

The Undeciphered Signs of Linear B

Decades after Michael Ventris deciphered Linear B and showed that its language was Greek, nearly one-sixth of the sound-values of its syllabic signs are still unknown. This book offers a new approach to establishing the possible values of these undeciphered signs. Analysis of Linear B's structure and usage not only establishes the most likely sound-values of these signs – providing the best possible basis for future decipherments – but also sheds light on the writing system as a whole. The undeciphered signs are also used to explore the evidence provided by palaeography for the chronology of the Linear B documents and the activities of the Mycenaean scribes. The conclusions presented in this book therefore deepen our understanding not only of the undeciphered signs but also of the Linear B writing system as a whole, the texts it was used to write and the insight these documents bring into the world of the Mycenaean palaces.

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The Undeciphered Signs of Linear B

Interpretation and Scribal Practices

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Citations of Texts

Unless otherwise indicated, readings of Cretan Hieroglyphic, Linear A and Linear B texts and other related information (e.g. scribal hand attribution) follow the main corpora and scribal publications for each writing system or site, as given below; differences of reading between corpora are discussed where relevant in the text. Major differences between the (at time of writing) very recent *KT*⁶ and the previous corpora for Knossos, e.g. changes to series classification or significant joins, are also indicated.

Cretan Hieroglyphic: *CHIC*

Linear A: *GORILA*

Linear B:

Ayios Vasileios: Aravantinos–Vasilogamvrou 2012
 Iklaina: Shelmerdine 2012
 ISJs: *CIV*; *CIV*²
 Khania: Hallager 2011a
 Knossos: *CoMIK*; *KT*⁶ (see also Firth–Melena 2016a, 2016b and 2016c); Olivier 1967
 RCT: Driessen 2000
 Midea: Demakopoulou *et al.* 2002: 53
 Mycenae: *SCM*; *TITHEMY*; Iakovidis *et al.* 2012
 Pylos: *PTT*; *PoN*⁴ (note that this is a preliminary version); Palaima 1988b (Jean-Pierre Olivier & Maurizio Del Freo (2020), *The Pylos Tablets Transcribed*, 2nd ed. (Padua: libreriauniversitaria.it) appeared when this volume was in production and so could not be taken into account)
 Thebes: *TITHEMY*; Piteros *et al.* 1990; *TFC*; Aravantinos *et al.* 2008
 Tiryns: *TITHEMY*

DAMOS has frequently been used for locating examples of particular terms or sequences, in which case all results have also been checked against the relevant corpora.

Unless otherwise indicated, interpretations of Linear B terms follow *DMic* and (for phonemic interpretations of morphological elements) Bartoněk 2003. Further details relating to attestations of the Linear B undeciphered signs are given in the Appendix.

Transcription Conventions

Linear B texts are transcribed using lower-case standardised transliterations for syllabograms (e.g. *pa*) and the conventional abbreviated Latin terms in small caps for ideograms (e.g. *OVIS* ‘sheep’, *EQU* ‘horse’). Phonemic interpretations are given between forward slashes (e.g. /pa/). Linear A texts are transcribed using the AB reference numbers assigned by *GORILA* and/or the values of their Linear B equivalents: the latter are capitalised to distinguish them from Linear B transcriptions (e.g. *PA*). Cretan Hieroglyphic texts are transcribed using the CH numbers assigned by *CHIC*.

In transcriptions of all three writing systems, the following conventions apply:

Underdots indicate an uncertain reading: *ṗa*

[.] indicates an unidentifiable sign

] and [indicate texts which are incomplete at the left or right, as follows:

]pa or pa[= tablet broken immediately before/after sign

] pa or pa [= space between sign and preceding/following break

] -pa or pa - [= traces visible between sign and preceding/following break

Double square brackets indicate erased text: [[pa]]

For further details of transcription conventions, see R. Palmer 2008a and Del Freo 2019a.

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Linear A, Cretan Hieroglyphic and Cypro-Minoan: ‘Knossos’, ‘Petras Archives’, ‘Petras Seals’, ‘CM 1’ and ‘CM 2’, created by Jean-Pierre Olivier.

Abbreviations

For bibliographic abbreviations, see pp. 290–3.

A	Arsenal (Thebes)
AAS	Agia Aikaterini Square (Khania)
AC	Archives Complex (Pylos)
acc.	accusative
adj.	adjective
AP	Apodoulou
app.	appellative
ARKH	Arkhanes
BCE	Before Common Era
C	consonant <u>or</u> Class (of scribes at Pylos)
CH	Cretan Hieroglyphic
CIPEM	Comité international permanent des études mycénienes
CM	Cypro-Minoan
CR	Crete
CS	Cypriot Syllabary
d.	dual
dat.	dative
E	Odos Epameinondou (Thebes)
EL	Eleusis
EM	Early Minoan (chronological period)
f.	feminine
gen.	genitive
H	Hand (designating a scribe)
HOM	House of the Oil Merchant (Mycenae)
HS	House of the Sphinx (Mycenae)
HT	Haghia Triada
HV	Ayios Vasileios
IE	Indo-European
IK	Iklaina
instr.	instrumental

IO	Iouktas
IOL	Iolkos (Volos)
ISJ	inscribed stirrup jar
K	velar stop (voicing/aspiration not specified)
KH	Khania
KN	Knossos
KO	Kophinas
KR	Kreusis
LA	Linear A
LH	Late Helladic (chronological period)
loc.	locative
LM	Late Minoan (chronological period)
m.	masculine
MED	Medeon
MIL	Miletus
MM	Middle Minoan (chronological period)
MN	man's name
MO	Mochlos
MY	Mycenae
n.	neuter
NEB	North Eastern Building (Pylos)
NEP	Northern Entrance Passage (Knossos)
NES	north-east slope of citadel (Mycenae)
nom.	nominative
O	Odos Oidipodos (Thebes)
P	Odos Pelopidou (Thebes) <u>or</u> labial stop (voicing/aspiration unspecified)
PE	Petras
PH	Phaistos
PIE	Proto-Indo-European
PK	Palaikastro
PL	Platanos
pl.	plural
PN	personal name
PO	Poros
ppl.	participle
PR	Prassa
PRI	Prinias
PY	Pylos

R	liquid (/r/ or /l/)
RCT	Room of the Chariot Tablets (Knossos)
RP	Room of Pithoi (Thebes)
S	stylus group (designating a group of tablets of similar palaeography and often content, which cannot be certainly attributed to or distinguished from the known scribal hands: used at Pylos and in the Knossos RCT)
sg.	singular
SI	Sitia
SKO	Skoteino Cave
SY	Syme
T	dental stop (voicing/aspiration unspecified)
TC	Treasure Chamber (Thebes)
TH	Thebes
THE	Thera
TI	Tiryns
TN	toponym
V	vowel
VRY	Vrysinas
WC	West Crete (ISJ origin)
WH	West House (Mycenae)
WN	woman's name
WW	West Wing (Knossos)
ZA	Zakros

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