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## A REVISED CLASSIFICATION OF THE CRETAN SCRIPTS

The threefold classification by Arthur Evans of the Bronze Age scripts of Crete, as Hieroglyphic and Linear of Classes A and B, may be questioned in the light of subsequent discoveries.

It is proposed that we make a first distinction between the account tablets and 'bars' on the one hand, and what we may term the 'monumental' inscriptions on the other.

Evans's threefold division may still be conveniently applied to the account tablets and bars. However, whether inscribed in the characters of the Hieroglyphic type, or in those which we have become accustomed to call 'Linear A' and 'Linear B', these records have in common certain writing conventions which distinguish them all from the 'monumental' inscriptions.

The conventions of writing which are found in all three categories of account tablets include arrangements in lists under headings, the use of ideograms, of ligatured signs, and other forms of abbreviation.

By contrast, the 'monumental' inscriptions, in which category it is proposed to include the Cretan seals, the stone libation tables which Evans classed as 'Linear A', and the inscribed hairpins and rings of precious metals, have in common the use of a fully 'literary' syllabary, without ideograms, ligatures or other forms of abbreviation.

The affinity between the inscriptions of the libation vessels and ornamental pins and rings on the one hand, and the hieroglyphic script of the seals on the other, extends to the form of the individual signs. The hieroglyphic sign P40 (fig. 1), for example, the high ewer with handle and curved spout, is identifiable also on the pin and ring from Mavro Spelio; while the equivalent sign on the Linear A tablets—L61—is much simplified. A further five examples are illustrated (fig. 2) from the stone libation tables of

Mount Iouktas, where the shape of the sign is closer to the form on the seals (the P series) than to its equivalent in the Linear A account tablets (the L series); in one case (P108) we as yet do not have any corresponding sign in the account tablets.

The Iouktas form of P85 (the 'bee' sign) is especially worth noting, because it presents the intermediate form which links L56 with P85, as in the case mentioned above of L61, which can be linked with P40 through the Mavro Spelio forms.

We may now observe the distribution throughout the island of the several categories of early writing (fig. 3). The 'monumental' styles, that is to say the scripts of the seals, the libation vessels and ornaments, are widely scattered, as are the account tablets in Linear A. The accounts in the Hieroglyphic and Linear B scripts, by contrast, are much more closely restricted, to Malia and Knossos in the first instance, and to Knossos alone in the second.

It is suggested (fig. 4) that the hieroglyphic script of Crete was inspired from some similar system on the mainland, possibly Anatolia. On Crete it was used on the seals and in the 'monumental' inscriptions, whose affinity to one another has been argued above. The Disc of Phaistos may for the moment be regarded as an egregious offshoot.

As for the account tablets, there is now much evidence that their writing conventions, in each of the three categories of Hieroglyphic and Linear A and B, were copied from those of Mesopotamia and Syria—in respect of their general arrangements as lists with numerals prefaced by headings and often concluded with totals, and of their use of various forms of abbreviation, notably ideograms and ligatures.

While these account-tablets borrowed their writing-system from the Levant, they took their sign-forms from the Cretan hieroglyphic repertoire, most evidently in the case of the Hieroglyphic account tablets of Malia and Knossos.

The links between the three categories of Cretan account-scripts is still a matter of debate. However, we should not forget that the 'horizontal' lay-out of the Hieroglyphic bars is reflected in the similar arrangement of the majority of the Linear B tablets; whereas the Linear A tablets are invariably written with the short edge uppermost, that is in a vertical lay-out of lines (fig. 5). Taking into account also the limited distribution of both the Hieroglyphic 'bars' and the Linear B tablets within north-central Crete, by

contrast with the more widespread circulation of the Linear A tablets, we may keep open the possibility that Linear B owed more to the Hieroglyphic cursive script than to Linear A.



Fig. 1. Forms of the 'ewer' sign

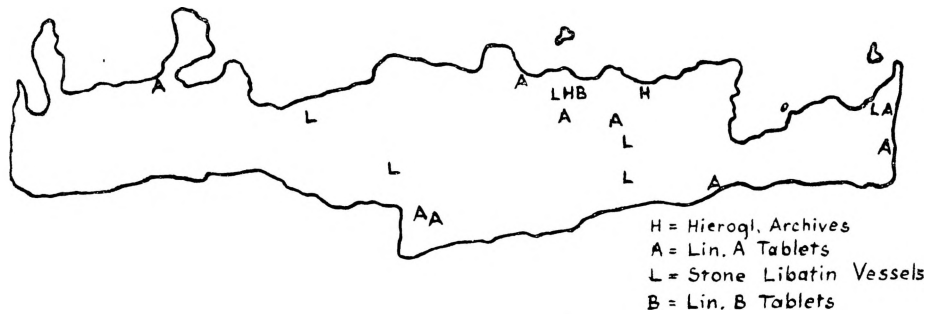


Fig. 3. Distribution of Cretan Writing Styles

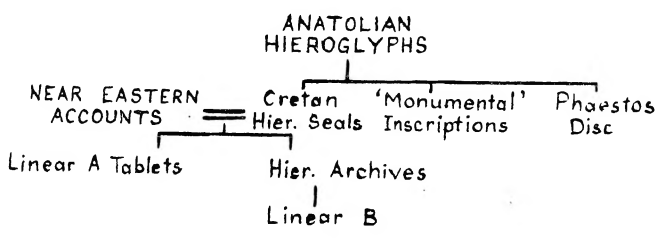


Fig. 4. Relationships of writing-systems















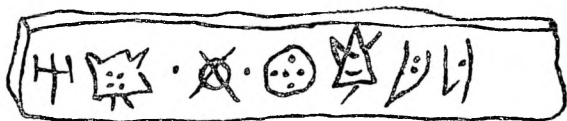
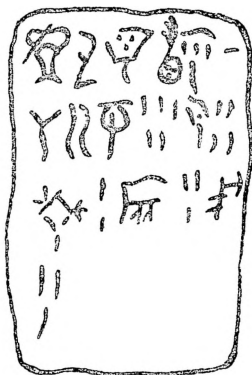
	Hierogl.	Iouktas	Lin. A Tablets
P 108			
P 49			 L 6
P 27			 L 88
P 85			 L 56
P 75			 L 95

Fig. 2. Variant sign-forms



Hierogl. Clay Bar - Malia



HT 121  
(Linear A)

Fig. 5. Two shapes of tablet