

Emmett L. Bennett
746 W. Main St. #309
MADISON, WI 53715-1467
+608 257 2279 ebennett@facstaff.wisc.edu

~~COPY
SECRET~~

Dear Spyro,

I had a fine time in Greece this summer, not only in the long stay in Chora and Ano Englianos, but also in Athens and Cyprus. The hospitality of the American School, of Dimitri Kokkoni (who runs the Viking Travel, which is the excellent agent who makes the semi-archaeological tours of the Madison Society of the AIA work out very well), and it was especially cheering to dine with you. CAARI in Nicosia was wonderful, too. I went off to Cyprus thinking I was just going to see the sights, but when I got there I found that I had promised to look at some pieces (two stone, one pithos fragment) from near Idalion with some still unidentified signs. They were offered as possibly Cypro-Minoan?, but I conclude that I know nothing like them, especially in Cypro-Minoan.

More recently I've been in Ohlstadt, Germany, for a conference about Greek language and Greek writing, as a listener to see if I could learn useful things. Tom Palaima was one of the participants, and Louis Godart was listed on the program - but he didn't come. I had very much hoped to talk to him, about other things, like his beautifully produced books on that Disk, and also about our conversation in Athens. I had one particular subject I wanted to talk about, which I had actually hoped to bring up in our talk in Athens. But it would have taken more time, and it seemed not quite polite to spend all the time of a pleasant supper on business. So I wrote Louis a letter a few days ago, and I am writing this one to you, to bring up the subject.

I have thought from the very beginning, when I first saw the stone in 1994 in Olympia, that it would be extremely valuable to have expert and scientific advice on the stone itself, and on the physical character of the marks on it. I think now that same advice would be even more useful if it showed that the marks are indeed ancient, and if the detractors, whatever they think about the marks, or signs, or text, could not claim that they are modern. To point this out to Louis I wrote this to him:

"... what I had hoped to talk about with Spiro, except that we did not have enough time, or the wish to interrupt a very pleasant meal, was the great desirability of having a "scientific examination" of the stone. I think I probably said something like this in a letter. But I surely didn't explain why I was so confident that such an examination would be a very desirable thing. Let me tell you now.

Way back in the very early 50's while I was at Yale, I got a letter from the University Museum in Philadelphia, inquiring whether I would be willing to examine an object with an inscription and give an opinion on its character. I was, of course, very pleased to be recognized as an "authority", and agreed. It would be in a bank vault in New York, and only a short trip from New Haven. So I went down and looked at it, and it was the double axe which is now in Boston. It was very pleasing to have it in my hand, and to examine it as closely as I could. It was really very hard to find anything to suspect. The signs looked like Linear A, and you can't see Mycenaean or modern fingerprints on gold, so I was ready to say I had no doubts about it - except for one thing. I had seen in Iraklion the fragmentary silver one, with very much the same inscription. That of course tended to confirm the status of the gold one, since it had the same inscription, and was therefore good Linear A. But suppose the gold was a copy of the silver, on a newly made gold axe. Or suppose it was a modern copy of the silver text on a genuine but uninscribed axe from Arkalochori. This did really worry me, because when you look at the gold text

Institute for Research in the Humanities, University of Wisconsin-Madison

1401 Observatory Drive, MADISON, WI 53706-1295 TEL +608 262 6118 FAX +608 257 4173

copy / SECRET

you will notice that right in the middle of the i-like sign [I forget its number, and do we use the numeration of JPO or of Raison?] there is a rough spot where some of the gold has been cut or abraded. Now if I were copying the silver, I would be in difficulties just at that point, because that's where the break between the two chief parts is, right at the i-like sign. And since if I were writing it I couldn't guess what marks to put in there, I would make it seem that the proper mark was there, but had been damaged. As a result, after some worrying, I decided that it probably was indeed perfectly genuine. But ever since that time I kept worrying about it, and kept thinking that it might really be not quite genuine. That is, until the scientific people at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston had a look at it, and discovered in the grooves of the inscription traces of compounds of gold and stuff which guaranteed that it had been under ground for centuries and centuries. Now, of course, I have absolutely no hesitation in saying that the gold and the silver are both really wonderful, genuine, evidence for the writing of Linear A. (You must pardon me if I continue to think it possible that the same craftsman made both pieces.)"

The questions that ought to be considered in an examination of the stone start out with what kind of stone it is, and how hard, and where might its brothers and sisters be found. This bothered me in 1994, when I wondered (prompted by the initial description as Linear A, I suppose) whether it might have come from Crete; it doesn't bother me now, since I've noticed lots of reddish stones in the Peloponnesos, though none as nicely polished as that one. The critical ones are these.

Can one identify, from the microscopic examination of the cuts, the material of the instrument which was used to cut: was it stone, or metal, bronze, or iron, or steel? These naturally differ in hardness, and the shapes appropriate to each material must vary.

Can one identify, from chemical analysis, any traces of the material of the instrument?

Can one identify, by microscope or chemistry, in the depths of the cut, any traces of the earth in which it was buried after it was cut? Could those traces, like the traces in the double axe in Boston, show a couple of thousand years of burial?

With a sound scientific indication of the great antiquity of the markings, of course, the problems of interpretation of the marks will become even more problematical than they are now. But those will be philological, or graphical, or economic, or religious, and not archaeological.

Naturally, I have great confidence in the Wiener Lab at the American School. But in the present circumstances I would suggest that the Laboratories of the British School (with a longer history of good work) would be a convenient and reliable organization for this task. And I write to you with more detail because you are surely much closer to, no, you are among the decision makers.

I am pleased to see that Maggidis will be in New York for the AIA meetings, and hope to see him there.

With best wishes,

25 October 1996