

**THE
DECIPHERMENT OF
LINEAR B**

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
978-1-107-69176-6 — The Decipherment of Linear B
John Chadwick
Frontmatter
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Michael Ventris

THE DECIPHERMENT OF LINEAR B

BY
JOHN CHADWICK

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PREFACE

The decipherment of Linear B was described by Michael Ventris in the first two chapters of our joint book, *Documents in Mycenaean Greek* (Cambridge University Press, 1956). This is an attempt to present that story to the general reader, so it omits many of the technical details to be found there; on the other hand, the vital steps in the decipherment are here explained in more detail, and much of the background which is unfamiliar to the general reader is filled in. In particular I have, by the kindness of Mrs Ventris, been able to make use of letters, notes, and other material from Ventris' files. My own file of letters between us, at times two or three a week, has been the chief source for the history of the subject after the first break in 1952. This has allowed me to round out the bare account by the inclusion of personal reminiscences and other details, much indeed that but for the tragic accident of Ventris' death would probably have remained unpublished; for his overwhelming modesty would have prevented me from writing the eulogy which I, and all his colleagues in this field, feel is his due. I had, however, his permission and encouragement to write a book on this subject; I hope it will be a worthy tribute to his memory.

Readers who are familiar with Greek, and even some who are not, may feel inclined to pursue the subject further. I have not provided them with the customary guide to further reading for two reasons: first because their next step has already been hinted at—they must read *Documents in Mycenaean Greek*, which contains a large bibliography up to 1955. Secondly, I find it impossible to select from the current mass of literature sufficient articles, especially in English, which are not either brief summaries of what is already in this book or technical studies of abstruse points. We have not yet reached the point where any more general surveys have been attempted, or at least have succeeded. Those

Preface

who wish to make themselves familiar with the formidable volume of articles will find an index to it in *Studies in Mycenaean Inscriptions and Dialect*, started in 1955 by Ventris, and continued by L. R. Palmer and myself, and published by the London University Institute of Classical Studies. Another useful bibliography, covering work on all aspects of the Mycenaean world, is Miss B. Moon's *Mycenaean Civilization, Publications since 1935* (London, 1957, published by the same Institute).

Then a word to my professional colleagues: this book is not for them, though I hope they will enjoy reading it. I have tried to summarize the story as I see it, and have deliberately omitted much that I know is relevant, much that deserves a place in an official history. I hope no one will take me to task for failing to mention X's contribution or Y's theory; some parts are already hard work for the reader, and I have no wish to add to them. Chapter 7, though based upon chapter 5 of *Documents*, is my selection from the numerous views on Mycenaean life which have been expressed in the last few years; it was impossible to avoid some controversial topics, and the views expressed are my own responsibility. But I have drawn heavily on the publications of others, and I should like to take this opportunity of acknowledging my indebtedness to all whose work I have used, whether their names are mentioned or not.

It is a pleasure to record my thanks to the many friends and colleagues who have contributed advice and criticism, especially Mr O. Cox, Dr A. P. Treweek, and Professor T. B. L. Webster; and to the officers and staff of the University Press, who have devoted much time and care to the book. My thanks are also due to the Syndics of the Press for undertaking the publication, and for permitting me to use figures and plates prepared for *Documents*.

Above all I am grateful to Mrs Ventris, who has not only allowed me to consult her husband's papers, but has given me valuable help and encouragement at every stage.

J. C.

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01		da	30		mi	59		ta
02		ro	31		sa	60		ra
03		pa	32		qo	61		o
04		te	33		ra ₃	62		pte
05		to	34		jo	63		ju
06		na	35		ti	64		ta ₂
07		di	36		e	65		ki
08		a	37		pi	66		ro ₂
09		se	38		wi	67		tu
10		u	39		si	68		ko
11		po	40		wo	69		dwe
12		so	41		ai	70		pe
13		me	42		ke	71		mi
14		do	43		de	72		ze
15		mo	44		je	73		we
16		pa ₂	45		nwa	74		ra ₂
17		za	46		pu	75		ka
18		zo	47		du	76		ge
19		qi	48		no	77		zu
20		mu	49		ri	78		ma
21		ne	50		wa	79		ku
22		a ₂	51		nu	80		ku
23		ru	52		pa ₃	81		ku
24		re	53		ja	82		ku
25		i	54		su	83		ku
26		pu ₂	55			84		ku
27			56			85		ku
28			57			86		ku
29			58			87		ku

Chart of eighty-seven Linear B signs, with numeral equivalents and phonetic values.