

The Cretan Hieroglyphic Inscription on the Mallia Stone Table

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The so-called Mallia ‘altar stone’ or ‘offering table’, excavated in a field in Mallia in 1937, is an irregular limestone block with one large shallow cup-hole on one end (Chapouthier 1938). The cup-hole could be for offerings, as suggested by Chapouthier (1938). However, Hillbom (1995) has interpreted many of the Minoan cup-holed stones as game boards, possible used for games with ritual aspect as the game *senet* in Egypt; the Mallia stone could originally have been part of such a ‘game board’, although it only has one large cavity. One more possibility is that the cup-hole was used in measuring a certain amount of agricultural goods, but this seems unlikely, since the cup-hole is shallow and only about 15 cm across.

In this Note, the possible content of the Cretan hieroglyphic text on the so-called Mallia ‘altar stone’ is discussed. The possible readings of the hieroglyphic text presented below are mainly based on the syllabic values assigned to the Cretan hieroglyphs by Olivier et al. (1996; hereinafter CHIC) and Younger (2007).

The Inscription

The hieroglyphic text on the Mallia stone is shown in Fig. 1.

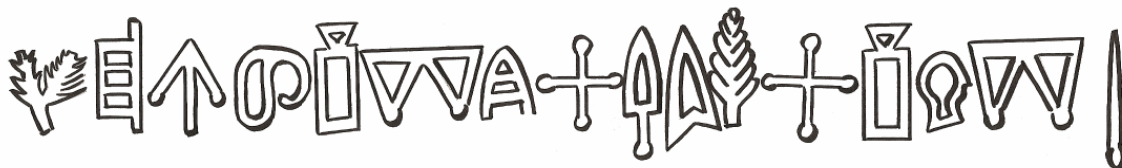


Fig. 1. The Cretan hieroglyphic inscription on the Mallia stone. The numbering of the signs in the text is according to Chapouthier (1938): 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16 from right to left, omitting the first sign; here, the first sign on the right is Sign number 0. Redrawn by the present author according to Chapouthier (1938).

Most of the signs of the Mallia stone are relatively common in the Cretan hieroglyphic texts. Signs **1/10**, **3/11**, **4/8**, **5**, **7**, **13**, **14**, **15** can be recognized as the signs CHIC 034, 056, 070, 025, 051, 049, 038 and 029, respectively [1]. For Sign **1/10**, CHIC suggests the reading TA, but, according to Younger (2007), it should be read as SI; the suggested reading in this Note supports TA (see below). The ‘male head’, Sign **2**, and the ‘beehive’, Sign **9**, are probably the same as 002 VIR₂ and 094 E in the hieroglyphic script; the same signs appear on the Phaistos disk (Chapouthier 1938; Owens 1996). Sign **6** is more problematic: Chapouthier (1938) interprets it as an arrowhead, but a close counterpart

among the common hieroglyphs could also be the Linear A/B ‘insect’ sign 39 PI (CHIC 021; see Younger 2007), which in Godart & Olivier (1976-85; hereinafter GORILA) Table AB39 has downward pointing ‘wings’. Chapouthier (1938) interprets Sign **12** as a possible scorpio, but it could also be the ‘ram/goat head’ sign of the Cretan hieroglyphics (CHIC 016) and Linear A, to be read as KI (Younger 2007). At least, the value KI seems likely, if the stone was used for offerings and, thus, was related to certain amounts of agricultural products, as the KI would then be followed by 049 RO, resulting in KI-RO, which means “deficit” in the language of Linear A (Younger 2003).

Assigning to the hieroglyphs the values given by CHIC and Younger (2007) (numbering as in CHIC, see Younger 2007):

029-038-049-???-056-034-094-070-051-???-025-070-056-002-034-[initiator]

MA-JA-RO-??-KU-TA/SI-E-RO-KU-??-TE-RO-KU-VIR₂-TA/SI-[initiator]

Which, by accepting the hypotheses presented above for Signs **6** and **12**, would become:

029-038-049-016?-056-034-094-070-051-021?-025-070-056-002-034-[initiator]

MA-JA-RO-KI?-KU-TA/SI-E-RO-KU-PI?-TE-RO-KU-VIR₂-TA/SI-[initiator]

The text is believed to be read from right to left (Chapouthier 1938), towards the facing direction of the ‘male head’ (CHIC 002 VIR₂) sign:

[initiator]-034-002-056-070-025-021-051-070-094-034-056-016-049-038-029

[initiator]-TA/SI-VIR₂-KU-RO-TE-PI?-KU-RO-E-TA/SI-KU-KI?-RO-JA-MA

Chapouthier (1938) assumed that the first sign (Sign **0**) was an initiator, which are frequent in Cretan hieroglyphic inscriptions. However, the first three signs could be the same sign group (062?-034-002) that is found on a document from Mallia Quartier Mu (CHIC document no. #328 [2]), where it precedes the word KU-RO (see Younger 2007). Thus, Sign **0** could be CHIC 062 NA (although it would be upside down, but that also seems to be true for Sign **1/10**). It is to be noted that in the documents from Quartier Mu, the word KU-RO is frequently written as 056-070 (Younger 2007).

In the above reading of the inscription, two familiar Linear A expressions can be found: KU-RO and KI-RO. It is generally accepted that in Linear A and, therefore, likely also in the language of the Cretan hieroglyphic script, these words mean ‘total’ and ‘deficit’ or ‘owed’, respectively (Younger 2003)). Thus, the text could be regrouped to read, e.g.:

NA-TA/SI-VIR₂ KU-RO TE-PI? KU-RO E-TA/SI-KU KI?-RO JA-MA (1)

Or, KU-RO and KI-RO could be verbal stems with endings:

NA-TA/SI-VIR₂ KU-RO-TE-PI? KU-RO-E-TA/SI-KU KI?-RO-JA-MA (2)

In the documents from Mallia Quartier Mu, there is the document CHIC #072 with SI-JA-MA, written with 011-038-029 (Younger 2007). As 011 is a bovine head, JA-MA could be a suffix. TE-PI may also be a suffix, but there are no clear parallels to be found in known hieroglyphic or Linear A texts.

Interestingly, if 034-056 TA-KU is a place near Mallia, as has been suggested by Younger (2007), then Sign 12, the ‘ram head’, which could also be ‘scorpio’, could be read as SA. Then, two place names, TA-KU, followed by SA-RO, would appear as in CHIC #061.d2. According to Younger (2007), SA-RO could be Mallia itself.

NA-TA-VIR₂ KU-RO-TE-PI? KU-RO-E TA-KU SA?-RO-JA-MA (3)

However, CHIC #328 presents 094-034-056-077 E-TA-KU-RU, which leads to the possible reading:

NA-TA-VIR₂ KU-RO-TE-PI KU-RO E-TA-KU-RU? RO-JA-MA (4)

The sign group 049-038 RO-JA (CHIC; Younger 2007) occurs in a text from Mallia (CHIC #113, which is from Mallia palace). Interestingly, CHIC #328 also presents the sign group 034-056-077-049-038-029, i.e., TA-KU-RU-RO-JA-MA, which makes (4) a likely reading of the text. Thus, Sign 12, the ‘scorpio’, likely is read as RU. Sign 094 E seems indeed to be a prefix for TA-KU, as Younger (2007) suggests.

Discussion

Whether the text is to be read as in any of the possible readings (1)-(4), the word KU-RO and possibly KI-RO, combined with the possible toponyms TA-KU, or possibly SA-RO, would be suitable for each of the hypotheses presented above for the purpose of the Mallia ‘altar stone’:

- (a) If the table is for offerings, the text could be a dedication or a curse, where KU-RO refers to ‘all’, and TA-KU could be a place name (in the so-called Linear A “libation tables”, a toponym is frequently given (see Younger 2007)).
- (b) If the table is part of a game board, the basic rules of the game could be expressed in a simple formula, quite probably including words like KU-RO and KI-RO. However, it is not clear why a game board should mention a place name, unless the game was of ritual importance and, thus, worth of dedication.
- (c) If the cup-hole on the stone was used for measuring a certain volume of agricultural products presented by the people of TA-KU, the inscription could be related to amounts, as KU-RO and KI-RO in the Linear A clay tablets.

In any case, it is interesting that the usage of the word KU-RO, which, expressing amounts, was used in the bookkeeping of goods, could relate to the usage of the cup-hole in a way that includes the counting of something (likely agricultural products). The place name TA-KU would tie the stone to the Mallia region, and the text could refer to the people that provided the offerings or commodities.

Notes

[1] These signs were recognized by Chapouthier (1938) as the signs 114, 24, 112, 97, 15, 13, 44A and 101 of A. Evans' *Scripta Minoa* I, p. 181.

[2] All the CHIC hieroglyphic document numbers used in this Note are marked with #.

References

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