

19 North End,

LONDON N.W.3

5 October 53

Dear Bennett,

Thank you for your interesting letter. I'm glad you are fixed up with comfortable accommodation in Athens, and it was good to hear about the new tablets, and about your plans.

I had a long talk with Blegen over the phone when he was here a couple of weeks ago, and he mentioned some of his speculations on the new companion piece to 641; also that offprints of his note on 641 would shortly be out, in which I gather he gives sympathetic account of the translation of the tablet which results from our suggested values.

I was glad to hear that more interesting E- tablets had been found: they seemed to be the most rewarding of the 1939 lot. The word you quote, $\zeta\epsilon\psi\zeta\epsilon\psi$, seems rather peculiar, and it would be interesting to see its context: grammatically, it looks like a reduplication, of the "dative" of the word $\zeta\epsilon\psi$ "year?". But what could it mean: "from year to year"? - but that's $[\epsilon\iota\varsigma] \epsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma \epsilon\epsilon \epsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma$ in proper Greek. "On a yearly basis?" - or is it really a compound of two dissimilar words?

If you can spare copies, from time to time, of this and of other tablets which would whet our appetites, I should be very grateful; and I would promise to keep them between Chadwick, Huxley and myself.

But for the moment I imagine that you will best be occupied looking, as you say, at the grid without interpretational preoccupation, while I myself ought not to be diverted on to any new tablets until I get finished with the card-index to the MLB Index which I'm working on at the moment, in intervals between screwing things into the walls and digging up the garden. I hope to get through it in the next 2 months, and transfer it to foolscap form (about 50 pages I expect), get it photostatted, and send you a copy. This is intended to give our first shot at interpreting as many as possible of the pre-1952 sign-groups, and it will be all the more interesting if we finalise it without reference to any more of the new tablets, beyond the 641 which is irresistible for inclusion. It may be that a good chunk of this "glossary" of ours will turn out to be complete nonsense, but it will at least form something to try out on the new tablets, and to form a basis for discussion and revision. After that we'll be all set to attack new material.

I very much hope that you'll do as much as you can, and include it in publication, on the "hands" and technical aspects of the tablets, without feeling that it isn't useful to decipherment, because it is all extremely interesting from the point of view of the history of writing: and no one will be better qualified to do it than yourself at the present with all the stuff in front of you. An interesting discussion of cuneiform technique is given in Driver's "Semitic Writing" (Schweich Lectures, British Academy, 1944), and it's something Scripta Minoa has been very lax about.

There is one point of text which has worried Chadwick, Sittig & myself on a Knossos tablet, which you may be able to throw light on. You suggest that the first word of "SPEAR" tablet 0481 bis might be restored as the word $A\chi\eta$ e-ke-a. This of course suits us fine, as being the nominative plural of the word $A\phi$ $\epsilon\chi\omicron\varsigma$ which occurs on Sc 226 and whose dative plural $A\chi\eta$ occurs on Jn09.3. It's the next two words which are worrying: the last sign of $\oplus\oplus \psi\psi$ looks like a very poor ψ , and if there was any chance of interpreting the spelling as being for $\oplus\oplus\psi\eta$

ka-ka-re-a , one would get the Homeric adjective χαλκ-ἄρεα "bronze-pointed" (cf Χαλκήρεϊ δουρι Iliad 5.145). But the division of the spelling into two halves seems to go against this. Sittig thought he could detect signs in erasure following ⊕⊕ - (the first one possibly Ψ ?) . Any comments ?

Incidentally it was only the other day that I noticed that the other name of a "missile" on Jn09.3 ⊕ ⊕ Ψ - ⊕ also has its nominative plural in ⊕ ⊕ ⊕ on the ARROW sealing Ws 1704; which Chadwick then pointed out had, by Evans' report, actually been found in association with a box of arrows. *Sittig compares πικατόν "dart", which is better than our σπαθ-*

I am glad that you will be including tracings of the tablets in the publication of the new Pylos tablets. I always felt that was a slight lack in the '1939' edition, not so much because one suspects the transcription at all, but because it would give a useful indication of how much matter is lost in the broken and smudged areas. I am sure you will not be offended if I say that here and there in your MLB Index there are words which, on the photos available to me, don't quite seem to square up. I propose to indicate these queries in coloured pencil on the copy of the 'glossary' I shall send you: I expect in most cases your own 'autopsy' will have proved to be the more correct.

Dikaios sent two splendid photos of his new Enkomi tablet for publication in the December number of our English quarterly ANTIQUITY, and the editor O.G.S. Crawford has lent them to me over the weekend. I have drawn him out a list of signs (which I get up to 58, possibly 57, on the tablet as it stands) and also a 'normalising' tracing, intended to make the word-division and sign-differentiation clearer to the average user (the signs are built up of tiny 'shshing' strokes, not continuous lines like the Mycenaean, and so the problem of finding a reasonable "normalising" shape is difficult). There seem to be about 128 discrete words on the two sides of the tablet, but though I've drawn up an index, I don't expect ANTIQUITY will have room for it- and in any case, it takes some initial fun away from any one else playing with the tablet. From what one can see of the script, it looks very little related to Linear A or B, superficially at any rate; though one suspects that, geographically and historically, it ought to be the ancestor of the Cypriot syllabary. I have tried to collate the signs with the terracotta ball inscriptions and vase inscriptions published in Daniel's article, and in Masson's chapter in Enkomi-Alasia; but many of the drawings are bad, and if there are variations in the forms of the letters, I think the signary based on the tablet must be accepted as the "norm" as being obviously a carefully-written literary text.

For the same number of ANTIQUITY Chadwick and I have also written a pair of articles going over much the same ground as our JHS article, but in more popular terms. Please discount any excessive confidence in it, on things you are still skeptical about. I will send you a copy of the ANTIQUITY number, and also a tidier offprint of the JHS article, which is on the way from the printers now.

All the best,

Michael Ventris