A note on a Linear B tablet from Thebes: TH X 105

A photograph of the tablet from the Thebes museum in Greece has been generously made available for public use¹, and I shall use it for discussion as any equivalent in any published "corpus" is less so². The photograph is shown below along with the proposed transcription of the signs, line by line, from the Damos database³.

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.0 vac.
.1 ṭọ-sa, ko-na
.2 wa-na-ke-te
.3 pe-re-wi-jo
.4 vest.[
inf. mut.

I return to the proposed identification of the Linear signage later, but at the outset draw attention instead to two oddities highlighted in the second photograph below. One is the formation of the proposed sign "te" at the perceived end of line 2. It is odd scribally for two reasons:
- it is not a single vertical line, the scribally economic and obvious way of delineating a very easy sign to draw. Instead it is formed by two separate incisions (the second purple-arrowed on the adjoining red standard form), non-obvious, unnecessary, uneconomic in terms of time and effort;

¹ Photo by O.Mustafin - own work, CCO 1, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=60630462
² I do not have access to V. L. Aravantinos, L. Godart, A. Sacconi, Thèbes: Fouilles de la Cadméé I: Les tablettes en Linéaire B de la Odos Pelopidou: Édition et commentaire. Pisa and Rome: Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 2001, but infer from the Damos database (note 3) that the tablet is there featured.
³ Damos, Aurora, F; Nesøen, A; Nedić, D; Løken, H; Bersi, A, Database of Mycenaean at Oslo, University of Oslo, Oslo 2013
- its descender is thinner at the top than the bottom, the inverse of how any writing implement normally impacts a surface, unless the incision was made from the bottom up, which would be no less problematic.

It is thus difficult to explain the formation scribally. Of course, it may or may not be attributed to a "scribal hand", but typologising scribal redundancy and irregularity - in fact any features - is not an explanation. On the contrary, it is a way of avoiding the obligation to provide one. Graphically, however, in terms of its contribution to a potential image, the rationale for the design and oddities of "te" becomes readily apparent, for they help to convey, with great precision and economy, the suggestion of a right-profiled, bearded male visage, highlighted green.

The second oddity is omitted entirely by the current transcription, but it is the patent oval indent to the right of the last apparent sign on line 3. Evidently, it was not deemed "deliberate" by scholars, but the decision needs justification as the indent appears to contribute, by way of the eye, to the suggestion of a right-profiled hare or rabbit (turquoise).

I have discussed potentially related motifs (TE-RE-O-WA, the shepherd, PE-RA-KO-KO-WO, the hare and bird) in Section 6 of The Problem with Linear B⁴, and will illustrate some other potentially related images shortly. But it is worth highlighting different graphic art work first, partly because its presence helps substantiate the case for the existence of imagery more generally in the piece, partly because it is, frankly, considerably more convincing, visually and semantically, than any speculation or inference about signage.

Thus below, the left-profiled probably female visage (red) is so finely observed and delineated it is impossible that it can be anything but deliberate. It relies on fainter incision and probably colour. The right-profiled hound (turquoise) may be less naturalistic, more cartoon, but the detail of nose and jowls is again brilliantly observed. Finally, my art work fails to do justice to the suggestion of a more slender slippered, trousered right leg and foot tripping towards us (our left), and a much

⁴ Available at https://hcommons.org/deposits/item/hc:20833/
larger, swollen one on our right (green). Again, I have set out the rationale for the "swollen limb" motif (and probably digging dog looking at rodent, bear or "tail") in Section 6 of *The Problem* (O-KO-KO-WO).

As with all examples of Linear and cult art (see *The Problem* especially Section 2), the tablet is full of multiple, complex, suggested and suggestive images. For example, the hare or rabbit is repeated in right profile on a larger scale (red in the highlighting further below). Above the smaller version of the hare or rabbit, already highlighted above, is the suggestion of a left-profiled bird (yellow), another stalking bird (purple) higher up. An indent (X) serves to suggest the mouth of a frontal, probably girl's face (turquoise), below a frontal sheep's face and receding body (green).
Turning finally to the putative signage, although I think some of the tablet readings are wrong, I want to focus instead on the underlying principles. For in making the identifications reflected in the Damos database, the existing reading has ignored what on many other tablets would be regarded (albeit I think also wrongly) as irremediable damage, most obviously on the left edge (purple arrowed below). It is not clear to me how the distinction - legibility here, elsewhere not - can be properly defended.

In similarly inconsistent vein, it has also treated manifestly heavier incision on exactly the same basis as lighter. The quality of the photograph is irrelevant; the degree of intervention cannot be in doubt. For example, the perceived "ko" in line 1 and "wi" in line 3 have been almost gouged out, the "ke" or "te" in line 2 being less invasive. But on what basis is a decision then made that yet lighter incisions (or other surface interventions) are not "deliberate"? What is the criterion?

To which the only answer can be that, objectively, there isn't one. Here - as on many if not all other tablets - subjective judgements have been made as to what is or is not "deliberate" on the assumption that the nature, if not even subject matter, of the object is already known, and signs need to be identified to fit that assumption. And so they have been.

Given such process, the results can be nothing but tendentious. The only properly scientific and evidence-based course is to treat all interventions on a surface as potentially "deliberate", until they are shown to be otherwise, that is contributing nothing to any visual or textual sense.

Analysis of this tablet, as of others, has a long way to travel before it gets near to that better informed viewpoint. Possibly at least some of its art work may not be old, but that is another story.

5 For some of the difficulties of the evidence base - tablets and photographs - see Annex 1 of The Problem.
6 The Odos Pelopidou dig, the reported source of the tablet, started in 1993. The film Beethoven premiered in 1992.