

. . . qu'il est permis de rire entre mycénologues

A FAMILY DOCUMENT OF THE KINGS OF MYCENAE

The following text has recently come to light. It is evidently a copy of a Linear B tablet. The place of discovery is unknown, but the contents suggest that it must have been written at Mycenae.

A JE PI TI

E KE 1 PO RO WI KA

ME TO KE SE

DE 1 PE RO PI DO

(SO or DO ?)

Αἴεπις

"Aieptis

ἔχει προῖκα,

has a dowry

μετόχησε

and got a share

δὲ Πελοπιδῶν.

[of the property] of the Pelopidae."

Αἴεπις,

evidently a lady who married one of the Pelopidae; the name may suggest Egyptian origin.

προῖκα,

sc. προῖκα.

μετόχησε,

an aorist of a verb derived from μέτοχος; equivalent to μετέχω.

Πελοπιδῶν,

the last sign appears to be so but probably do is meant. Contraction of gen. da-o to do is, however, abnormal, but is doubtless an early instance of classical practice.

NOTE.

The interpretation given above appears to be justified by the context. The Pelopidae are closely associated with Mycenae; and there is obviously a connection between a bride's dowry and a share which she obtains by marriage in the possessions of her husband's family. If the bride was an Egyptian, an interesting light is thrown on relations between Egypt and Mycenae in the 2nd millennium; we may compare Menelaus' voyage to Egypt.

An alternative suggestion, that this tablet is really a list of the staff of the Greek Department at Edinburgh University, seems hardly

worth considering. It happens that the names A.J. Beattie, E.K. Borthwick, M. Stokes and D.B. Robinson, bear a certain resemblance to the words of the text; but these persons obviously cannot have been known to a Mycenaean scribe in the 12th century B.C. In any case the Greek character of the text as explained above is protected by astronomical odds against coincidence.

J. CH*DW*CK.

Dear Ch+dw+ck,

Many thanks for your exciting news, which gave me great pleasure while I was waiting for my bus outside the Wo-de-wi-jo (local cinema).

I can't entirely agree with your reading of line 4. Surely so is quite clear. And the tablet must, on internal evidence, come from Pylos.

As you say, the names of the members of the Greek Dept. in Edinburgh can't come into question here. The names could just as well be Firth, Browning, Tonks, Phelps, etc.; almost any names would fit.

I seem to read with certainty the following naval intelligence report:

Ἄλσπις τις	A certain A.
ἔχει πλωφικόν	has a cruiser,
μεθώλησε	but has berthed (it)
δὲ Πύλου (ὀ)πίσω	behind Pylos

Aispis seems to be a Persian name, cf. Teispes etc. This is the first mention of an Iranian in Mycenaean tablets, but cf. Perseus.

The harbour behind Pylos is interesting. Evidently Pylos is on the headland of Koryphasion; this proves that after Ano Englianos was sacked by Heracles, Nestor built the new palace on Koryphasion. This agrees with Homer and Strabo.

For the verb μεθολκῶ cf. diolkos; evidently ships were transported across the Koryphasion isthmus on rollers.

For ὀπίσω cum gen. cf. LXX. L. 4 is to be compared with Hipponax, οἴκεϊ δ' ὀπίσθε τῆς πόλης where the person mentioned may also have been living on a cruiser.

J. C.

P.S. I also seem to read

Αἶπιθι

At Aipy

ἔσκε ONE πωλοφίκας, there was a horse-dealer (?)

μετώκησε

but he has de-

δέ. ONE φῶρ-όπισωρ camped. An objectionable thief!

Aipy is the town next to Pylos (Il,ii,592); it was Neleus' city at Ano Englianos, cf. Mimnermus'. Αἶπυ, Πύλου Νηλήϊον ἄστυ.

Πωλοφίκας, which is evidently the Mycenaean word for 'book-maker' and should be added to the list of trades, seems to be formed from πῶλος and εἴκω ('make to give way'), which = Lat. 'vinco' (as Lewis & Short rightly conjectured). Cf. the name EKTOR; note that in the Iliad Hector is a professional breaker-in of horses.

L.4. 'Οπίσωρ = δυσάρεστος (Hsch.). For the compound form cf. A-ta-na-po-ti-ni-ja, 'Bossy-Athena'. This is a case of a stock epithet merging into the noun, cf. ἰδία(ν)δρδς, εἰδιγυναῖκα etc. in later inscriptions. 'Objectionable-thief' must have been a common Mycenaean term of abuse.

The Greek character of the text is now protected against coincidence by triple astronomical odds.

J. C.

Dear Chickweed,

Many thanks for your letter. Your remarks on the Aieptis text are very interesting. Although we may differ on some points of interpretation, we agree that the language is Greek; and that after all is the main thing. If we put our heads together, the remaining difficulties will soon be overcome.

Your notion that the text refers to a Persian sailor at Pylos will cause great excitement. I am looking forward to hearing what Wobbler and Twister, who are both very knowledgeable about Pylian coastal defences, will say. Some historical theories may have to be revised. It seems likely that Nestor's people dragged their ships over the isthmus into the harbour, as you suggest, in preference to sailing straight through the channel; we know that both the Greeks and the Persians disliked the sea. My only objection is that, as a philologist, I can't accept your pe-ro as the equivalent of Pylos. But I dare say that I may reach a different conclusion about this when I have had time to think it over.

I hope you won't mind my saying that your second rendering is frivolous. There is no denying that the Achaeans were fond of horses; and your 'bookmaker' might be a welcome addition to our list of trades, which has unfortunately been at a standstill for some time. But I really cannot have a Laconian word in the text. The rule is, no Dorians in Linear B! Still, the suggestion is amusing; and, even if it is mistaken, it strengthens our view that the text is written in Greek.

You are right to protest against my reading pe-ro-pi-do. I admit that it was rather optimistic. It is of course a well-established principle of the decipherment that scribes often make mistakes; this is proved by our emendations, many of which give excellent sense. In this case, so and do are not dissimilar; and I felt that the result might be convincing.

I still cling to my belief that the text comes from Mycenae and that it contains an allusion to Pelops. You will see that Professor Ahmet el Pinhed, whose version I enclose, agrees with me; and he is, as you know, our leading expert on the palaeographical side. He has changed the word-division in line 2; he also thinks that there may be a divider after pe-ro-pi in line 4 and suggest that the text may be unfinished. If Pinhed is right, the tablet may be a mute witness of the moment when invaders broke into the admin. block of the palace and struck down the clerks as they wrote. But we shall have to find out what Pellmell thinks about this. My own view is that Pinhed's ideas are quite attractive, and it may be impossible to prove him wrong. I have a preference, however, for my own 'marriage-contract' theory.

Yours sincerely,

J. Chidwick.

A MYCENAEAN COURT-MARTIAL VERDICT

A JE PI TI
E KE PO RO . WI KA
ME TO KE SE
DE.PE RO PI.SO [PO

Αἴεπτις
ἐχέφρων. Φικῶ (?)
μέν, δόξε
δὲ Πέλοπι σο[φός ...

"Aieptis is reliable. He yielded (?), but Pelops decided that he was wise."

Αἴεπτις, an Achaean officer; or perhaps an Egyptian mercenary. Probably male.

ἐχέφρων, There are possible traces of what may be a word-divider after this word.

Φικῶ, probably cognate with εἴκω yield, withdraw; this may be an early instance of the historic present. Or perhaps frequentative; is apt to withdraw ?

μέν, the first occurrence of this particle in Linear B; it is confirmed by the following δέ.

δόξε, or δόκησε, aorist without augment, as usual; to for do is rare, however.

Πέλοπι, there is no means of deciding whether this is the well-known hero or another man of the same name. Probably the latter.

σο[φός, after prolonged study of the tablet, I seem to see traces of a sign resembling po after so. In any case, I feel sure that it must have been the scribe's intention to write po, whether he did or not.

The text apparently records the acquittal of Aieptis, following a trial in which he was accused of cowardice in battle. Pelops, the president of the court, decided that Aieptis had really executed a planned withdrawal. Since the document is incomplete, it looks as if events had overtaken the course of justice. Mycenae, Pelops and Aieptis were no more!

Ahmet el Pinhed Jr.

I reluctantly conclude that an explanation is necessary. Several years ago, before Xerox, a colleague (not one of those among whom they were meant to be circulated) sent me photocopies of four sheets of paper, with the texts copied above. Some years later, since it seemed worthwhile to collect and preserve all sorts of ephemera of the decipherment of Linear B, I thought to publish them in Nestor, and therefore wrote another colleague who, I thought, might have seen them on their first circulation, to see whether he could obtain for me from the authors authorization to publish them. The answer was that the material seemed now to have no interest, and might better be left to decent obscurity. So I put the scheme aside. But almost immediately thereafter some boulderized portions of these pages appeared in a book published in München. I concluded the authors had abandoned their copyright, and determined to publish the whole as an historic document at an appropriate moment.

Unfortunately a further word is necessary, since we do not all laugh at the same things. If you have found the letters funny, and did not notice an incongruity between the rubric "...qu'il est permis de rire..." and what follows it, then I did indeed choose the appropriate moment. But if you have been troubled by it, be assured that this is the only intentional appearance in these pages of the classic trick for this day: the still-muddy cobblestone under the top hat on the sidewalk.