continued walking and soon bumped directly into the railing erected by the good townsfolk of Marburg to keep distracted Aegeanists visiting the CMS headquarters from falling into das Schwarze Wasser. It protected me, but it jarred loose the newly discovered tablet which, like its soapy Germanic counterpart from Heidelberg, fell into the murky waters and is now 'sleeping with the fishes' *in profundis*.

RECONSTRUCTION

Fortunately my visual memory had been sharpened by several days of continual slide viewing, and this counteracted in part a perceptible weakening of my memory induced by

sanctuaries. The chief similarities are in format, phraseology, style and even in the graffiti occupying the bottom third of the *recto* surface.² Like PY Tn 316, MA Tn 249 lists a combination of object ideograms and human beings, and its text seems to be relating to events that took place in a sacred setting. On MA Tn 249 the graffiti appear to be a mixture of pictorial doodling³ and lexical elements. The tablet also resembles in some of its features many other such finds by its editor from far-flung congress sites like Calvi, Corsica, Naples, Italy, Philadelphia, Heidelberg and Liège.⁴

pa-ra-ki-ja-si The term is perhaps a *lapsus styli* of the scribe or even another *lapsus memoriae* of the discoverer/editor. I.e., I proposed at first to read *pa<-ra>-ki-ja-si* for *pa-ki-ja-si* which is the dative/locative plural of the famous cult territory in the Pylos tablets (including PY Tn 316) that is sacred chiefly to the *potnia*. *pa-ki-ja-ne* = Sphagianes, 'the place of slaughter' (cf. Greek σφάζω < **sphag*). But contextual parallels suggest that we rather have here a *hapax* toponym *Sphragianes*, i.e., not the 'place of slaughter', but the 'place of seals and sealings' (cf. Greek σφραγίς, σφραγίδος).

pi-ni, mu-ro-na-qe By position the phrase is most likely a pair of personal names. Neither is heretofore attested in the Mycenaean onomasticon. Neither the first-time toponym nor these first-time personal names should surprise us, given the paucity of data we so far have from German territory and the fact that even what we have are chance surface finds without clear archaeological contexts. We can suggest no Greek or Minoan or Anatolian or Luvian or Etruscan or Chinese interpretation for *pi-ni* and so leave it untranslated as *Pi-ni*. We invite suggestions from Mycenologists and even amateurs who usually occupy their minds with reading the Phaistos disk, Linear A or the Kafkania pebble. *mu-ro-na-qe* clearly ends with the enclitic conjunction *k^we* = 'and'. We interpret *mu-ro-na* consistent with *pa-ra-ki-ja-si* as evidence for a Greek settlement in this territory, or at least a Greek-speaking 'scribe'. We render this as Μυλωνάς, i.e., 'Miller'. Given the context, this is perhaps a translation from Germanic of a name like Müller. For a similar process, cf. the famous Greek critic and raconteur, Kimon Friar, whose father changed his family name from Καλόγερος to the English equivalent.

ma-wa-tu-de By size, position and form undoubtedly an allative place name (cf. the Thebes Wu sealings and Pylos Tn 316 and Khania Gq 5). For the *ma* element, we should think first of the possibility of interpreting it like the *ma* in *ma-ka* on the Thebes tablets and Knossos tablet F 51. We would then render the word here as '*ma*' = 'mother' + *wa-tu* = *wastu* 'town', i.e., a reference to a small *metro-polis*. Perhaps the 'mother-city' for the kind of activities performed in 'the place of seals and sealings'. The other alternative, derived from pouring over many *Landkarten* of the region, is to see here an attempt by the scribe to render the site of Mar-burg, again into a suitable Greek form. For such a hybrid, cf. the North American Indian and Greek elements in Minneapolis.

² T.G. Palaima in: S. Deger-Jalkotzy et al. (eds.), Floreant Studia Mycenaea. Akten des X. Internationalen Mykenologischen Colloquiums in Salzburg vom 1.–5. Mai 1995 (1999) 437–461.

³ On doodles on Linear B tablets, cf. T.G. Palaima in: Laffineur – Crowley, Εικόνων 63–75 Pls. XX–XXIII.

⁴ Cf. T.G. Palaima in: Laffineur, Polemos 507–511; Laffineur – Betancourt, Τέχνη 539–543; E. De Miro – L. Godart – A. Sacconi (eds.), Atti e memorie del secondo congresso internazionale di micenologia (1996) 1645–1648; Laffineur – Basch, Thalassa 4.

a-ko-si, pa-ra-ki-ti-ri-ja MUL 13 *pa-ra-ki-ta* 18 = ἄγουσι σφραγιστρίας WOMAN 13 σφραγίστας 18. Clearly the verbal form 'they lead' with plural for dual, a common confusion in traditional texts (cf. *Iliad* Book 9). There then follow the animate objects 13 women described as 'seal women' and 18 men described as 'seal men'. The 18 men lack an ideogram, but cf. the *Iconaean* lexicon wherein we find 'voluptuous lady', but no 'hunk', 'stud' *vel sim.* for a 'Mel-Gibson' kind of man.

na-wo-de pa-ra-ki-do This is a very odd phrase. The second word unit seems to derive from the same root as *pa-ra-ki-ja-si, pa-ra-ki-ti-ri-ja,* and *pa-ra-ki-ta*. It is either genitive singular σφραγίδος or genitive plural σφραγίδων. *na-wo + de* (cf. Jn 829 for the adjectival form *na-wi-jo*) refers apparently to the later Greek word *nawos* with the allative suffix indicating motion toward. Using the 'nothing-implied' *Iconaean* dialect, we are tempted to render this not as 'temple' or 'shrine' *vel sim.*, but as 'VIP lounge', the kind found in airports worldwide. While this would keep our translation 'assumption-free' with regard to perhaps unwarranted religious inferences – always a desirable objective in dealing with Aegean texts and Aegean seals and sealings – since there is no word or ideogram for *Flughafen* on the tablet, we shall render *na-wo-de pa-ra-ki-do* as 'to the shrine of seals', which we take as a reference to what the scribe might have otherwise rendered as the *ko mi mu si* or *Corpus der Minoischen und Mykenischen Siegel = CMMS*.

di-ja-re-ke<-se>-o, e-ne-ka, a-ko-ra-jo/-ja The first word seems to be a compound with a definite *lapsus styli* and the phrase should be rendered as: διαλεξέων ἔνεκα = 'for the sake of lectures'. The final word introduces a new textual feature to Mycenologists, the slash = /. The reference here is to the masculine and feminine plural of the adjectival form of the word ἄγορά. In the Mycenaean period this term has been attested only in the semantic sphere of livestock management. This may indicate that the 'seal men' and 'seal women' were herded together like cattle in a closed 'pen' and force fed, not on *cyperus*, as were Mycenaean sacrificial animals, but on intellectual fodder. Thereafter begins a list of what seem to be personal names, following procedures familiar from the Mycenaean A- and B-series.

ne-wo-te-ro VIR^{videns} 1 The first name is followed by a variant of the man ideogram which we here have designated VIR^{videns}. That is, it is the normal man ideogram with the highlighted attribute of a 'specky-eye'. Although the posture and form of the ideogram seems to hint at someone who is of at least middle age, the word that identifies this person is *ne-wo-te-ro* which translates unequivocally as 'younger'. Since age is a relative thing, perhaps this individual is 'younger' in comparison with true *ke-ro-te* or *gerontes* that took part in the 'seal festival'. The alternative is that this is a *sobriquet* or nickname for the 'seal man'. Cf. such expressions as 'old-timer' and even the American gangster Babyface Nelson.

ku-ru-su-zo-ko-ka MUL 1 The second name introduces us to a well-known principle among those who interpret Mycenaean texts, the principle that stipulates 'the longer the better' (cf. below on *pa-pa-ta-sa-ro-u-ka*). It also is an example of a well-known secret that few Mycenologists ever reveal to the general scholarly world, because it would diminish the esteem in which other scholars hold readers of this complex script and its early form of Greek mixed with loan words from Minoan, Anatolian, Semitic and Aegean substrate languages. That secret is that Linear B is easy to read if you just pronounce the characters fast and in a

steady stream. Following this procedure we come up with a name of something like 'Krsyzkoska' for this 'seal woman', obviously an inaccurate and desperate attempt by the scribe to render a name even more difficult to spell than Palaima.

ko-to-u-ra according to Mycenaean spelling rules could be rendered as 'Kostoula' *vel sim*. We are helped here by an accompanying ethnic adjective *pe-ti-ri-ja* which indicates that this 'seal woman' had something to do with a community known as Petri. The alternative, building on our suggestion for *ne-wo-te-ro*, is that the adjective here is likewise a *sobriquet*. Cf. the American baseball player Rocky Colavito and the Sylvester Stallone boxing character 'Rocky Balboa'. However, in keeping with Mycenological practice to suggest as many meanings as possible for even the most obvious word, we might propose that the adjective specifies that this 'seal woman' has a specialization in stone seals.

There then follows a unique ideogram, previously unattested, which we have rendered as *666. It has adjoined following it a raised lexical item *a-na-to-ri-ja-te*. The ideogram seems to be a seal stone with a particular kind of symbol incised. The scribe takes great pains to stress its non-Germanic associations and instead gives its provenience as *Anatolia-then*, i.e., 'from Anatolia'.

to-ro-pe-ja we interpret as we did *mu-ro-na*, i.e., as a Greek rendering of a non-Greek name. Here τροφεία = Foster. She is described as a 'seal woman' according to her area of interest: *a₃-ku-pi-ti-ja*, i.e., 'the Egyptian one'. She is also somehow associated by 'hyphen' to the site of *ma-ri-ja* or Mallia in Crete. This refers perhaps to a preoccupation with Egypto-Cretan connections.

po-u-sa pa-pa-ta-sa-ro-u-ka-qe we-ka-te-ri-jo The above hypothesis is confirmed by the following transparent names. We follow the rule of thumb in Linear B, 'the longer the better'. And the sequence *po-u-sa pa-pa-ta-sa-ro-u-ka-qe* leaves little doubt that we are dealing here with a pair of 'seal persons', a man named 'Poutsas' (we reject alternatives such as 'Poursat' by using the analogy of *mu-ro-na*) and a woman named 'Papatsaroucha'. The 'seal man' at Mallia perhaps supplements the notoriously poor salaries paid to academicians by shoe-making in his spare time. Again see among American sports figures, a jockey named Shoemaker. They are followed by the word *we-ka-te-ri-jo* = *wergasterion* or 'workshop'. This reinforces our idea that the academic here was bootmaking in a workshop at Mallia on the side, and even the 'seal woman' might have been making clothes to make ends meet, as her name would suggest.

ra-pi-ne-u ke ko-ro-re-u-qe *667 At long last we come to an item that we have come across before in the context of Linear B tablets from Aegeanist conference sites. I refer, of course, to the notorious *ra-pi-ne-u*, first attested in the famous Calvi tablet that was found, like the ring of Gyges, in the belly of a dolphin off the coast of Corsica. This name can only refer to the renowned *lawagertas* ('Volkssammler') of such conferences, Robert Laffineur. The name is followed by a phonetic adjunct *ke* which we interpret as an abbreviation for the Greek word γέρον, i.e., 'old man'. This lends some credibility to our proposal concerning the interpretation of the word *ne-wo-te-ro* in line .5. *ra-pi-ne-u* undoubtedly has prematurely aged because of the demands of conference scheduling and publication. He thus becomes the 'benchmark' against which to test age and vigor. It is somewhat odd to find him here in a non-leadership role, but there are good textual parallels in the Pylos E-series for variable status depending on situation. He has obviously here ceded his traditional function to *Pi-ni* and Müller.

ra-pi-ne-u is teamed here with an individual whose name we render as something like 'Crowley'. They are paired in front of another new ideogram that is followed by a stream of numbers. The ideogram is squarish and seems to have internal markings for something like a screen and keyboard. We interpret this new ideogram and the random numbers that follow as a composite ideogram for the 'idea' of computer. These two 'seal persons' undoubtedly made use of such computational devices in their presentations. Since there is no adjoined logogram for an apple and no adjoined phonograms *i* or *pe*, we are here confronted with another 'nothing-implied' rendering. The scribe perhaps did not know whether these 'seal persons' used Macintosh or IBM PC.

The graffiti on the bottom part of the tablet are best interpreted by iconographers and sigillographers. No doubt they will have to decide, with Jutta Wohlfeil, whether what we have here are *Inhaltsangabe* or the *Darstellung einer Geschichte*. I shall, however, make a few comments. It appears to me that the various elements are jottings or notations that refer to things seen by the scribe in the process of recording the actual text. Perhaps he participated as an observer in the 'seal festival' organized by *Pi-ni* and Mueller.

At the bottom right are a pair of seated individuals who seem to be in a posture so as to watch something on a screen. The motif resembles CMS VII No. 16. The individual behind left seem to be trying to prod the person in front right. The adjoining phonetic characters just above these seated figures read: *ze ze ze*. If we take *e* to be the 'dummy vowel' as in Cypriote Syllabic writing, our transliteration would be reduced to 'zzz'. The scribe then seems to have been trying to write onomatopoeically the sound of an individual snoring through a slide lecture. His companion behind him left seems to be trying to wake him up in order to save him from public embarrassment.

The seal drawn at the upper right indicates by its adjoining phonograms, to its right, that it was an acquisition by a 'seal man' named *ke-na*, whatever way that short name is to be rendered.⁵

The seal and characters drawn along the left-hand side of the bottom of the *recto* betray clear Cypriote Bronze and Iron Age associations. At the lower left we find a proud "maker's inscription" of the form known heretofore on vases and dedications of all kinds from historical Greece and Cyprus, but not from the Bronze Age. It reads in Linear B:

.1 o-ri-wi-je

.2 me-ku-ru-pe-se.

I interpret this as a phenomenon quite different from *mu-ro-na*, *to-ro-pe-ja*, *po-u-sa* and perhaps *pe-ti-ri-ja* in the text proper, wherein names from other languages were translated into Greek. Here the original name is rendered in Mycenaean syllables. So the text reads 'Ολιφιτεγ μῆγλυψε, i.e., 'Olivier incised me'. This would seem to refer to someone known as the 'olive man' who proclaims himself incisor of the Cypriote-related material.

⁵ The corollary to 'the longer the better' is of course 'the shorter the worse'.

The centerpiece of the whole bottom area is a cultic scene which seems to represent, according to a new way of looking at it, a 'voluptuous lady' with upraised arms standing beneath a tree while a string of bees buzz by on the way between their pithos-hive and the pollen on the tree's blossoms. This interpretation gains some support by its juxtaposition with the inscription *ze ze ze*. All Mycenaean scribes like to do as little work as possible, and it seems that this scribe broke off listing all the participants in this seal festival in order to give a kind of pictorial tableau as a summary of the events. When he was forced to write to give the summary of a particular talk, he made sure that his writing 'would go far', or in this case, 'smash two bees with a single swat'. The *ze ze ze* thus is cleverly used to mimic the sound of the sleeping academician and to capture the buzzing of the bees. We might also hazard a guess that at least this portion of the tableau is narrative. I suggest that the two figures in viewing posture are 'seal men'. The front man is sleeping through this particular lecture. When, however, a voluptuous lady is finally shown on the screen, his friend reaches forward to say, "Hey, wake up and look at her!" We can imagine that this is a clear case of cultural continuity in male human behavior from the Minoan Bronze Age into the last year of the now old millennium.

CONCLUSION

As with all newly discovered artifacts of unknown provenience, there undoubtedly will be questions about the authenticity of tablet MA Tn 249. In my own opinion, the reference to *ra-pi-ne-u* and the high degree of ingenuity demonstrated by the scribe in both textual and iconographical communication argue in favor of the authenticity of the tablet. We should recall that even singleton finds from controlled excavations, like the Phaistos disk, the Kafkania pebble, and, to cite a Germanic example, the cup of Pheidias from Olympia, have been the subject of considerable debate about their authenticity. We firmly believe that the 'truth will out', and we can point to the parallelism of inscribed tablets and even an inscribed 'galet' or Belgian waffle from other Aegeanist conference sites in order to argue in favor of the genuineness of the piece.

I apologize here for violating the practice in recent years whereby the publication of important newly discovered inscriptions either takes five to ten years or is done simultaneously and confusingly by at least three sets of scholars. Since I myself am no longer a *ne-wo-te-ro*, I have the outmoded notion, taken from excavators and scholars like Ventris, Bennett, Lang, Chadwick, Killen, Godart, Sacconi and Olivier in the 1950's through 1970's, that it is important to get a good working publication of important discoveries into the hands of other scholars as quickly as possible.

I thank the organizers and all who made the 1999 Marburg symposium be so productive. Their hospitality, personal warmth, and gracious hard work will live on in all of our memories without any *lapsus* whatsoever. I also thank them and my fellow conferees for their senses of humor that attest to an eternal verity: *il est permis de rire entre mycénologues et sigillologues*.