

## TWO TRADITIONS IN SPIRAL INSCRIPTIONS WITH LINEAR A TEXTS

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Two clay cups from Knossos, dating from the period MM IIIb,<sup>1</sup> bear inscriptions in the Linear A script, their legends being written from the centres of their bottoms towards the edges, whilst a disc on top of a golden ring from the Mavro Spelio cemetery in Knossos, also dating from the period MM IIIb, bears an inscription in Linear A, which runs from the edge towards the centre.<sup>2</sup> Because the contents of these three inscriptions cannot explain the use of the two different systems in operation, as we shall see, we are obliged to look for external phenomena, which might account for the occurrence of two different types of spiral inscriptions in Knossos at the same time.

1. Let us start with the most simple inscription in one of the Knossos bowls.<sup>3</sup> Next to an inscription forming two lines, three, much larger, syllabic signs are written, which most probably stand for the personal name of the bowl's owner.<sup>4</sup> Of these signs only the second is clearly visible: *?-ti-?*.

### Reading:

1. *a-ka-nu* (.) *Wa-du-ra-re-a-za*.
2. (?.)??-? (-) *ra-ka-ru A-na-da*

### Translation:

line 1: The bowl: *Wa-du-ra-re-a-za*

line 2: (The writing *vel simile*): (the priest?) *A-na-da*

1. a: W.C. Brice, *Inscriptions in the Minoan Linear Script of Class A (ILA)*, Oxford 1961, p. 15, II, 1, II, 2, plates XXIIa/XXII; b: James T. Hooker, *Linear A Inscriptions from Knossos*, in: *Kadmos VI*, 1967, pp. 110-113.

2. a: Brice, *ILA*, p. 24, V, 14, plates XXXa/XXX; b: Arthur Evans, *The Palace of Minos II*, London 1928, p. 557, Fig. 352.

3. Brice, *ILA*, plates XXIIa/XXII.

4. Instead of *a-re = al*: to, for + PN.

## Formula:

a:b = a:b

## Comments:

### 1.1. *a-ka-nu*

The masculine singular nominative *agannu* (cf. *a-ga-nu* in a Semitic text from Qatna), bowl;<sup>5</sup> behind this word is visible a damaged spot, which may have obliterated the vertical stroke of the word-divider, such as to be seen behind the personal name at the end of the first line.

### 1.2. *Wa-du-ra-re-a-za*

Behind the first sign of the personal name (to be paralleled later), *wa*, we see a dot, not to be taken for a word-divider (herefore the scribe used a vertical stroke), but if not a slip of the pen at all, rather for a sign-combiner, such as used on the stele of Lemnos at the beginning of the fifth horizontal line above the picture of the warrior to combine *av-* with *-is*.<sup>6</sup> Now there have been traced in both Linear A and B scripts many personal names of Anatolian origin, with especially their Lycian counterparts ending on *-a*,<sup>7</sup> just as both names in this inscription, whilst also the component *Wadu-* in the first personal name is to be compared with Lycian counterparts: so *Wa-du-ni-mi* (HT6b.1, 85b. 4-5) with Lycian *Badunimi*.<sup>8</sup> Therefore we should bear in mind that a dot as a sign-combiner, both in the Etruscan inscription from Lemnos and in our inscription, might belong to the inheritance of the Luwian Bronze Age.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.1. (?) ?-?-? (-) *ra-ka-ru*

On the analogy of the order on the Chaniá bowl, PN: the fringe, PN: the writing,<sup>10</sup> we should expect to find on the

5. Jan G.P. Best, *Some Preliminary Remarks on the Decipherment of Linear A*, Amsterdam 1972, pp. 19 - 20 with note 35.

6. J.G.P. Best, *Bilingual Inscriptions on the Stele from Lemnos*, in: *TALANTA XIII/1981-SEM*, pp. 58 - 59.

7. J.C. Billigmeier, *An Inquiry into the non-Greek Names on the Linear B Tablets from Knossos and their Relationship to Languages of Asia Minor*, in: *Minos* 10, 1969, pp. 177 - 183.

8. Maurice Pope, *Aegean Writing and Linear A*, SMA VIII, Lund 1964, p. 5.

9. J.G.P. Best, *Zur Herkunft des Diskos von Phaistos*, in: *TALANTA XIII/1981-SEM*, pp. 49 - 56.

10. J.G.P. Best, *The Zakro Pithos Inscription, Again*, in: *TALANTA XIV-XV/1982-1983*, Appendix 1.

Knossos bowl the reversed order, so-the bowl: PN, the writing: PN.A noun for writing in the masculine singular nominative or an absolute infinitive both would end on -u and so *-ra-ka-ru* could be the last three signs of a noun or verb for writing, consisting of six or perhaps seven syllabic signs in all. But we should also consider the possibility that the term for writing consisted of only three or at most four syllabic signs, as *po-ni-za* on the Chaniá bowl has clearly demonstrated to us. Because *ra-ka-ru* is not separated from *A-na-da* by a word-divider, it could as well be taken for a noun in the masculine singular nominative, belonging to the personal name: *lagaru*, priest,<sup>11</sup> would do surprisingly well in that case. Considering the fact that most Linear A tablets stem from either the western wings of the palaces, which were with a surprising regularity concerned with cult or from temples themselves (Mallia, Haghia Triada),<sup>12</sup> we should not be astonished in the least to find priests functioning as scribes.

## 2.2. *A-na-da*

Personal name (to be paralleled later).

2. After these remarks on writing in the hands of priests, the moment has come to pass on to the inscription in the second bowl from Knossos.<sup>13</sup> Now the presumable owner's name occupies the whole centre of the bottom and consists again of three very large syllabic signs: *L69-ti-qu*.<sup>14</sup> So it does not seem to be impossible that the two nearly identical clay bowls from Knossos once formed a pair (they were found together!), each of them bearing the same owner's name. However, the maker of the second bowl and the witty scribe who painted its text of two lines surely did not bear the same names as those mentioned in the inscription of the first bowl.

11. AHW, s.v. *lagallum*, *lagaru*.

12. a: Nanny M.W. de Vries, *The Central Sanctuaries at Mallia and Megiddo*; b: Joh. W. Jong, *The Religious Context of the Linear Script A Texts Found at Hagia Triada near Phaestos in Crete*, both in: *Interaction and Acculturation in the Mediterranean I*, edited by Jan G.P. Best and Nanny M.W. de Vries, Amsterdam 1980, pp. 125 - 141.

13. Brice, *ILA*, plates XXIIa/XXII.

14. See *supra* note 4.



Fig. 1  
Clay cup 2 with owner's name in centre.  
From: Brice, *ILA*

**Reading:**

1. *a-di.Da-ki-ti pa-ku.i-ya Nu-*
2. *-yu-ku-na pa-ku (.) a-u-ṭa-mē-i*

**Translation:**

- line 1: My hand: *Da-ki-ti* the Wise and *Nu-*  
line 2: *-yu-ku-na* the Wise (:) my words

**Formula:**

$a:b = b:a$

**Comments:**

1.1. *a-di*

Feminine noun in nominative singular *ad* + *-i*, possessive pronoun of the first singular person.<sup>15</sup> Here the bowl itself is address-

15. J.G.P. Best, Yaššaram!, in: *TALANTA* XIII/1981-SEM, p. 19, 3.

ing us as if it were a living person, "my hand" presumably standing for "the hand which made me".

1.2. *Da-ki-ti*

Masculine personal name (to be paralleled later).

1.3. *pa-ku*

The religious designation *pakku* with the meaning of "the Wise" stands behind the personal name, so *bēl pakku*, also here being a noun in the masculine nominative.<sup>16</sup> Both *Da-ki-ti* and *Nu-yu-ku-na* must have had the same grade as members of a religious order.

1.4. *i-ya*

Writing variant of *u-ya*, and.<sup>17</sup>

1.5. *Nu-*

First syllabic sign of a masculine personal name.

2.1. *-yu-ku-na*

Remaining syllabic signs of the masculine personal name *Nu-yu-ku-na* (to be paralleled later).

2.2. *pa-ku*

Cf. *pakku* sub 1.3.

2.3. *a-u-ṭa-ṣe-i*

I suggest to read this badly damaged word as probably having stood behind an obliterated word-divider in a damaged spot below. I have translated it as "my words" on the analogy of "my hand", considering the neat structure of the inscription as a whole, but can only make a good case for the first two signs from a grammatical point of view. The rest is nothing more than a guess. But we should add, that the plural of this word must end on *-m V* at least and that in Ugaritic the possessive pronoun of the first singular person would have been pronounced *-i*.<sup>18</sup> The Linear B script having been invented not yet in the MM IIIb period and as a consequence its sign for the Indo-European sound *au* (\*85)

16. AHW, s.v. *pakku(m)*.

17. See *supra* note 15, *op.cit.*, p. 18 for *u/i* alternation and *supra* note 10, *op.cit.*, Appendix 2 for *i-ya = u-ya*.

18. Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Manual I*, Roma 1955, p. 30, 6.6.

not being available at all, the two Linear A signs *a-u-* must have represented two different syllables in the MM IIIb text of our bowl. Because the Linear A script uses as writing variants not only *u-ya* and *wa-ya*, and, but also *qe-lya-u* and *qa-lya-wa*, toasted grain (cf. HT1a.1 with HT86a.3), it occurred to me that, with the variant writing of *a-wa-* for *a-u-*, the first two signs would form the beginning of *awātum*, word.<sup>19</sup> That is why using the analogy of the clear meaning of the first word in the formula, "my hand", I dare to propose as the meaning of the final word a form of *awātum* in the plural nominative: "my words".

3. The spiral inscription on the small disc attached to the golden ring from Mavro Spelio shows several interesting features.<sup>20</sup> In the first place, all signs, being of the same size, are spared out from the surface of the disc, a technique, which reminds us of that used for the signs on the Phaistos disc. There is perhaps one exception, a much smaller potential syllabic sign with value *nu*, which occurs beneath two dark round spots on the photograph of the disc,<sup>21</sup> indicating former holes and a use of the disc as a hanger before it was attached to the ring. This small sign seems to have been engraved, if it is not just a damaged spot on the disc. But the most striking feature is the use of a vertical row of dots behind the fifth sign of the inscription to indicate the end of the introduction and the begin of the main text, forming an exact parallel of the dots on the first two vertical lines of the Phaistos disc after the introduction. Elsewhere I have interpreted the Phaistos disc as a Luwian document, having compared it with the Etruscan disc from Magliano, which shows also dots in vertical rows to divide sentences (cf. the same usage on the front of the stele from Lemnos).<sup>22</sup> Notwithstanding its North-West Semitic text, the golden disc from Mavro Spelio stands in the same Luwian tradition of both the Phaistos and Magliano discs, with its legend also running from the edge to the centre.

#### Reading:

*a-re Ne-si-di, ti-pi ke-pa ya-ta- <nu? > -nu-te Pu-a-a-ya-ku*

19. AHW, s.v. *awātum*.

20. See *supra* note 2a.

21. See *supra* note 2b.

22. See *supra* notes 9 and 6.



Fig. 2a  
Golden disc with spiral inscription.

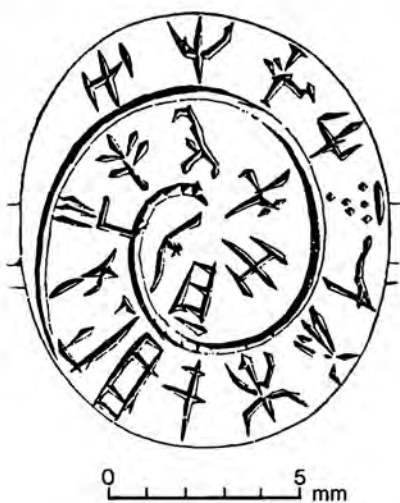


Fig. 2b  
Drawing of golden disc with spiral inscription.  
From: Brice, *ILA*

### Translation:

To *Ne-si-di*: the winding of the overlay has given *Pu-a-a-ya-ku*

### Comments:

1. *a-re*

Cf. Ugaritic *l(al)*, to, for.<sup>23</sup>

2. *Ne-si-di*

Personal name (to be paralleled later).

3. *tī-pī*

Singular genitive of the masculine noun *tīpu*, overlay (i.e. the small golden disc on top of the ring).<sup>24</sup>

4. *ke-pa*

Singular accusative of the masculine noun *kippu* (cf. *keppû*), winding.<sup>25</sup>

5. *ya-ta-<nu?>-nu-te*

From the verb *yatanu*, to give, with *-te* to denote the ending of the third feminine person singular (Ugaritic *-t*).<sup>26</sup>

6. *Pu-a-a-ya-ku*

This feminine personal name (see the feminine ending *sub* 5!) has a rather religious flavour in two respects: *pû*, word, order (of gods) occurs in the name of the god *Pu-šu-ke-en*,<sup>27</sup> whilst *Ia-a-ku-* (from *ajjaku*, temple, cf. the writing variant *a-a-ka-am*) forms the first component in personal names or does occur in the name of the god *Bēlat-ia-a-ki*.<sup>28</sup> So the personal name *Pu-a-a-ya-ku* would most appropriately fit a priestess.

The later Aramaic incantation bowls, with their most important message in the centre of the bowl,<sup>29</sup> stand in the tradition of

23. See *supra* note 10, *op.cit.*, *sub* 2.3 for *a-re*.

24. AHW, s.v. *tīpu(m)*.

25. AHW, s.v. *kippu(m)*.

26. See *supra* note 15, *op.cit.*, p. 19, 4.

27. AHW, s.v. *pû(m)* I, 7.

28. AHW, s.v. *ajja(k)ku(m)*.

29. W.H. Rossell, *A Handbook of Aramaic Magical Texts*, Shelton College, Ringwood, N.J., 1953 (texts 9, 14, 30). The first to see this congruency was Cyrus H. Gordon, *Evidence for the Minoan Language*, Philadelphia 1966, p. 27, 119.



the two spiral bowls from Knossos, the Etruscan Magliano disc with its most important message on the edge, in that of the Phaistos and Mavro Spelio discs. All three spiral inscriptions, translated above, have a religious flavour around them, just as is the case with their descendants. Bowls with spiral inscriptions seem to have a North-West Semitic origin, discs with spiral inscriptions a Luwian one. The established phenomenon of acculturation between both traditions on the Mavro Spelio disc implies the presence of two population groups in Crete in the MM IIIb period, a North-West Semitic and a Luwian one, the Greeks only joining the company from LM Ia onwards. Today, Greek is spoken in the island of Crete, but little bays affording shelter still bear the name Phoinikè (Finikí)! In antiquity the population group imbued with old Minoan traditions was called Eteo-Cretans, who used their own traditional language far into historical times. A first structural analysis of their texts convinced me that these are comparable with those of the Lycians, like the "Eteo-Cretans" descendants from the Luwians as well: l'histoire de la longue durée!<sup>30</sup>

30. Cf. Ph.H.J. Houwink ten Cate, *The Luwian Population Groups of Lycia and Cilicia Aspera during the Hellenistic Period*, Leiden 1961 with Yves Duhoux, *L'Étéocrétois, les textes-la langue*, Amsterdam 1982.