

Brooklyn College

BEDFORD AVENUE AND AVENUE H
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICAL LANGUAGES
ACADEMIC BUILDING

April 21, 1948

Dear Mr. Bennett,

Shucks! As I think I explained, my letter was written in a hurry, and I made a mistake. I have your ΑοΛε, of course. It bothers me that I can't remember why I gave you ΑοΛΑ, which does occur at Knossos, while your form does not. It is probably because I am certain both are inflectional variants of ΑοΛ, which appears in statements, usually initial statements, though not itself initial, and I strongly suspect you have it at Pylos, although I haven't seen it. I have been looking for it too. I keep changing my mind about the language of Pylos. At present, I'm inclined to think that it is very like that of Knossos, but my switch again before I finish this letter. At any rate, the vocabularies are much more similar than our lists of identical words shows, because I have what are almost certainly inflectional variants of other words of yours, though the forms are not identical. What is even more cogent, many of these similarities occur in what seem to be sentences. That is, they involve words rather than names (although there are similarities in names too).

I also suspect that Β may be a miswritten β, but can't make it come out to my satisfaction. The first sign is too rare, and not quite the same. *Addendum - now I prefer "the ox-head"*

Ditto for Π and Ξ and the "ox-head". I wrote Sir John to that effect last year, when I was trying to get him to change his sign list.

Α is certainly some variant of Α. I'm inclined to think that the first sign of Α is another variant of this, because Α exists.

The Metropolitan casts are not too useful for dubious signs, because the casts are not quite as clear as the originals, naturally. I haven't seen the originals, but I have seen Evans' photographs of some, and as a result, changed my opinion of dubious signs several times. My notes are full of question marks that must be answered only from the originals.

The "saffron" sign, as you know, occurs at Knossos as a ~~phonetic sign~~ commodity sign. I know why you asked: PM iv Fig. 704 d contains an error. It bothered me too, until I looked at the photograph. Α is probably Α, though the number does look like the sign. *Nope - better to it*

Since I last wrote, I've been over the inscriptions again. I think there may be one example of Α (and several where Α or Α are possible readings). It is, at any rate, extremely rare at Knossos.

Α occurs a few times, I set it down as Α but it may possibly be your Α. It has the cross-bar, but the long vertical goes through the bottom of the lower curve in several cases. The other two signs do not occur at all, though the first is probably a variant of the phonetic Α and the ideographic Α, n'est-ce pas? That is, I don't mean a phonetic variant, but a graphic variant with another meaning.

I am inclined to think that Α is sometimes written Α, since, after all, the difference between a slightly curved stroke and a straight line is sometimes impossible to make out in clay. Α (Knossos doesn't have your Α) is probably the same, though it has a tendency to occur regularly in certain words, while it sometimes appears in words elsewhere spelled with Α. But the writing of the tablets where it occurs is usually more stylized in other ways as well. Α is annoying. It occurs regularly in Α only one word, with several inflectional variants, otherwise

rarely, and under such conditions that it may be a miswritten H , which is sometimes written H , so that it is ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ possible that a cross-bar is invisible. I had tentatively theorized that H was a form for H in initial position (since the latter almost never occurs initially) but against that is the fact that H occurs, though very rarely, both as medial and final. I haven't been able to eliminate or explain away these instances.

When the happy day comes when we all have all the evidence, a lot of these difficulties will disappear. In a way this period isn't too bad, because we are formulating the questions that must be answered, and so will know exactly what to look for when we get the chance.

I'm not too certain about Q , Q and Q , especially since Q , with an oval, not a circle, is a common form of the last. It could be that the others are ideographic--I mean, ideograms used phonetically, perhaps with more than syllabic value. My policy is always to simplify in the sign list, but keep the variants when writing words, and keep them in mind.

I hope I have a chance to talk to you. Our M , M , versus M , M has to be cleared up. I suspect it's due to a handwriting change between the time of Knossos and Pylos. My distinction works in nine cases out of ten, but in the tenth, I ~~am~~ can't be sure. I've tried to keep your distinction in mind as well, but it doesn't work either, since there are a few cases of M that is, crossed legs and an interior vertical, which must be my M , and your uncrossed legs. Generally, at Knossos, the first sign, (your uncrossed legs) has curved legs as well, while the other (your crossed legs) are usually straight. I've given up trying to differentiate the superstructures.

S is still extremely bothersome. The trouble with it is that the best examples occur in the "Man" inscription, where it is certainly different from S and S , since both of these also occur. But that inscription is almost impossible in spots. It's too bad, because it is the longest Knossos inscription.

By the way, did I tell you that I have no example of the alternation of final Z , Z , Z , but do have pairs of these in various combinations? I found your statement about them most illuminating, and it has helped me, in some cases, in ~~xxxx~~ tentative restorations.

My talk, I am afraid, will not be too illuminating for you, since it will be quite elementary, and I won't show any slides of unpublished inscriptions. But I will discuss techniques connected with decipherment, and some of the problems. Analysis of the available material comes first, of course, and there we are all handicapped because the validity of our assumptions of what is important and what it means, cannot be established until many differing opinions are evaluated and combined.

My answering letters immediately is due not so much to virtue as to expediency. Once anything is put in my "to be answered" file, it stays there for months.

Thank you for your information. As we both know, every little bit helps.

Sincerely

Alice Kober

{ A MAJOR PROBLEM IN DECIPHERING
THE MINOAN SCRIPTS
May 3rd }