

Thomas G. Palaima, "A New Linear B Inscription from the Land Down Under," in Louise A. Hitchcock, Robert Laffineur and Janice Crowley eds., *DAIS. The Aegean Feast*. Proceedings of the 12th International Aegean Conference University of Melbourne, Centre for Classics and Archaeology, 25-29 March 2008. *Aegaeum* 29, Liège and Austin: 2008, pp. 429-432.

## A NEW LINEAR B INSCRIPTION FROM THE LAND DOWN UNDER: AUS HO(ME) Bo 2008

### Description

Wooden object. 15 x 8.5 cm. (maximum length and height); 5.0 cm. wide in middle; maximum thickness 3.0 cm. Polished and tapering. Inscription made with a thin blade-like stylus not at all dissimilar to the 'exacto-blade' stylus used for actual Linear B clay tablets. Reverse completely devoid of writing.

This object was found in the epichoric shrubbery on the grounds outside the J.H. Mitchell Theatre of Melbourne University at 3 AM March 29, 2008. At this time the discoverer, as is his wont at *Aegaeum* conferences, was in a slightly intoxicated state producing, as ably described by Helène Whitaker, "dislocation of the mind," from having imbibed just a drop, or two, of products from the Shelmerdine Winery following one of the many ample southern hemispheric feasts that were *distributed* amply throughout the *DAIS* conference. He was actually, at the time of chancing upon the inscribed object, trying to relocate his mind, a task that many view as comparable to the underworld labors of Sisyphus or the Nile River flowing upstream.

Immediate use of his handy on-the-spot Carbon-14 testing kit proved inconclusive. Dendrochronological examination was frustrated by the absence of a saw and the hardness of the native wood. By employing smell, taste, touch, sight and sound, in the sensuous and sensitive manner proposed by Rachel Fox, was determined that the object was made of wood cut from the Tamarind, *Diploglottis Cunninghamii*, a species of tree which once grew to heights of 60-80 feet in Queensland and New South Wales. It appeared to have been cut from a specimen slightly less than 16 years ago.

The discoverer, plagued already in a Midas-like way with a preternatural knack—some would call it a curse— for chancing upon inscribed linear documents in out of the way places like Calvi, Corsica; Liège, Belgium; Heidelberg, Germany; Göteborg, Sweden; Marburg, Germany; Naples, Italy; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was not at all surprised to find himself again in the presence of an inscribed object of unusual form and material.<sup>1</sup> Having in the past discovered an inscribed herring and even a delicate and tasty *galet*—fortunately for him a waffle and not a pebble—in his nocturnal peregrinations in the neighborhoods where conferences have been held on many diverse topics in Aegean prehistory, nothing surprises him.

Wary of the notoriety that these former publications had already brought to him, instantly ruing the change of heart that had brought him again to hazard attending another *Aegaeum* conference, and fully grasping the universal element of all Greek myths, that any knowledge, especially of Linear B texts, is a dangerous thing, he was determined to rid himself of this inscription before it could do his reputation any further harm. Employing another *topos* familiar from Greek mythology, he threw the object once, twice and three times. Each time it fluttered and arced through the air returning to hit him squarely in the back of the head.

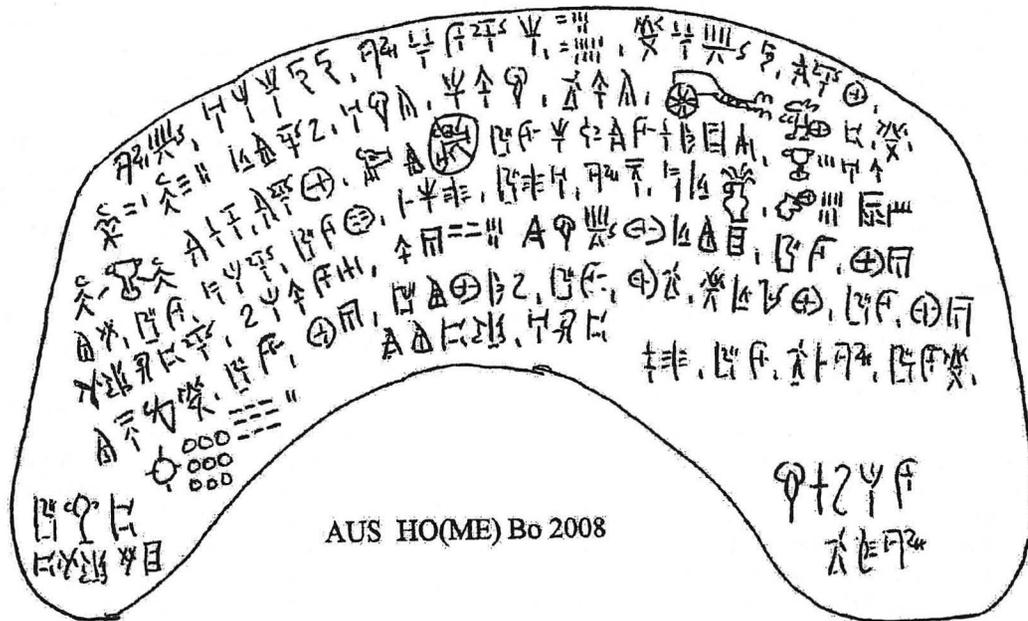
Having thus been brought into a state of mental clarity not experienced since a succession of Pythia's ascended tripods at ancient Delphi, he immediately grasped the totality and the significance of the inscribed signs upon the surface of this object. In one last act of desperation, he flung the object out toward Swanston Street, where, by the kind of stroke of coincidental luck Aristotle criticizes in the meeting of Medea and Aegeus in Euripides' *Medea*, it entered the window of a passing lorry that sped off into the night.

The text and interpretation offered here are of a quality equal to those in the publication of prior discoveries. Again the scholarly world has every assurance that the triple blow to the skull of the discoverer rendered him clear-minded and quasi-mantically gifted.

<sup>1</sup> For earlier discoveries, see T.G. PALAIMA, "A Linear-B-Inscribed 'herring' from Göteborg: An Ichthyomorphic Epiphany," in *POTNIA*, 485-491, and with partial bibliography p. 486, n. 2.

According to the principles with which other Linear B texts have recently been studied and published,<sup>2</sup> the discoverer has here produced an *editio princeps* that has not been sullied by any serious consideration of the informed opinions of other Mycenological experts in palaeography, linguistics, or specialized branches of textual interpretation. Nor has he bothered to question whether a text of this kind with so many peculiar features of writing and language could possibly have been produced by a Mycenaean scribe in the period to which it is attributed (the late 20<sup>th</sup> century CE).<sup>3</sup>

The text has been given the following identification: AUS HO(ME) Bo 2008. AUS designates general provenience, the continent of Australia. HO(ME) marks the place of discovery (parenthetically, ME = Melbourne) and the place of manufacture, as designated in the inscription: HO = Hogarth. Bo stands for the general class (B) that deals with human beings logographically and the page-shaped (o) type of text. By chance, this also produces a handy mnemonic for the shape and aerodynamic characteristics of the object: Bo(omerang). Since the object cannot be given an inventory number unless the lorry driver recognizes the value of the 'boomerang' and brings it to the attention of Mycenologist Stephie Nikoloudis who is affiliated with the University of Melbourne, it has been given the number 2008 to mark the year of discovery.



**Text**

1. me-no , a-re-i-jo-jo , me-qo-u-ne-i , 25/29 , de-qo-no-jo , e-ne-ka
2. VIR 21 MUL 34 ra-pi-ne-we , a-ko-ti , i-zo-ko , wo-zo-ti , BIG \*103 + KA ta , de ,
3. MUL + \*215<sup>VAS</sup> + MUL e-ro-to , e-ne-ka , SUS + SI pi SUS + SI o-u-i-do-e-u-ro-pe-ja-si \*215<sup>VAS</sup> 3 a ↑
4. pi-ni , o-u , po-re-ne , o-u-qe , da-ite , o-te-a , me-na , po-ra \*204<sup>VAS</sup> + ? \*213<sup>VAS</sup> + KA 7 VIN + SE
5. sa-ma-ri-ta-ne , we-re-zo-u-si , zo-a , 45 e-ko-no-ka-ra-pi-ja , o-u , ka-wa
6. pi-na-ki-de , o-u , ka-wa , o-pi-ka-pe-we , o-u , ka-wo , ke-ra-mi-ka , o-u , ka-wa
7. e-pi-ta-ma , a-ri-ta
8. 1992 pa-te , o-u , wo-da-me , o-u-de
9. o-qa-ta ko-ro-we-re-u
10. ta-sa-ma-ni-ja wo-ze-me

2 See T.G. PALAIMA, "Reviewing the New Linear B tablets from Thebes," *Kadmos* 42 (2003) 31-38.  
 3 See T.G. PALAIMA, "OL Zh 1: *Quousque tandem?*" *Minos* 37-38 (2002-2003) 373-385.

**Text**

1. mēnos Areīyoyo Melg<sup>w</sup>ournei 25/29 deik<sup>w</sup>onoyo heneka  
 2. VIR 21 MULIER 34 Lap<sup>h</sup>inewei arkhonti (H)it<sup>w</sup>cock word<sup>w</sup>onti BIGA KANGAROO *ta de*  
 3. gunaikes duo + kuliks erōtos heneka hus sialos + p<sup>h</sup>i hus ~~sialos~~ ou Indoeuropeayasi kuliks IIIA ↑  
 4. Pini ou p<sup>h</sup>orenes ouk<sup>w</sup>e daites ostea men polla VAS + ? COFFEE BREAK 7 woinos S(h)elmerdinios  
 5. Samaritanes wred<sup>w</sup>ousi zoa 45 eikonographiyā ou kalwā  
 6. pinakides ou kalwāi opiskap<sup>h</sup>ewes ou kalwoi keramika ou kalwa  
 7. epistāmā aristā  
 8. 1992 pantes ou woidamen ouden  
 9. Hog<sup>w</sup>art<sup>h</sup> Krowleu  
 10. Tasmaniya word<sup>w</sup>ei me

**Translation**

1. In the month of Ares , at Melbourne , 25/29 for the sake of *deipnon* (i.e., meal)  
 2. 21 MEN 34 WOMEN Laffineur leading Hitscock working CHARIOT ANIMAL + KA *ta de*  
 3. WOMAN kylix WOMAN for the sake of love by means of fatted pigs no fatted pigs for Indoeuropeans  
 kylix III A onwards  
 4. Pini no offerers , no banquets , but many bones VASE + ? Coffee Break 7 WINE S<sup>(h)</sup>elmerdine  
 5. Samaritans sacrificing animals 45 iconography is no good;  
 6. tablets are no good ; excavators are no good; pottery is no good.  
 7. knowledge is best  
 8. 1992 all of us know nothing  
 9. Hog<sup>w</sup>arth Crowley  
 10. Tasmania makes me

**Commentary**

This text obviously is oracular (see the specification of date of manufacture in line 9: 1992) in content, predicting the epistemological despair that was cast over the assembled scholars at the *DAIS* conference that took place in Melbourne, Australia in the month of Ares (March) 25-29 in 2008.

Mycenaean Greek did not have as part of its lexicon the word *dais*, 'distributive meal', no doubt because the Mycenaean rulers, despite the nice-sounding titles examined in one paper, were really the prototypes for the social meanness displayed on the other side of the world in eight years of the Bush-Cheney administration. The text therefore uses the attested Mycenaean word *deipnon*, here, as in the Thebes tablets, clearly a reference to a banquet meal, and not to an agent of banqueting.

The richly attested figure named *ra-pi-ne-u* again is designated as leading this event, but here it is specified that all the work is done by someone named, as we reconstruct despite some unrepresented elements in Mycenaean spelling, Hitscock.

The conference seems to have made use of a large vehicle pulled by an indigenous creature known from other sources as the Ka(ngaroo). What are clearly phonetic abbreviations *ta* and *de* are somewhat opaque in this context, and it is unclear whether they refer to the animal tentatively identified as the kangaroo or in some way to the material of the chariot-like vehicle, or if they are meant to provide supplemental information like the *TA* and *DA* that appear to mark supervisors in the Pylos women ration texts.

There seems to have been some representation at the conference of women in pairs toasting one another by means of the standard drinking vessel, known as the *kylix*. There seems, also, to have been hints of an erotic element in feasting and especially in mass sacrificial and banqueting ceremonies which involved fatted pigs slaughtered (and we assume cooked). For some reason it is specifically mentioned that Indoeuropeans, in whatever context this cryptic text is discussing, do not partake of the slaughtered and roasted pigs. And the kylix, we take it, is identified as a phenomenon from III A either onward or backward in time (see the heretofore unattested 'arrow' symbol; what temporal direction it is marking is not entirely clear). Scholars are referred to papers by Salvatore Vitale, Charlotte Langohr and Jan Driessen.

Then there is an equally cryptic word, given in the asyntactical rubric manner, Pini. This figure is somehow associated with a denial of the existence of people bringing offerings and of banquets, but at the same time admitting the clear data of many animal bones (whether from the Neolithic to MM IIB levels in the Hagios Charalambos cave, or from early Mycenaean to IIIB and IIIC Midea, or at sites outside the Aegean, like Tel Miqne-Ekron, is unclear) and some kinds of vessels with what appear to be multiple projections (straws?, or a fermented effervescent spray? [see the discussion by Sarah P. Morris for elite bonding and the introduction of knowledge of fermentation into the Aegean]).

The entire event recorded, or, as we should say, predicted in 1992, was punctuated by seven coffee breaks (cf. logogram \*213<sup>VAS</sup> + KA, known from previous texts in this series); and here we also have a new ligature to the wine logogram, SE, which is taken to refer to the wine of the sponsor of this event. The conspicuous consumption concludes with Samaritans recorded as sacrificing 45 animals in a fantastically sensual atmosphere resembling an *Aegeum* banquet.

Then despair descends with the swiftness of Attila the Hun as iconography, tablets, excavators and pottery are all declared 'no good'.

Still the conference ends on a positive note, as knowledge itself is celebrated as 'best': ἐπιστήμη ἀρίστη (as it would read in classical Attic Greek). The date of 1992 and location of manufacture of Hogarth, Tasmania are given at the bottom left. At the extreme bottom right a declaration is made: "Crowley work(s) me." There also the state of satisfied know-nothingness of these scholars is declared:

οὐ Φοίδαμεν οὐδέν.

Besides giving us our first confirmed reference to the ethnic designation Samaritans and Indoeuropeans, the boomerang text is notable for new ideograms and for adding to the extensive prosopographical data for the prominent figure of *ra-pi-ne-u*. It is clear from this text that this figure is able to be in so many places at so many high intellectual occasions because, following practice as old as Agamemnon, he merely rules or presides while others, as Achilles knew and here the poor figure of Hitscock has found out, do the work. Another female figure who did *ra-pi-ne-u*'s work in the past is the figure named Crowley, who undoubtedly was compensated so poorly that she has had to take up a side job as a craftsperson manufacturing boomerangs out of Tamarind wood.

On the textual side, the *plene* spelling of the monosyllabic particle μέν as *me-na* is welcome as is the ideographic indicator of 'negation' with the second entry of SUS + SI on line .3. The first occurrence of that logogram is followed by what looks like the first instance of a grammatical determinative, *pi*, marking the form as an instrumental plural. The 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural ending *o-u-si* in line .5 is unexpected and a clear indication of the modern date of writing of the text.

Finally we must give thanks to the *te-o-i* that the feasts associated with the *DAIS* conference produced no instances of cannibalism, of the kind viewed as possible when Minoan bodies, and by extension Minoanist bodies, are subject to the exhilaration of food and wine consumption.

Thomas G. PALAIMA