

15 Cretan Hieroglyphic A Texts

Stuart L. Harris, October 2011

Summary of Cretan Hieroglyphic A Texts

Cretan Hieroglyphic Script is found on clay tablets, seal-stones and various other objects from MM IA to MM IIIB (2060-1695 B.C). The style occurs in four cities: Knossos, Phaistos, Mallia and Petras. I have translated just one item, the Arkalochori Axe, but this is sufficient to establish the language as Finnish and verify some letters proposed by John Younger¹.

Hieroglyphic A Syllabary

Table 1: Cretan Hieroglyphic syllabary assembled primarily by John Younger.

A	Ä	E	I	O	U	Y	Hieroglyph A
042 	Ä 	094 	I 	O 	U 	Y 	URHO 026
038 	HÄ 	070 	049 050 	HO 	HU 		H
JA 	041 	JE 	JI 	JO 	JU 	153 JIVA 	J
062 	KÄ 	052 	024 	008 	KU 	KY 006 KOKO 	K
LA 	LÄ 	031 	061 	LO 	092 	069 LY 	L
MA 	MÄ 	047 075 	009 	MO 	MU 		M
019 	NÄ 	158 	NI 	040 	035 		N
PA 	PÄ 	PE 	PI 	072 	023 	033 PY 	P
RA 	RÄ 	025 	093 	RO 	085 		R
039 	SÄ 	SE 	007 	048 022 	058 	SIKA 017 	S
002 D02 046 	066 	021 	053 057 	060 KO2 TO 	020 034 	056 	T
P75 	VÄ 	169 	VI 	VO 	012 	VINI 156 	V

¹ John Younger, "Hieroglyphic A texts in phonetic transcription", <http://people.ku.edu/~jyounger/Hiero/>

Arkalochori Axe: 'This steadfast blade'

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The Arkalochori Axe is a double-bladed gold labrys on display at the Iraklion Archaeological Museum. It dates by context to MM IIB (1900/1850-1750/1720 BC), but not secure as there was no pottery. In 1934, Spyridon Marinatos found the axe in Arkalochori Cave, hidden so well that looters missed it.

The inscription mixes Linear A with Hieroglyphic A to good effect in three columns that read from top to bottom, left to right. It is a sophisticated erotic poem with matching iconography.

Why did Minoans leave miniature gold and silver axes in the sacred cave of Arkalochori? If this axe is representative, the supplicants were celebrating lovemaking.

Translation

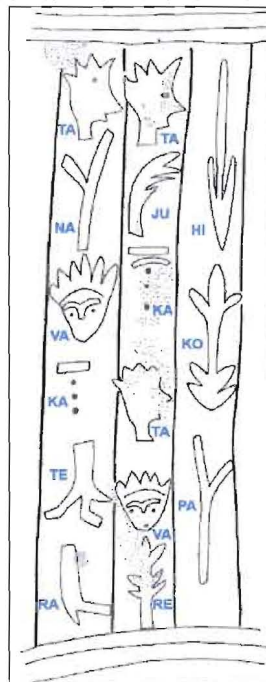
Hieroglyphic A: TA-NA VA-KA TE-RA TA-JU KA-TA VA-RE HI-KO PA.

Finnish: Tänä vaka terä tajuan kaita varren hikko pää.

English: This steadfast blade understands close-fitting shaft's axe head.

Image and transcription

Figure 1: Arkalochori Axe transcription.



Notes on translation

- .1 The first two lines begin with TA. There are eight words with 16 syllables, arranged 6-6-4.
.1 TA resembles a male's head in profile, while VA represents a female's head from the front.
.3 Axe, *hikko*, varies from the conventional *hakko* so that it can use letter HI, an arrow. The engraver rotated HI so that the arrow aims toward the next letter KO, drawn like a flower waiting to receive the shafted point with open petals.
.3 The spelling of *pää* 'head' uses PA instead of PÄ.

TA-NA = *tänä* 'this'; K16.44 'three times **this** (*tänä*) summer'

VA-KA = *vaka* 'steadfast'; K1.289 '**Steadfast** (*vaka*) old Väinämöinen'

TE-RA = *terä* 'blade'; K2.124 'the **blade** (*terä*) the height of a thumbnail'

TA-JU = *tajuan* 'understands, gets, realizes'; K9.270 "**understand** (*tajuan*) the ways of steel"

KA-TA = *kaita* = 'close-fitting'; K25.571 "it is **close-fitting** (*kaita*) under the arms"

VA-RE = *varren* = 'of the shaft, handle'; K6.148 'selected the best **shaft** (*varren*)'

HI-KO = *hikko* 'axe', *hakku* 'pick axe'; K7.260 "all the evergreens **hew** (*hakkoavi*) at me."

PA = *pää* 'head'; K9.268 'the greybeard sang, his **head** (*pää*) shook.'

Discovery of Arkalochori Axe

"There are only 3 documents that use the signary of the Phaistos Disc: the Phaistos Disc with 45 different signs, the Arkalochori Ax that uses 2, perhaps as many as 4, of these signs and introduces a further 6 to 8 signs, and a sealing from Phaistos (CMS II 5 no. 246) whose impressing seal carried Phaistos Disc sign 21. Since there are only 3 documents and since the entire signary is still unknown (if a syllabary, as seems likely, there should be some 75-100 signs), there is no need to develop an elaborate classification system.

"After pillaging in the late 19th and early 20th century, and some excavation in the late 19th century, Spyridon Nikolaou Marinatos responded to more pillaging in 1935 with further excavation of the site and, among other finds, discovered the gold and silver axes inscribed in Linear A ("I-DA-MA-TE," AR Zf 1 & 2), and a bronze ax inscribed with some signs from the Phaistos Disc syllabary (Marinatos 1935: 250-259). Marinatos assumes a context date of MM III (-LM I), but there was little to no pottery. Most scholars assume a date either contemporary with Neopalatial axes of similar type or with the Phaistos Disc (late Protopalatial).

"As to date of the Phaistos syllabary: The Phaistos Disc was excavated under less than satisfactory conditions, and found with it was the Linear A tablet PH 1. Its ceramic date is assumed to be MM II, but if there was any pottery found with the Disc and tablet, it is unpublished. The seal impression from Phaistos (CMS II 5 no. 246) is therefore the only Phaistos Syllabary document that comes from a reliably dated context: MM IIB." John Younger, December 2007, personal communication.

CHIC 039 Medallion: '1/3 of the imported flour'

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KN He 039 (HM 1270), (SM I, P86), is a ceramic inventory tag with a tie-hole from the Palace of Knossos. It contains four lines of writing, measures 4.1 x 4.0 x 1.3 cm and dates to the 18th century BC. The syllabary is Old European, not Hieroglyphic A or Linear A, so it belongs in a separate category akin to Mason Marks. The symbol for 'flour mill' resembles Linear Elamite. The scribe wrote left to right; Linear Elamite began that way but changed to top to bottom, and besides had disappeared by the time this tag was written.

The tag tells how a shipment of imported flour was divided: 1/3 to the scribe, 1/3 to the men of the flour mill, and 1/3 to a woman to make table beer and some food. None was left.

Translation

Old European

1/3 JA HA KO Ä
1/3 MI VÄ JA-LA
1/3 SA KA RE
NY E

Finnish

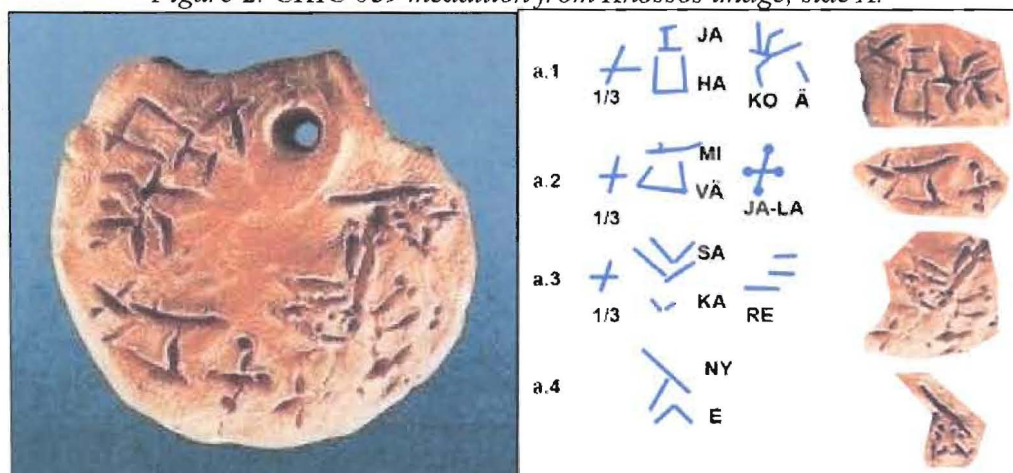
1/3 jauhон haahen ko'in äijän.
1/3 miehin väen jauhaenla.
1/3 sai ka'jahan rehu.
Nyt ei.

English

1/3 of the imported flour I tried a lot.
1/3 more to the men among the people of the flour mill.
1/3 she made into table beer and some food.
Now there is nothing.

Image and Transcription

Figure 2: CHIC 039 medallion from Knossos image, side A.



Notes on Translation

a.2.4 'Flour mill' could also be 'flour hall' or 'grinding mill'.

a.2.4 The symbol for 'flour mill' occurs on the front of a building in the center of Tallinn, capital of Estonia, where it meant 'flour hall'. This style, called Linear Elamite, uses dots to replace short crossing bars. It suggests that the scribe came from either Estonia or nearby Poland.

a.1-----

1/3

JA = *jauhon* 'of the flour'; K23.295 "Sift **the flour** (*jauhot*) briskly"

HA = *haahen* 'imported'; K04.025 "I do not care about **imported** (*haahen*) cloth"

KO = *ko'in* 'I tried'; K23.562 "**I tried** (*ko'in*) to live above reproach"

Ä = *äijän* 'a lot'; K31.368 'The craftsman gave **a lot** (*äijän*) for him'

a.2-----

1/3

MI = *miehin* 'to the men'; K27.090 'the mead measured out **to the men** (*miehin*)'

VÄ = *väen* 'among the people'; K21.036 "my son-in-law **among the people?** (*väen*) "

JA-LA = *jauhonla* 'of the flour mill'; K23.295 "Sift **the flour** (*jauhot*) briskly"

a.3-----

1/3

SA = *sai* 'she made'; K01.270 'there **she made** (*sai*) the coasts smooth'

KA = *ka'jahan* 'into table beer', from *kalja*; K20.502 'the fine **table beer** (*kalja*) made ready'

RE = *rehu* 'some food', from *ruoka*; K26.028 "set out **some food** (*ruoka*) quickly"

a.4-----

NY = *nyt* 'now'; K02.303 "**Now** (*nyt*) make the turf grow"

E = *ei* 'there is nothing'; K 03.529 "**There is nothing** (*ei*) to weep about"

You are invited to contact Stuart Harris about these or any other inscriptions at
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