

THE PALAEOGRAPHY OF MYCENAEAN INSCRIBED SEALINGS
FROM THEBES AND PYLOS,
THEIR PLACE WITHIN THE MYCENAEAN ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM
AND THEIR LINKS WITH THE EXTRA-PALATIAL SPHERE

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Κάτι λίγο ψυχῆς μέσα στήν ἄργιλλο
O. Elytis, *TO AXION ESTI*

Sealings have a long history as information devices within both pre-literate and literate ancient economic administration.¹ Within cultures that make use of writing to organize and oversee economic activities, uninscribed sealings may work independently or quasi-independently of written record-keeping and they may serve as non-literate controlling mechanisms within established systems of economic relationships and transactions.² Within the Aegean this would seem to account for the apparently greater use and greater typological diversity of sealings³ in the Minoan Neopalatial period, when centralized written record-keeping on clay tablets appears to be at a 'simpler' stage of application or development, than in the Mycenaean full-palatial period, when the complexity, internal structural diversity, and degree of 'systems-dominance' of written administrative records on clay have increased.⁴

* Source of Illustrations. *Fig. 1*: MOPS, Pylos Pl. 12 and PASP Archives (Courtesy of University of Cincinnati and Emmett L. Bennett, Jr.); *Fig. 2*: MOPS, Pylos Pl. 11 and PASP Archives; *Fig. 3*: MOPS, Pylos Pl. 36 and PASP Archives; *Fig. 4*: MOPS, Pylos Pl. 36; *Fig. 5*: MOPS, Pylos Pl. 9; *Fig. 6 a. b*: C. Piteros – J.L. Melena – J.-P. Olivier, BCH 114, 1990, 116, 129, and PASP Archives (Courtesy of University of Cincinnati and Emmett L. Bennett, Jr.); *Fig. 7*: PASP Archives (Courtesy of University of Cincinnati and Emmett L. Bennett, Jr.). Scanning and Composition (*Figs. 1–3, 6 a. b; 7*) by Kevin Pluta.

¹ Conveniently surveyed in the review of Near Eastern and Aegean sealing use at Ebla, Umma, Lagash, Ugarit and Thebes within the context of the long pre-literate tradition for sealing use from Tell Buqras (7th millennium B.C.E.) and Tell Sabi Abyad (6th millennium B.C.E.) through Arslantepe and Phaistos by P. Ferioli – E. Fiandra in: P. Ferioli – E. Fiandra – G.G. Fissore (eds.), *Administration in Ancient Societies. Proceedings of Session 218 of the 13th International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (1996)* 87–111. Cf. the papers in: Ferioli, *Archives Before Writing* (1994).

² Cf. T.G. Palaima in: Ferioli (supra n. 1) 307–337, 355–361.

³ Cf. Hallager, *Minoan Roundel I*, 21–26 for the typology of Minoan sealings. Of the chief categories, the 'roundel' and the 'flat-based nodule' are not used in Mycenaean palatial administration. Cf. also I. Schoep, *AJA* 103, 1999, 205–209 Tab. 1 and Fig. 3.

⁴ The definition and role of 'archives' and other collections of written records within Linear B administrative systems and the place of inscribed sealings within this administration is reexamined at length by T.G. Palaima in: M. Brosius – A.K. Bowman (eds.), *Archives and Archival Tradition: Concepts of Record-Keeping in the Ancient World* (forthcoming). For a convenient overview of Record-Keeping in the Aegean, cf. T.G. Palaima in: Palaima, *ASSA* 83–104 Pls. VII–XV.

Judging from the find-contexts of sealings, the economic transactional vocabulary and subjects recorded on inscribed sealings,⁵ and the find-contexts of inscribed (and uninscribed) sealings in the Mycenaean full-palatial period, sealings were used primarily in what we would define economically or administratively as 'second-level' or 'semi-independent' organizational units, i.e., workshops, storerooms and production areas, where we also find 'deposits' of tablets as opposed to 'archives' or 'pre-archives',⁶ or they were employed at the interface between the economic and bureaucratic interests of the centralized palatial administration and those of outlying individuals, whether 'private' or 'official', and outlying communities and institutions. Such hierarchical systems of transactional relationships can be schematized as follows, so long as we are aware that the actual systems in operation were much more complex.⁷

Viewed macro-economically we have:

- (a) central regional controlling sites
- (b) principal second-order centers in control of sub-regions or districts
- (c) lesser settlements or areas within these districts

Micro-economically we have:

at the top level (a) officials at, from or representing centers and settlements of any order (e.g., *e-qe-ta*, *ko-re-te-re*, *po-ro-ko-re-te-re*, *qa-si-re-we*, *du-ma-te*, *da-mo-ko-ro*);

at the middle level (b) workshops (e.g., linen and woolen cloth) and their stewards, collectives and collector/owners, guilds and their leaders, production centers (e.g., olive oil and stirrup jars), land-lessors of various status and the local community organization, the *da-mo*, that controlled land allotments (and their equivalent at Pylos: a group of high-ranking *te-re-ta*);

at the bottom (c) the smallest units (individual shepherds, bronzesmiths, cloth-workers, tree-cutters, agricultural workers and specialty crafts personnel).

⁵ On the contents and transactional vocabulary in Mycenaean sealings, cf. T.G. Palaima in: P. Ferioli – E. Fiandra – G.G. Fissore (supra n. 1) 37–66 and in: M. Perna (ed.), *Administrative Documents in the Aegean and Their Near Eastern Counterparts*, Proceedings of the International Colloquium, Naples, February 29–March 2, 1996 (1999) 229–244.

⁶ 'Second-level' at least in relationship to posited centralized and overarching *loci* of administrative control. The definition of the 'houses' at Mycenae in relation to 'palatial administration' remains problematical. Of the 165 sealings attested at Pylos, only 22 have writing upon them. Only a single inscribed sealing and a mere 19 sealings total, including object sealings, were found in the two-room Archives Complex at Pylos. Cf. J.-P. Olivier and I. Pini in: MOPS, Pylos 71–72 nn. 12–14; pp. 92. 101–102 Tabelle 4. Compare the small number (4) of inscribed sealings (Wm and Ws) from the major tablet collection in the Room of the Chariot Tablets at Knossos, an area that might function as a 'pre-archives'. J. Diessen, *The Scribes of the Room of the Chariot Tablets at Knossos*, *Supplementos a Minos* 16 (2000) 22–27. 284–285.

⁷ For discussion of this basic schema of transactional relationships among administrative units and officials or persons at different levels within Mycenaean regional micro- or macro-economies, cf. T.G. Palaima in: P.H. Ilievski – L. Crepajac (eds.), *Tractata Mycenaea*. Proceedings of the 8th International Colloquium on Mycenaean Studies (1987) 249–266. For a proposed three-level scheme of Minoan administration (centralized, decentralized and 'private'), cf. I. Schoep (supra n. 3) 206 Tab. 2.

In daily operation, sealings could have been called into use among transactants at or between any levels in the above organizational schema. Further complexity would have been introduced by institutional factors. For example, we know that within the 'livestock' and landholding and bronze-production sectors of the Mycenaean economy, certain materials or individuals were designated as *po-ti-ni-ja-we-jo/-ja* (e.g., PY Eb 364.1, Ep 613.14 and Eq 213.5; PY Jn 310.14 and Jn 431.16; KN Dl 930.A, Dl 933.A, Dl 943.A etc.), i.e., within the sphere of the deity known as *po-ti-ni-ja*. Other materials or resources were associated with individuals whom we identify as 'collectors' or with other individuals whom the documents identify as **qa-si-re-we*. In the landholding sphere, we find categories such as *te-re-ta*, *o-na-te-re*, *ko-to-no-o-ko*, *ko-to-ne-ta*, *ko-to-ne-we*, *ka-ma-a-we*, and *wa-na-ka-te-ro* craftspersons. In the so-called 'religious' sphere, at least the *ka-ra-wi-po-ro* ('key-bearers'), the *i-je-re-ja* ('priestesses') and the *du-ma-te* – to judge from their activities in PY Jn 829 and PY Ep 705 – had responsibilities that called for them to be recorded in central documents relating to important economic matters that might have used sealings at other stages. These designations carry transactional implications that far exceed our abilities to understand them through simple explanatory schemata.

Likewise, macroeconomically, the presence in Mycenaean regional territories of sanctuaries and structures within sanctuaries is well-attested in tablets and series of tablets from Pylos, Knossos, Khania and Thebes, e.g., PY Jn 829, PY Tn 316, KN Fp 1 + 31, and the TH Of series (and perhaps Gg 7792 if we really are to read *wo-ko-de* in line .a).⁸ These appear in most tablets as the destinations for 'offerings' (oil, honey, ceremonial vessels) or materials (wool). But in PY Jn 829 **na-wo* (the later Greek word for 'temple') in each of the sixteen main Pylian districts are designated as sources for recycled bronze and relevant 'secular' and 'religious' officials are charged by the central administration with seeing to its collection and delivery to the central administration. The interface between the 'secular' and 'religious' spheres in such transactions would have brought sealings into use.

Recent work with the Thebes sealings and selected tablets from Pylos (Un 2. Un 47. Un 138. Ua 25) and Knossos (C-tablets) that are representative of the kinds of 'central' records that would have been compiled from the information furnished by inscribed or uninscribed sealings has made clear some, but not all aspects, of the role of sealings in the administrative process.⁹ The most striking point is that the information furnished by the 56 inscribed Thebes sealings, all of which were found together in a batch with four uninscribed sealings (60 total sealings), relates collectively to the kind of aggregate list of foodstuffs for a commensal banqueting ceremony represented by PY Un 138.¹⁰ That is, in some direct or indirect way, the collected data from the individual sealings, each apparently devised for and used within a

⁸ The basic article remains S. Hiller in: Hägg – Marinatos, SC 95–126. Cf. also T.G. Palaima in: J.M. Fossey – M.B. Cosmopoulos (eds.), *Boiotia Antiqua VII–VIII* (forthcoming) and in: S. Deger-Jalkotzy et al. (eds.), *Florent Studia Mycenaea. Akten des X. Internationalen Mykenologischen Colloquiums in Salzburg vom 1.–5. Mai 1995* (1999) 437–461.

⁹ C. Piteros – J.L. Melena – J.-P. Olivier, BCH 114, 1990, 103–184; J.T. Killen in: J.-P. Olivier (ed.), *Mykenaiika*, BCH Suppl. 25 (1992) 365–380; J.T. Killen, BICS 39, 1994, 67–84.

¹⁰ Killen (supra n. 9) 72.

single transactional procedure, were intentionally exploited as sources of information at 'higher' levels of the central palatial administration. Yet just as interesting as the information extracted from the inscribed sealings is the particular information in them that is *ignored* or *edited out* at 'higher' or 'more centralized' levels of administrative control. This is a key point in assessing how sealings and those who wrote on sealings fit into the overall picture of economic record-keeping.

Within a closed system wherein the significant details of the transactions involved were all understood by the parties charged with recording and keeping or transmitting information, the kind of data-collection procedures represented by the sealings could have worked without writing. For example, if a limited enough range of items were to be furnished, the terms for the items were set and either exceptionless or limited in range, and the individuals or institutions involved (including their intermediaries) were known and/or identifiable by the seal impressions, then writing need not enter into the process at all. We are speaking here, of course, about the use of sealings on a limited scale. But if, as the Thebes sealings and the vocabulary of the Un and other tablets series suggest, items were due under various conditions, and the terms of obligations, institutions and transactants (and individuals who were secondarily involved with the transactants) varied with enough complexity, then writing might be called into use in order to make clear the specific details.

We can see what I mean by considering the subset of Thebes sealings that relate to pigs. If the process only involved collecting individual pigs under set conditions from a number of transactants identifiable by the seal impressions, then one could devise a procedure whereby sealings associated with male and female pigs were stored separately and were then further divided spatially within these sets by any meaningful variation in age or condition and then according to any meaningful differences in terms of obligations or benefits derived by the transactants. However, since the transactions that lay behind the Thebes sealings involved different kinds of animals, many different sources, many different terms of transaction, and a wide geographical sphere of operation, their complexity exceeded the information capacities of the sealings themselves. So writing was introduced as an ancillary tool for data processing.

Even within the subset of sealings relating to pigs, the information provided by the inscriptions is rather bewildering. TH Wu 68 (seal F 'palaeographical grouping'¹¹ δ) specifies in writing that the sealing relates to a 'fatted' pig (SUS + SI) that was an animal from a 'collection' (*a-ko-ra-jo*). TH Wu 52 is an identical sealing in seal (F), 'pg' (δ) and text. This helps to establish the correlation between one sealing and one animal. TH Wu 58 (seal C 'pg' α) indicates that a generic pig (SUS with no further indication of gender, age or quality) was 'finished' (*o-pa*)¹² by an individual – we do not know whether he is the owner or only a secondarily responsible party – named *qe-ri-jo*, and that the animal had some connection with the site of Amarunthos, presumably in Euboea (*a-ma-ru-to*). The immediate question, of

¹¹ Hereafter abbreviated 'pg'. Piteros et al. (supra n. 9) 137–147, esp. 146–147, are very careful to stress that the evidence provided by the inscriptions on the Thebes sealings for the study of 'hands' is severely limited and consequently the designations by Greek alphabetic letters are to be taken as associated stylistic groups rather than 'scribes'.

¹² J.T. Killen in: S. Deger-Jalkotzy et al. (supra n. 8) 325–341.

course, is why the information about the personal name and the locale is necessary here and not on Wu 52 and 68.

The inscription on Thebes Wu 60 (seal J 'pg' ζ) informed the relevant administrators that the male pig (SUS^m) with which the sealing was associated was 'under the control of' (*pa-ro*) an individual named **sa-me-u*. The inscription on TH Wu 63 (seal E 'pg' β) stipulates that the female pig (SUS^f) for which it was manufactured was somehow associated with a 'collective' (here simply the noun-form *a-ko-ra*) and seemingly that the animal had 'to be paid (as a religious penalty)' (*qe-te-o*).¹³ The inscription of TH Wu 47 (seal D 'pg' γ?) records that a male pig (SUS^m) was 'under the control of' (*pa-ro*) an individual named *te-qa-jo*. It further contains the rather inscrutable term *ro-we-wi-ja* (found on three sealings and most likely a descriptive term parallel to *e-qi-ti-wo-e*, *i-je-ra/-ro*, *po-ro-e-ko-to*).¹⁴

Sealing Wu 51 (seal D 'pg' γ) registers a male pig and then records 'to be paid (as a religious penalty)' and a toponym specifying destination *te-qa-de* ('to Thebes'). It further complicates our understanding of this material because the form of the word for 'payment' here is *qe-te-a₂* and can only be interpreted as a neuter plural or a nominative feminine singular, so that in neither case would the term properly modify the animal recorded. Wu 96 is an identical sealing in seal (D), in 'pg' (γ) and in text, except for the fact that the animal in this case is female. If these documents were made and inscribed at about the same time, Wu 96 could account for the gender confusion in the form of 'payment' terminology on Wu 51. However, the designation 'to Thebes' on these two sealings would seem superfluous from the viewpoint of a central administration at Thebes that was ready to receive animals obviously required of outlying individuals, collectives, flocks and/or communities. It would make sense from the point of view of the 'point of origin' or an 'intermediate point' wherein animals destined 'for Thebes' and animals headed elsewhere were being differentiated both in reality and in textual annotation on accompanying sealings. And in fact this hypothesis finds some confirmation in a sealing related by seal (D) and 'pg' (γ) which records a female goat (CAP^f) and the allative destination *a₂-pa-a₂-de*, which is most likely to be interpreted as */Haphai-has-de/* or 'to the site of *Haphai*', whether a site separate from Thebes or even a locale, such as a sanctuary, within the immediate territory of Thebes.¹⁵ But then we have as an added complication to figure out why a sealing associated with an animal going to *Haphai* became part of a collection of sealings at Thebes proper.

Wu 55 (seal H 'pg' unidentified) records a male pig and the toponym *ka-ru-to*, seemingly Karastos in Euboea. Unlike Wu 58, which also recorded a Euboean toponym, there is no written specification here of the person responsible or the nature/condition of the animal (in contrast to *o-pa* on Wu 58). Wu 66 (also Seal H 'pg' unidentified) registers a male pig and the apparent descriptive term *i-je-ro*, the exact nuances of which are difficult to figure out. It most likely implies that the animal is somehow considered 'sacred' and in the domain of the gods,

¹³ W.F. Hutton, *Minos* 25–26, 1990–1991, 105–132.

¹⁴ Piteros et al. (supra n. 9) 156–160. It may relate to the particular coloring agent used to tint the leather hide (sc. *di-pte-ra*) of the animal, thus explaining the feminine form of *ro-we-wi-ja* despite the male gender of the animal. But we must then ask why such information about 'hides' is recorded explicitly here and not elsewhere.

¹⁵ Piteros et al. (supra n. 9) 153 and n. 173.

rather than of humans.¹⁶ Whether this pertains, however, to where and the way in which the animals were raised or to the ultimate use of the animals is not clear. There is a third lexical item on Wu 66, unfortunately now illegible.

Wu 75 (seal G 'pg' unidentified) specifies 'male pig' and in the single additional entry (*e-qi-ti-wo-e*) a descriptive term (in the dual or the plural) indicating that the animals had 'died of consumption'.¹⁷ As in the Near and Middle East, animals had to be accounted for *even*, and from the point of view of the responsible 'collector' *especially*, when they had died. In order to preserve the hypothesis that one sealing stands for one 'live' animal, we might assume that when animals had died, they were dealt with collectively, i.e., their carcasses were inspected and certification by means of a sealing was then attached to the hides. Nonetheless it is surprising in a Mycenaean economic sector wherein livestock in remote flocks are recorded in precise detail, that no indication is given here of the number. For that reason, I believe it is best to interpret *e-qi-ti-wo-e* as a dual. For then the lexical item in and of itself would specify the *exact* number: 2. The potential ambiguity of it referring to an undefined plurality of animals would not have even been considered by administrators within the closed record-keeping environment in which the sealings were used.¹⁸

The collection of Thebes sealings has rightly been compared with PY Un 138, PY Un 2 and PY Un 47 which represent centrally compiled information about foodstuffs for commensal banqueting, both animals and other foods.¹⁹ The numbers of total animals represented by the appropriate *inscribed* Thebes sealings (53) and recorded on PY Un 138 (53) are identical and the variety of animals is reasonably similar. This makes it likely enough that the assembled sealings have to do with centrally organized activities or events like those recorded on PY Un 2, Un 47 and Un 138. However, the aggregate number in the Thebes sealings is derived from individual documents that have heterogeneous information of the sort just surveyed in the sample relating to pigs. PY Un 138.1 specifies in its heading that foodstuffs and animals registered in its opening section are:

pu-ro , *qe-te-a₂* , *pa-ro* , *du-ni-jo*

Pylos / 'to be paid (as a religious penalty)' / 'under the control of' / *du-ni-jo*.

du-ni-jo would seem to be an individual in the Hither Province of the Pylian palatial territory who holds the rank of *du-ma*, an office of considerable importance ranking with the provincial *ko-re-te-re* in other contexts (PY Jn 829, On 300) and generally translated rather generically as 'overseer' or 'supervisor'.²⁰

¹⁶ Piteros et al. (supra n. 9) 157 and n. 210.

¹⁷ Piteros et al. (supra n. 9) 156–157.

¹⁸ On the understanding of information from inscriptions within a closed administrative/economic context, cf. the parallel of the inscribed stirrup jars: P. van Alfen, *Minos* 31–32, 1996–1997, 251–274.

¹⁹ Piteros et al. (supra n. 9) 173–183. Killen (supra n. 9) Mykenaiika, 369.

²⁰ M. Lindgren, *The People of Pylos* (1973) I, 43–44; II, 40–41. Lindgren thinks that the proposed 'temple connections' of the *du-ma* are "impossible to prove" and "not very likely". Nonetheless one can cite the alternation between the *ko-re-te-re* and *du-ni-jo* on On 300 and the textual ordering of the officials names on Jn 829 to make a stronger case for the associations of the *du-ma-te* with 'the religious sphere'. On the etymology and probable meanings of *du-ma/da-ma* and compound forms in Linear B, cf. C.J. Ruijgh in: Ilievski – Crepajac (supra n. 7) 299–322.

It is possible that the pertinent Pylos Un tablets and the Thebes sealings are operating at different scales, so that at Thebes we might expect there would have existed eventually *either*:

1. a single tablet that ignores the heterogeneous terms for contribution of the animals and flatly lists their numbers, *or*
2. a series of tablets that summarize individually the animals which are respectively *qe-te-o a-ko-ra*, *te-qa-de qe-te-a₂*, *pa-ro sa-me-we*, *pa-ro te-qa-jo*, *a-ko-ra-jo*, and so forth.

If the former is true, then that would reinforce the hypothesis that much of the information on the sealings was essential within the particular transactions, but would have been 'edited out' or virtually 'ignored' in higher level data processing at the palatial center. In the latter case, we would argue that the information still was 'transactional specific' in its origin and intent, but that it was at least partially retained in central record-keeping. We would at Thebes only have documentation for at most 7 animals 'paid as a (religious) penalty' (*qe-te-o/-a₂*) as opposed to 53 such animals on PY Un 138. In either case, and undoubtedly in all sorts of possible variants between these two extremes, it is clear that sealings, at least in some instances, were used at the interface between the higher or more centralized levels of bureaucracy and individuals and institutions at lower or outer levels.

We should also draw attention to the fact that the other pertinent Pylos tablets further add to the picture of transactional heterogeneity: Un 47 records foodstuffs and livestock under the heading:

ro-u-so , *ro-u-si-jo* , *a-ko-ro* [
Lousos or *Lousoi* / the *Lousian agros* vel sim.

Here then we have specification of one of the nine main districts in the Hither Province of Pylos and some form of institutional collective or at least sub-unit within this district. Un 2, of course, famously specifies that the context for the list is:

pa-ki-ja-si , *mu-jo-me-no* , *e-pi* , *wa-na-ka-te*
at *Sphagianes* 'on the occasion of the initiation of the *wanaks*' vel sim.²¹

It then records in line .2: *a-pi-e-ke* , *o-pi-te-<u>ke-e-u*, or that an official known as the *o-pi-te-u-ke-e-u* somehow is involved with these particular materials.

Consequently, it is possible to reconstruct an entire record-keeping process in the other direction. Involved in the transactions that ended up with the information recorded on these two tablets (and Un 138) would have been sealings specifying parties or institutions making contributions or deliveries, under a variety of obligations, to the *Lousian agros* or to the district of *Sphagianes* or directly to the individual designated as the *o-pi-te-<u>ke-e-u*, i.e. to more centralized authorities or institutions or their designates.

If then we imagine at least some of our surviving inscribed and uninscribed sealings being made and used by functionaries, transactants, workers, officials and/or representatives of

²¹ T.G. Palaima in: Rehak, The Role of the Ruler 131–133.

collective groups or organizations operating at the edges of, or even outside of, the centralized administration and within traditional and long-established transactional networks (besides the Thebes sealings, we can cite the PY Wr sealings that relate to wine, the sealings from the PY NE Workshop pertaining to spear shafts, wood materials and livestock or leather, the MY Wt sealings relating to various kinds of vases and containers from the House of the Sphinxes, and the Knossos Ws sealings from the Arsenal relating to *o-pa* work with javelins [*pa-ta-ja*]), then we might ask whether there is any reflection of the administrative status of the inscribed sealings in their palaeography.

Here I wish to make explicit mention of three points where the work of other scholars has been important in my thinking. Emmett L. Bennett, Jr. raised the question of sealing palaeography with me in the course of his recent work with the history of the ideogram for wine in Minoan and Mycenaean writing. He specifically observed that certain of the wine ideograms from the Wine Magazine at Pylos have a more 'archaic' appearance than the ideograms found commonly in the tablets from the Archives Complex.²²

Secondly, Jean-Pierre Olivier and his collaborators have stressed the extreme difficulty in making palaeographical identifications and associations within the Linear-B inscribed sealings.²³ The factors include:

1. the 'facets' of the nodules provide limited space for writing;
2. the writing surfaces are not smooth and relatively level as on the tablets, but are concave or slightly to extremely convex;
3. the conditions under which the nodules were manufactured and manipulated would have made writing difficult;
4. the limitations of space preclude lengthy inscriptions, thus limiting the repertory of signs that can be used for palaeographical identification.

It is worth quoting the following observation and drawing an important corollary from it:²⁴

Et ses contraintes ont sans doute aussi favorisé le choix des formes les plus simples: ainsi pratiquement pas de lignes redoublées inutilement, presque pas de fioritures.

The corollary is that if, under conditions so unfavorable to even minimally complex sign forms, the writers of the texts on the sealings choose to use an elaborate form (e.g., with extra flourishes or redoubled elements), they must have been influenced to do so either by their habitual manner of writing or by some special factors in the immediate context in which the sealings and their inscriptions were made and used.

Thirdly, if we wish to make even some few comparisons between the writing on the sealings and the writing of 'scribes' within the central administration, we are further constrained by other factors. For Mycenae and Thebes we perhaps do not have any or any

²² Per litteras.

²³ Piteros et al. (supra n. 9) 137–147. Cf. also J.-P. Olivier in: MOPS, Pylos 71.

²⁴ Piteros et al. (supra n. 9) 137.

appreciable documentation of 'higher-order' or 'centralized-palatial' administrative palaeography and must use the small samples of writing on tablets furnished by 'deposit documents of the TH Of and Ug series'²⁵ or by the tablets from the various 'houses' at Mycenae and our impressions of a mainland 'koiné' style.²⁶

Still I think it is worthwhile to make a start at such a comparative palaeography, if only because Jean-Pierre Olivier has recently called attention to the difficulty of estimating the degree to which the Mycenaean inscribed sealings from Pylos are related to the mechanisms of palatial administration:

"Sie setzen sich demnach nicht aus Depots *stricto sensu* zusammen; es handelt sich dabei um solche *membra disiecta*, die allein selbst im günstigen Fall (demjenigen des «Wine Magazine», «Room 105») nicht zu den Mechanismen der palatialen Verwaltung weiterführen, selbst wenn man mit größtmöglichem Scharfsinn eine Beweisführung versuchte: diese Tonplomben befanden sich entweder nur vorübergehend an der Stelle ihrer Auffindung, oder sie waren dort durch Zufall hingeraten (Stücke, die der Beseitigung entgangen sind), so daß man sie nur spekulativ mit den Aktivitäten an den Stellen in Verbindung bringen kann, an denen sie sich nur vorübergehend oder zufällig befanden".²⁷

It is in the nature of sealings to be 'transitory' and 'temporary' and preliminary records that would be affected, and affected quickly, as Fissore has pointed out, by the "regular rhythms of use and discard" that characterize ancient economic archives.²⁸ The find-spots of many of the sealings can be viewed as 'accidental' if they are divorced from any specific contextual evidence for intentional grouping of the sort that is clear for the Thebes sealings, and we might imagine that the Thebes sealings would have been quickly discarded once they had served their purpose in information-checking or record-compiling.

Even when the association of an inscribed sealing with its archaeological context is clear from the nature of its inscription and the function of the particular context (e.g., PY Wr 1437 with *AREPA* found in the oil storage area Room 24) the isolation or textual brevity of the sealing can pose an insurmountable problem to understanding its specific purpose or determining whether its survival was simply a chance oversight within the normal use and discard process. Again we might make a virtue of necessity. If the sealings are so 'transitorily' connected with centralized or higher-level administrative procedures, it will surely be interesting to note, wherever we can, palaeographical peculiarities that either link or de-link the sealings from the prevailing writing styles of tablet-writers working at higher-level or central administrative tasks.

Here I shall deal with a few cases from Pylos and Thebes.

²⁵ L. Godart – A. Sacconi (eds.), *Les tablettes en linéaire B de Thèbes* (1978). We await the definitive publication of the ca. 250 Thebes tablets discovered by V. Aravantinos and his collaborators between autumn 1993 and spring 1995. Cf. L. Godart – A. Sacconi, *CRAI* 1996, 99–113.

²⁶ A. Sacconi, *Corpus delle iscrizioni in lineare B di Micene* (1974).

²⁷ MOPS, Pylos 70.

²⁸ G.G. Fissore in: Ferioli (supra n. 1) 345.

PYLOS

1. Wr 1457 Archives Complex Room 8.

Wr 1457 is the only inscribed sealing that comes from the central Archives Complex.²⁹ The writing upon it is clearly consistent with the style of Hand 2 (especially the form of the sign *pu*), the 'scribe' responsible for the important Ma series of tablets that record taxation assessments of 6 commodities from the principal districts of the Hither and Further Province, amounts delivered, amounts due and specific exemptions. There is a clear link in the contents of the text inscribed on Wr 1457 as well. It records *152 (ox-hide) and the term *a-pu-do-si* for 'payment' toward said assessments, as found also on four of the Ma tablets (Ma 123, Ma 222, Ma 346, and Ma 393). The discovery of this sealing, inscribed by so prominent a tablet-writer, in the Archives Complex, at least indicates that sealings were used at some stage of the information-gathering process involved in regional taxation and that the tablet-writer himself made use of sealings. It does not, however, explicitly record the name of the district, and we do not know what particular identification is conveyed by the seal impression itself, i.e., whether it refers to an official representing the interests of a provincial district, a responsible official of the central administration charged with collecting the assessments, or a 'scribal' administrator connected with the central archives.

2. Wr 1360 Wine Magazine Room 105 (Fig. 1).

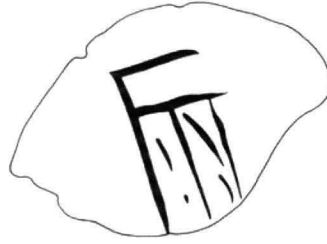
Wr 1360 is associated palaeographically with La 628 and 640 (currently assigned to S628 Ciii) from Room 6 (= Throne Room). There are distinctive forms of both the sign *ti* and the sign *me* on Wr 1360.β. *ti* written with two central strokes is paralleled at Pylos only on tablet La 628. But the ideogram for wine VIN on Wr 1360 conforms to a common style. We should also note that the spelling of the descriptive term (or less likely a personal name) *me-ri-ti-jo* runs counter to the palatially focused 'normal' Mycenaean dialect treatment associated with the social milieu of the palatial centers in which we would expect *ti > si*.³⁰ This would reinforce the opinion formed from the palaeographical evidence, that Wr 1360 shows non-centralized features shared with the La and Ae tablets from Room 6.

²⁹ MOPS, Pylos Pl. 13 No. 32.

³⁰ On the interpretation of the 'dialect' evidence from Pylos in relationship to 'tablet-writers' and the sociolinguistic situation in LH IIIB Messenia, cf. T.G. Palaima in: J. Bennet – J. Driessen (eds.), *Economy and Society of Mycenaean Polities*. Studies Presented to John T. Killen (forthcoming), and R.J.E. Thompson, *Minos* 31–32, 1996–1997, 313–333.



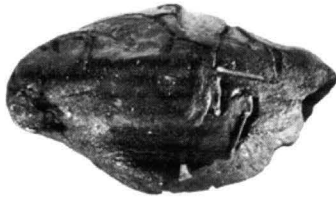
31 C/Wr 1360.α



31 C/Wr 1360.β



PY La 628



31 C/Wr 1360.γ



Fig. 1 PY Wr 1360 and PY La 628.

3. Wr 1359 Wine Magazine Room 105 (Fig. 2).

Wr 1359 has a distinctive form of VIN on face . α . Notice the difference from the standard form of VIN on Wr 1360 above. Face . β has very simple and almost 'primitive' forms of signs in the *hapax e-ti-wa-i*! The form of VIN is associated with the forms of TELA + *TE* and *te* in tablets La 624 and La (formerly Xa) 627 of the La series (also from Room 6) assigned now to Hand 13. La (formerly Xa) 633 (Hand 13) shows a spelling with *ti*: *ti-nwa-ti*! vs. spellings with 'palatial' Mycenaean *si* in the tablets of major scribes of the three main palaeographical 'schools' or classes at Pylos: *ti-nwa-si-ja* (Hands 1 and 21) and *ti-nwa-si-jo* (Hands 1 and 43). Compare this spelling with the spelling of *me-ri-ti-jo* above on Wr 1360. Again a palaeographically distinctive inscribed sealing found in a storage area on the periphery of the main palatial megaron structure also exhibits a potentially 'non-palatial' dialect feature.

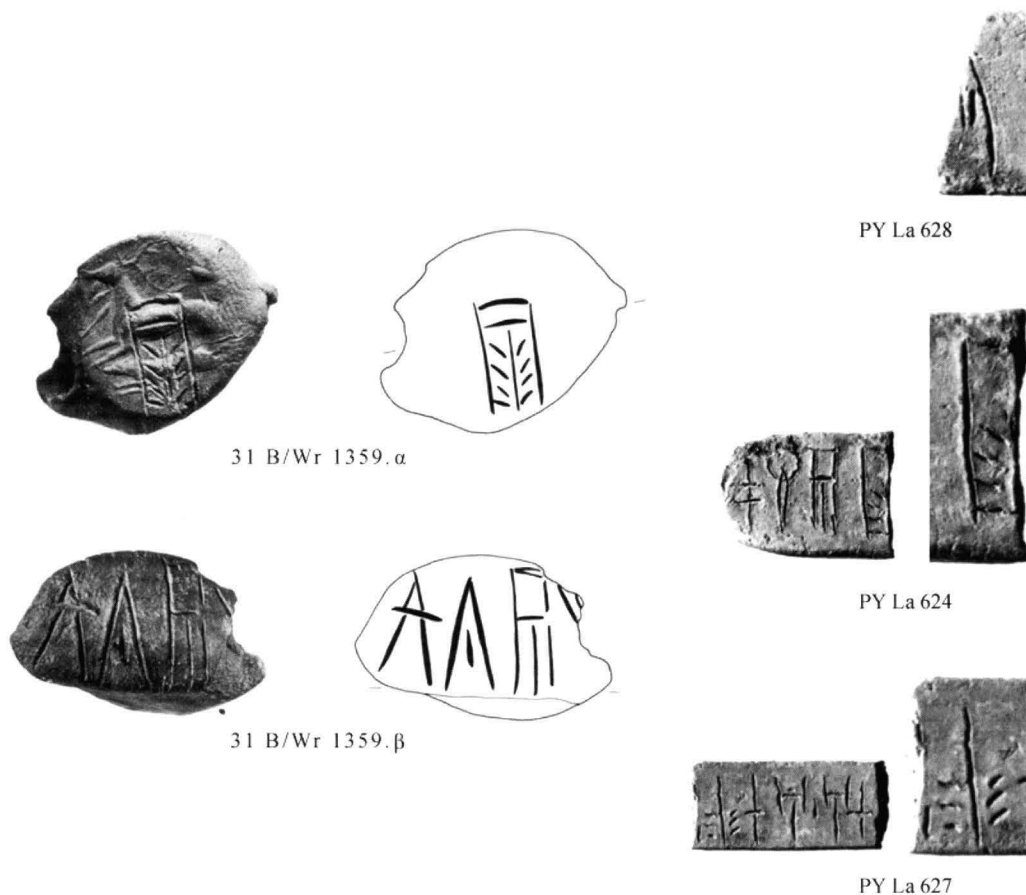


Fig. 2 PY Wr 1359 and PY La 624, 627 and 628.

4. Wo 1199 Room 32 in sifting (Fig. 3).

This document has been reclassified from the Wr set. It has a transverse string hole, no seal impression, is covered with fingerprints, and in contour looks like an oval clay



Wo 1199



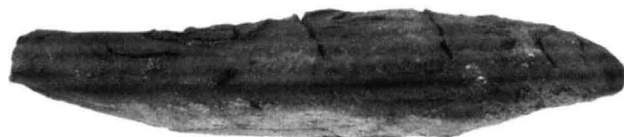
Wo 1199



PY Un 1321



Wo 1199



Wo 1199

Fig. 3 PY Wo 1199 and PY Un 1321.

sealing.³¹ The text reads *ka-ra-ni-jo*. The form of the first sign *ka* with its curvilinear and s-shaped interior elements is unique at Pylos except for tablet Un 1321 from Room 99 in the Northeast Workshop. A stroke at the upper right after *-jo* has been interpreted as more likely part of the sign *jo* than a digit-stroke or word-divider. If this is correct, then this version of the sign *jo* would be unique.

The sealing was assigned in *PTT* and in *Scribes of Pylos* to Hand 34.³² Olivier notes that the grounds for scribal assignment to Hand 34 may be insufficient.³³ To Hand 34 otherwise is assigned only tablet Un 1321 (ca. 30 signs). Wo 1199 has only 4 signs, and only two (*ka* and *ra*) are in common with Un 1321. The *ka* on Un 1321 is shaped in the same style as on Wo 1199. The *ra* on Un 1321 is simple and not inconsistent with the version on Wo 1199. The current opinion of Olivier is sound: "despite certain similarities," the palaeographical affinities between Un 1321 and Wo 1199 seem insufficient for scribal identification. What can be noted, however, with regard to sealing palaeography is that again a sealing from a secondary area shows at least one distinctive similarity with a tablet that is likewise outside of the Central Archives Complex and its main tablet-writers. Un 1321 also has a distinctive text and the form of its ideogram for VIN is likewise idiosyncratic, but the shape is different from the idiosyncratic shape on Wr 1359.

Room 32 otherwise yielded three oil tablets Fr 1194, 1198 and 1200, of which Fr 1198 is attributed to Hand 2.

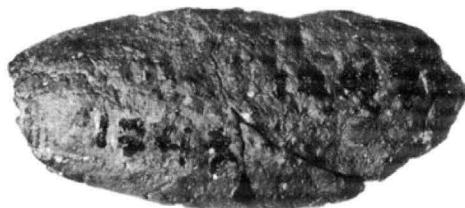
³¹ J.-P. Olivier in: MOPS, Pylos 80 Pl. 36

³² T.G. Palaima, *The Scribes of Pylos* (1988) 218; E.L. Bennett, Jr. – J.-P. Olivier (eds.), *The Pylos Tablets Transcribed, Part II* (1976) 16. 64.

³³ J.-P. Olivier in: MOPS, Pylos 81.

5. *Wo 1247 Room 24 (Fig. 4).*

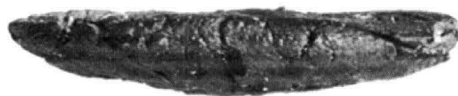
A relatively flat, almost disk-shaped 'sealing' from Room 24 (like Wr 1437). It has a transverse string hole, no seal impression, and a nearly triangular contour. Its text reads: *a₃-wo-di-jo-no*.³⁴ It is unassigned to scribe or stylus group, but displays an unusual form of sign *a₃*.



Wo 1247



Wo 1247



Wo 1247



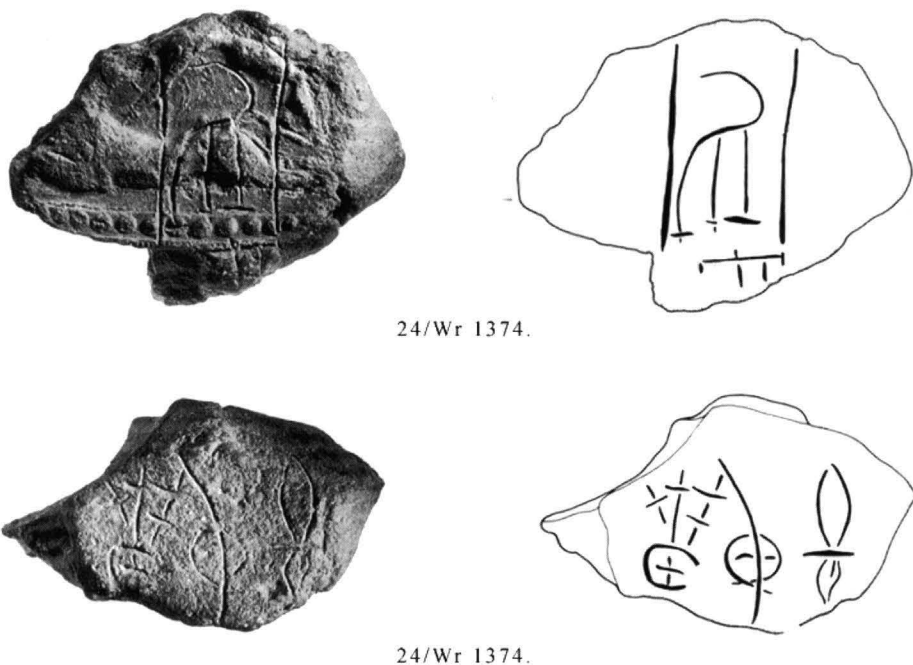
Wo 1247

Fig. 4 PY Wo 1247.

³⁴ J.-P. Olivier in: MOPS, Pylos 80–81 Pl. 36.

6. *Wr 1374 SW trench 22 (Fig. 5).*

Wr 1374 was found in an area where texts dealing with textiles were also found (e.g., Ob 1373 (*166 + WE), Mn 1367 and 1369 (*146) and Mb 1365 (*146). The text of the sealing records, over the seal impression, TELA + *PU* and then a problematical word-unit with palaeographically distinctive signs: now read as]*pu*₂-*35-[.]. We should note that the first phonetic sign *pu*₂ here has the central circular embellishment seen, as noted below, with signs *je* and *ne* on sealings from Thebes, on demonstrably peripheral tablets from Pylos, and on tablets by a number of Knossian hands.³⁵



24/Wr 1374.

24/Wr 1374.

Fig. 5 PY Wr 1374.

³⁵ Cf. J.-P. Olivier in: MOPS, Pylos 77–78.

Thebes

Within the collection of inscribed sealings from Thebes the following signs are distinctive:

1. *i* (Fig. 6 a. b) the first phonetic sign on sealing Wu 44.β, has an embellishment at the right of its central vertical *hasta* that is otherwise conspicuous on PY Xa 1419 (from west of the SW Building Room 74 and assigned to Hand 91) and once perhaps at Mycenae³⁶ and on Pylos tablets Fr 1219 (S 1219 Cii) and 1232 (Cii) both from Room 23. The same kind of embellishment is attested at Knossos in the work of H 104.³⁷ Again the similarities between the sealing and tablets are with tablets that themselves are non-central and one of which (PY Xa 1419) may in fact give evidence of an earlier palaeographical tradition at the site of Pylos.
2. *je* (Fig. 6 a) on Wu 44.β and Wu 86.β and Wu 87.β. The Wu 44 version has a horizontal beneath the upper angle at left and right. We might compare the same elements on *sa* in PY Un 1321.

The Wu 86 and 87 versions have the circular element at the central crossing of the legs of the sign of the sort that one finds as an embellishment of *ne* at PY on Xa 1419 and Ae 995.

This version is known at Knossos in scribes 123, <<124>>, 126, 141 and 224.³⁸ It is not found at Mycenae. At Pylos it is found only in the work of Hand 12 on tablet Vn 851 (Fig. 7) (from Room 8 and Chasm and Room 2). The text of Vn 851 refers in its heading to *de-mi-ni-ja* 'beddings'. The other text at Pylos which refers to this item (*de-mi-ni-jo*) is sealing Wr 1326 from Room 98 and the other text assigned to Hand 12 is An 1281 from Room 99, i.e., both the sealing and the tablet are from the Northeast Workshop. It seems likely that Vn 851 originated in the NE Workshop and that the similarities in sign form between it and the Thebes sealing correspond to the pattern of links with non-centralized tablets as seen universally above. The term *de-mi-ni-ja* also occurs on MY V 659 from West House.

CONCLUSION

Where palaeographical idiosyncrasies appear in the sealings of Thebes and Pylos, the closest parallels are mainly with sign forms that occur in tablets from Pylos that are themselves from 'peripheral' areas or are assigned to scribes whose work is associated with such areas: especially Room 6, Room 23, and Room 99 (NE Workshop). The pertinent sealings are all from non-archival deposit areas where such things as commodity (wine and oil) delivery, storage and disbursement took place. The one inscribed sealing from the Archives Complex matches up with the palaeographical style of prominent scribal hand 2 (writer of the Ta, Jn and other important series).

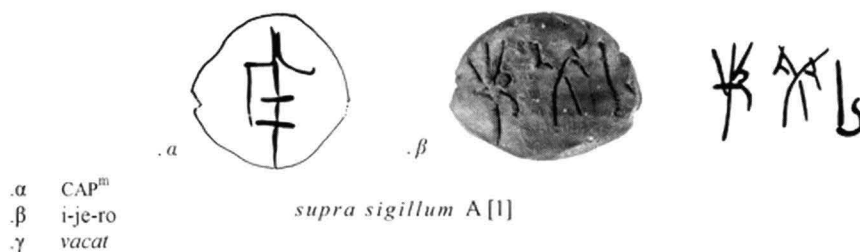
³⁶ Piteros et al. (supra n. 9) 142 and n. 89: in Au 102.5.

³⁷ Palaima (supra n. 32) 111–113 and Fig. 11.

³⁸ Piteros et al. (supra n. 9) 144 and n. 96.

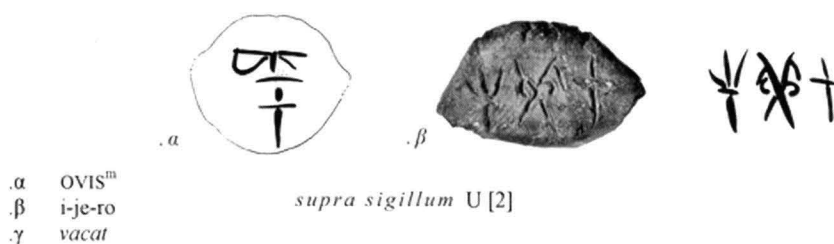
Wu 44

TH M 9904



Wu 86

TH M 9950



Wu 87

TH M 9951

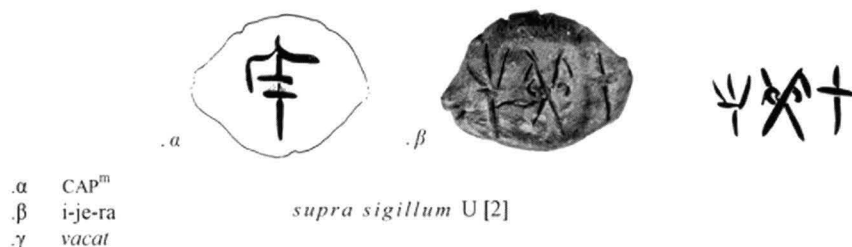
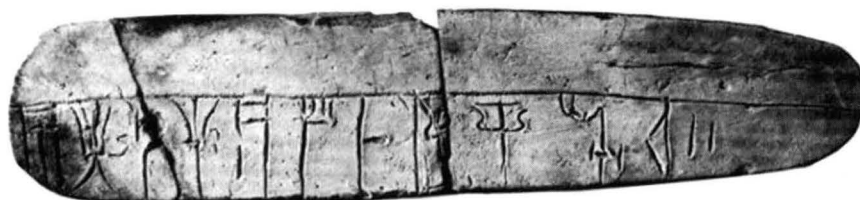


Fig. 6a TH Wu 44, 86 and 87.

Linguistic peculiarities in *ti* spellings both on a sealing (Wr 1360) and on a tablet (La 633) of a 'scribe' whose palaeographical style has been connected with that of certain sealings further reinforce the impression that at least these palaeographically distinctive sealings are influenced by or reflective of their 'peripheral' environments and do offer some small evidence for the existence of non-centrist habits of writing and spelling among individuals (and related



PY Fr 1219



i



PY Fr 1232



i



i



ne

PY Xa 1419

Fig. 6b PY Fr 1219, 1232 and 1419.

institutions) who only periodically came within the orbit of the central tablet-writers and the central administration. It is worth repeating and stressing that the palaeographical peculiarities of the sealings, in most cases elaborated signs, are all the more remarkable and convincing *because* they are attested despite the factors, astutely pointed out by J.-P. Olivier, that should have induced those who were writing on the sealings to simplify, not to complicate, the forms of their signs.



Fig. 7 PY Vn 851.