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**Mycenaean philology and materiality:
the “*pa-i-to* Epigraphic Project.”
An integrative approach to Linear B tablets
from Knossos***

Georgia Flouda, Erika Notti

Preface

Since the early days of the discipline, specialised studies have demonstrated that an integrative approach exploring materiality, philology and palaeography may afford the best possible understanding of Linear B documents. The *pa-i-to* Project¹ that was initiated in 2016 has worked in this direction on a small batch of documents, characterised by the presence of the toponymic reference *pa-i-to*. While the methodology and research focus adopted by our team have been addressed in previous publications, it is our intention here to expand on our ‘all-round’ approach, to quote Palaima², by discussing our most significant results with regard to the materiality and palaeography of the documents.

* The authors participate in the *pa-i-to* Epigraphic Project. The first part of this paper concerning materiality has been developed by Georgia Flouda, and the second part concerning philology has been developed by Erika Notti; as regards palaeography, see GRECO, this volume.

¹ GRECO & FLOUDA 2017.

² PALAIMA 2011, 90.

Materiality explored through 3D-laser scanning and RTI: research objectives and outcomes of the *pa-i-to* Project

By G. Flouda

Essential questions that serve as guidelines for approaching the inscription supports as material artefacts have been recently brought to the fore and, accordingly, were integrated within the *pa-i-to* Project.³ Thus, a major research goal of the project, beyond visualizing the Linear B tablets under study, was to render their diverse material qualities ‘explorable’ to researchers and laymen alike through the 3D-laser scanning and RTI technologies. As both methods enable the users to interact with the digital models and renderings of the tablets at an unprecedented level of accuracy, they have been employed by the *pa-i-to* Project as a tool for studying the materiality of the tablets, and for validating past hypotheses with regard to the following two perspectives: a. their three-dimensionality, which entails the forming techniques, the resulting tablet format (shapes and sizes), as well as colouring; b. the preparation and treatment of the writing surfaces in order to hold the inscriptions.

Whereas tablet format is mostly associated with record-keeping priorities and tablet content, forming techniques are related to fabric composition and texture, which may also have been affected by the agency of specific scribes or tablet makers associated with them. Tom Palaima has noted that tablets were often made of finely levigated clay, especially by the principal tablet makers at Pylos.⁴ Recently, experimental approaches have systematically treated questions of erasure and textual correction on unfired Linear B tablets.⁵ The practice of cutting longer tablets to smaller ones that can be considered as ‘simili-joins’, in order to fit specific record keeping tasks, has also received attention.⁶ Both parameters are associated with the *chaîne opératoire* followed by the tablet makers and/or the scribes, and should be treated along with paleography and context every time we try to assess complex stratigraphic and taphonomical issues related with the deposition of the tablets.⁷ In the following discussion, we shall focus on forming techniques and on conclusions reached

³ FLOUDA 2013; JUDSON 2017; PALAIMA 2011, 76; TSOUVAROPOULOU 2016.

⁴ PALAIMA 2011, 105.

⁵ JUDSON 2017; PAPE *et al.* 2014.

⁶ DRIESSEN 1988; also recently explored by FLOUDA 2022; MOUTHUY 2019; TOMAS 2013, 177-183.

⁷ MOUTHUY 2019.

through the RTI and 3D models, due to constrictions of space.

Tablets by Hand 117: insights into forming techniques

In the case of the *pa-i-to* Project, our targeted group of tablets affords a notable chance to reconstruct practices of recording information and handling the records enforced by Hand 117,⁸ a scribe who may have personally monitored sheep husbandry at *pa-i-to*.⁹ Besides, from a practical point of view, clay can be stored moist in a closed container and thus preserved ready to use indefinitely,¹⁰ whereas evidence for records written in the Knossian periphery is particularly strong.¹¹

One of our research questions has been to follow Palaima's observations on how Pylian tablet-makers produced leaf-shaped tablets by flattening clay out into a thick sheet and rolling it up at top and bottom to create a long tablet with a closure seam along the back side, which was usually smoothed out.¹² The most obvious features for documenting this shaping method are the joints of the edges of the rolled up clay sheet. These joints are also visible at both ends of many Knossian tablets we examined, since they have not been smoothed out and they often overlap with hole-channels (e.g. **Db 1159**). Careful observation of many examples through RTI and 3D provides insights into the no-longer preserved fibrous cord that apparently was laid lengthwise across the sheets of clay. This was done before they were 'rolled up', in order to tie them together, and in most of the cases projected from the tablet edges.

The fairly charred tablet **De 1084** of Scribe 117 (Munsell 10YR 4/1 dark gray: *recto* surface, 10YR 3/1 very dark gray: *verso* surface) presents an intriguing case. More than half of its *verso* is broken (max. preserved thickness 1.3cm; height 2.4cm; length 12.1cm), so that it reveals its core and the negative imprint of a cord that ran obliquely along the long axis of the tablet, through the upper right corner to its lower left one (Fig. 1). This may be identified with some kind of organic fibre, cylindrical in section, possibly some kind of dried stems of plants, such as those suggested for strings running through clay nodules, namely raffia, hemp

⁸ FIRTH & MELENA 2016a-b, 287-292.

⁹ See BENNET 2001, 32-33 on bureaucrats active in the wider Pylian territory; also, GRECO 2010.

¹⁰ PALAIMA 2011, 105.

¹¹ BENNET 1992, 82-83; GODART 1972, 424, on the **Co** series as written at Chania; HALLAGER & HALLAGER 2015, 111.

¹² PALAIMA 2011, 105-106, Fig. 12.43.

or bulrush rush.¹³ The cord ran out at both ends of the tablet, thus being possibly used for handling it. It is noteworthy that this practice was also enforced at Pylos in a later chronological horizon, where the use of a twisted plant-like material, possibly rush broom or weaver's broom (*Spartium junceum*) or stalk, has been suggested for the inner cords of tablets.¹⁴



Fig. 1. Photo of verso of tablet **De 1084** preserving the channel of a fibrous cord (© *pa-i-to* Project).

Two other examples also bear remarkable traces of organic fibres. **Dv 8413**,¹⁵ the recto of which is preserved very fragmentarily (Munsell 5YR 2.5/1 black surface), displays a thin cord channel which points to a non-braided or non-twisted cord. Unlike what has been observed in the case of tablet **De 1084** and in most others as well, this cord did not run longitudinally across the whole length of the document; it rather ran obliquely from the broken right edge towards the lower left edge of the tablet. By adjusting the light on the RTI model, it has become possible to observe three parallel grooves, which correspond to a fibrous substance of streaky texture; the width of the middle groove is quite similar to the one of the incised OVIS logogram. Moreover, the three-dimensional model of tablet **Da 1341** allows to observe and document the trace of a similar streaky cord with parallel grooves (Fig. 2).¹⁶ The closest parallels to these traces of grooves on tablets **Dv 8413** and **Da 1341** belong to the reconstructed cords of a Late Minoan IB nodule from Hagia Triada (HM S-T 451/2) and of a Pylian hanging nodule, which on the basis of an X-ray examination has been attributed to bulrush rush.¹⁷ The evi-

¹³ MÜLLER & PINI 1997, 67-68, Pl. 40: 5-7.

¹⁴ PALAIMA 2011, 105-106, Fig. 12.43.

¹⁵ Above the logogram *-to*, horizontal striation marks have been preserved, which hint at traces of burnishing on the recto surface before inscribing it.

¹⁶ The same 3D model highlights traces of burnishing on the side of the tablet made with some hard medium, possibly wood or bone, after moulding and before the inscriptions are engraved.

¹⁷ MÜLLER & PINI 1997, 67-68, Pls. 40:7 [Pylian nodule cat.no. 74]-41:3 [HM S-T 451/2].

dence of the Haghia Triada nodule is particularly significant, as we may deduce the endurance of a practice that may have been enforced since the Neopalatial period. Imprints of wicker made of similar material are also documented on ‘combination nodules’ or *Objektschnurplomben* from Knossos, which broadly belong to the same chronological horizon with the examined tablets¹⁸.



Fig. 2. Three-dimensional model of tablet Da 1341 (© *pa-i-to* Project).



Fig. 3. Tablet Db 1159 with traces of a fibrous strand on its fragmentary verso

Nonetheless, tablet **Db 1159** bears similar traces of a fibrous strand on its fragmentary verso, at the point where the two sheets of clay have been pressed together (Fig. 3). In this case, it is possible that non-twisted strands of hemp or linen had been used for the inner cord.¹⁹



Fig. 4. Photo of tablet Dv 1607 with traces of a fibrous strand (© *pa-i-to* Project).

Last but not least, due to its fragmentary state, tablet **Dv 1607** (Fig. 4) (Munsell GLEY2 4/5 PB surface, GLEY2 6/5 PB core) bears traces of the channel of a non-twisted cord that runs from the centre of the left edge diagonally up to the lower right edge. The 3D model of the tablet allows us to accurately observe the cross section of this channel.

¹⁸ MÜLLER 2002, 71, Fig. 29b-h.

¹⁹ ZOLLINO 2018, 59-60.

Concluding thoughts on the materiality of the tablets

These findings have important repercussions on how tablets were shaped and handled after they were dried out and inscribed, as they reveal aspects of the relevant *chaîne opératoire*. The diagonal arrangement of the inner fibrous cords, which in most cases run through the tablet from one end to the other, provides ground for proposing that they possibly helped to tie groups of ‘contiguous’ leaf-shaped records together, either in their storage transport baskets or during storage at the palace, as has been established for the Pylion **Sh** series.²⁰ At the same time, as the tablets examined by the *pa-i-to* Project belong to different series, further research is by all means needed in order to ultimately verify this hypothesis.

Philology in the pa-i-to Project

By E. Notti

Myc. po-ro-de-ī-qo-no (KN F(1) 51 v.1) and *ma-ka* (KN F(1) 51 v.2)²¹

In the course of our research project we have also turned our attention to documents of complex interpretation due to difficult readings, such as KN F(1) 51. As it is known after the discovery of the Theban texts, the uncertain reading *ma-ka* – a likely recipient of HORD on KN F(1) 51 v.2 – was considered to be more convincing than *ma-qa* in light of the attestations of *ma-ka*²² emerging on the Theban texts from the Odos Pelopidou excavation.²³

Nonetheless, the presence of a small fracture in the clay, cutting across the second sign (*ka*), has caused conflicting interpretations. These are reflected in several studies, both in their conclusions and in the traditional, accompanying photographs and drawings. Evans himself was initially deceived by this fracture: in the drawing he published, a complete cross appears inside the circle of the sign, including a vertical

²⁰ PALAIMA 1996, 379-380, 384-385, Figs. 4-5.

²¹ This contribution is not meant as a deep-dive into the interrelated questions that have already been widely discussed for some time now, especially in relation to the Theban *côté*. However, in the space allotted, we present several preliminary considerations, which – *in votis* – will be followed by further, specific observations currently under preparation.

²² On the occurrences of *ma-ka* and the controversial thesis of the ‘Theban triad’: *DMicSupl s.v. ma-ka* and the related bibliography; DUHOUX 2002-2003; 2006; *FdC* I, III-IV; PALAIMA 2000-2001; 2003a; 2003b; RUIJGH 2004, 2006.

²³ ARAVANTINOS *et al.* 1995, 834.

(slightly oblique) line visible also in the lower part of the sign.²⁴ However, in later editions this line is correctly excluded.²⁵ Moreover, Duhoux in particular, excluded the presence of any vertical line at all inside the circle of the sign, both in its upper and lower part, simply confirming the presence of two horizontal lines and thus establishing the reading *ma-qe*.²⁶ Following his exhaustive studies, this reading has come to be generally considered preferable.

Consequently, one of the crucial arguments sustained by the editors, i.e. the presence of *ma-ka* both in the archive of Knossos and Thebes, has practically been ruled out.²⁷ On the basis of current knowledge, the following readings are now, in fact, generally accepted: *ma-qe* – “*ma-ka* unlikely” (KN F (1) 51 v.2); traces of uncertain interpretation between *po-ro-de-* and *-qo-no* (KN F (1) 51 v.1) have also been perceived as “accidental scratch or divider (?)”.²⁸

The analyses carried out in the course of the *pa-i-to* Project²⁹ allow us to contribute to this field of research, as the results produced by the RTI method confirm the presence of traces between *po-ro-* and *-de-qo-no*. In fact, these do not seem to be accidental scratches, but rather the constitutive traits (at least four of which are more clearly discernible) of a writing sign. This sign – smaller, more condensed, and the only one not resting on the same line of writing as the others – appears to be the result of a secondary annotation, as suggested also by the discernible order of the strokes incised by the scribe after the incision of the sign *-qo*.³⁰ The *ductus* of the sign encourages us to propose the reading *po-ro-de-i-qo-no* (Fig. 6). We may therefore note that this reading provides further confirmation of the currently accepted interpretation */pro-deik^wno-/*, “*banquetier*”.³¹ This also leads to update the list of no-

²⁴ SM II, facsimile 51a.

²⁵ CoMIK, 30; DRIESSEN 2000, 294; DUHOUX 2006.

²⁶ DUHOUX 2006, 9.

²⁷ On more recent studies focused especially on the Theban evidence and an interpretative perspective according to which *ma-ka* may not be intended as a recipient of HORD, see BERNABÉ & PIERINI 2017; DEL FREO 2014; PIQUERO RODRÍGUEZ 2018; SERRANO LAGUNA 2017.

²⁸ KT⁶, 170.

²⁹ Autopsy was first performed by the founders of the *pa-i-to* Project Greco and Flouda in 2016, and was repeated by the same scholars together with Notti and Lopez in 2018-2019. For more information, an extensive photographic apparatus, and new drawings, see FLOUDA & GRECO 2021; also, FLOUDA *et al.* 2021; NOTTI 2020.

³⁰ For a broader discussion, see GRECO *et al.* 2023, 464-467.

³¹ DMicSupl s.v. *po-ro-de-qo-no /pro-deik^wno-/*. Cf. *de-qo-no /deik^wnōi/* (dat.) ‘*banquet*’ (: δειπνον); *infra*.

tations of the second element of *-i* diphthongs so far attested in Linear B, and especially in the archive of Knossos.³²

With regard to the debated reading on KN F(1) 51 v.2, RTI technology has helped us in the following:

- a) to highlight the fracture in the clay, isolate it in detail, and distinguish it from the voluntary strokes of the second sign;
- b) identify and highlight each constitutive feature of the sign *ductus* (namely, the circle and the cross); in particular, the trace left by the *stylus* in the upper left quadrant, where the circular line was infringed upon when the vertical line was made, producing a still clearly visible notch.³³ These elements lead us to identify the sign *-ka* (Fig. 5).³⁴ This new data allows us to resolve the palaeographic problem posed by this tablet by ruling out, beyond any reasonable doubt, the reading *ma-qe*. Consequently, this Knossian parallel with the Theban texts may now be restored (naturally assuming that the meaning of Myc. *ma-ka* is the same in the two archives).³⁵



Fig. 5. Particulars of the sign *ka* from the RTI taken by the authors (© *pa-i-to* Project).

³² As regards scribal mistakes and *lapsus*, see CONSANI 2019; DUHOUX 1987, 111-113; MELENA 2014, 92-98.

³³ Sometimes some cracks can run smoothly and straight and deceive, so to speak, the eye of the camera as well as that of the palaeographer; but here the proof lies in the *ductus* of the upper left edge of the sign, and above all in the notch left by the stylus in the circular line at the point where it is met by the vertical one. If one also observes the starting point of the fracture in the lower horizontal section, it can be clearly seen that it is not regular, and that the fracture itself does not continue upwards into the body of the sign (FLOUDA & GRECO 2021).

³⁴ The presence of the distinctive strokes of the syllabogram *-ka* can be verified on the RTI, which will be made available online at the site <https://www.paitoproject.it>.

³⁵ In the light of the new data emerging from KN F(1) 51, we may expect that the parallels offered by this document, which were already brought to attention after the discovery of the Theban texts – in light, in particular, of Myc. *ma-ka*, *po-ro-de-qo-no* (*nunc*, see above) *po-ro-de-i-qo-no* (cf. *de-qo-no*), *di-we* (cf. *o-po-re-i* (?)) – will naturally come back to mind and will be worthy of further discussion. Without delving further into this subject in the present paper, we may remember that *de-qo-no* (TH) does not actually provide a direct parallel with the figure of the “*banquetier*” (KN), but rather seems to provide information alluding to the context (this linguistic datum alone would not rule out the hypothesis of a cultic context); for a discussion on this topic, see DMicSupl s.v. *de-qo-no*; and in particular GARCÍA RAMÓN 2010, 79). An in-depth linguistic and philological discussion on the methodological and phonetic problems, also raised,

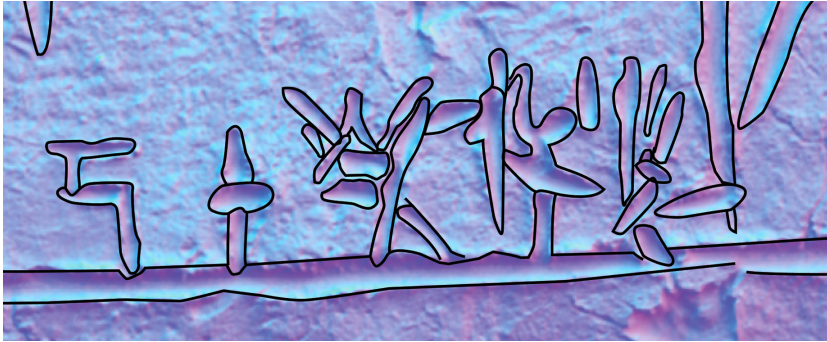


Fig. 6. Drawing of *po-ro-de-i-qa-no* made by Greco after the RTI image taken during the autopsy by Greco et al. 2023 (© *pa-i-to* Project).

Concluding thoughts on the philological aspects of the text

KN F(1)51 alludes to the cultic context of the recording and to the theonymic nature of *ma-ka*.³⁶ It may also be interesting to remember that the intriguing interpretation of Myc. *ma-ka* as (dat. of) *Mā Gā* (?), “Mother Earth”³⁷ is acceptable in Greek (despite the uncertain origin).³⁸ Al-

in particular, by the question of the interpretability of Myc. *o-po-re-i*, goes beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is worth remembering that the interpretation *op(i)-* (: *ὀπι-*, cf. *ἐπι* “above”) -*oros* (: *ὄρος* “mountain”) is to be considered the most economical and thus preferable, as it easily satisfies the lexemic and morphological analysis. This linguistic interpretation would not suggest the rejection of the possibility – at least in theory – that *o-po-re-i* might in fact be an epiclesis. However, this question necessarily connects with the general problem of the identifiability of epicleses (and epithets) in the accidental and fragmentary picture suggested by the Mycenaean evidence. On this general issue, which would naturally take us too far afield now, see GARCÍA RAMÓN 2010; 2011; HILLER 2011; on the hypothesis of a Zeus “of the mountain” (?) – cf. e.g. *di-ka-ta-jo di-we* (KN Fp(1) 1.2) – see the recent overview by NEGRI 2020.

³⁶ *DMicSupl* s.v. *ma-ka* p. 206 n. 17.

³⁷ Although this is not the only possible one (*DMicSupl* s.v. *ma-ka*), we may notice that from this perspective, the epigraphic evidence would not seem to pose an insuperable problem, assuming that *ma-ka* may be the result of (graphic (?)) univerbation – this would, in fact, appear to be a suitable strategy in a syllabic system such as Linear B, which is notoriously refractory to the notation of monosyllables; see now NOTTI 2024, 102.

³⁸ The form *mā* is acceptable in Greek, see *DELG* s.v. *μά* cf. *μαῖα*; see also s.v. *μήτηρ*: the picture of the Indo-European languages suggests the importance of this basic syllable re-morphologised with the suffix forming the fundamental class of kinship terminology. According to a widely accepted view, an origin in the form of a *Lallwort* designating the “maternal”, as attested in many languages of the world, is likely (BUCK 1988 § 2.36, 103-104; GREENBERG 1966, XXII: “There is a high probability that a word designating a female parent will have a nasal consonant”; JAKOBSON 1971, in particular 129-141). As for Gr. *γᾶ* (of unknown etymology), cf. *γαῖα*, see *DELG* (and also *EDG*) s.v. *γῆ*; as regards, in particular, the well-known hypothesis *γᾶ = δᾶ* (?) (KRETSCHMER 1902), s.v. *Δημήτηρ*; cf. also s.v. *Ποσειδῶν* (?) (*Ποσειδᾶων*, *Ποτειδᾶων*, *Ποτ(ε)ιδᾶς* *vel sim.*; epith.: *ἐνοσίχθων*, *γαῖήχοχος ἐνοσίχθαιος* *Il.* 7.445, 13.43, etc., or *ἐνοσιδᾶς* (Pind.), cf. Myc. *e-ne-*

though this is not, of course, the only possible one, this interpretation is of special interest from a linguistic and cultural point of view, and is supported by later evidence (*Suppl.* 890, 900) as the editors of *FdC* I observed, although in the (probably relict) form of invocation/exclamation.³⁹ The ascertained presence of *ma-ka* in documents of Knossos and Thebes that may be traced back, admittedly with varying degrees of probability, to the religious sphere thus provides another piece of fundamental evidence in order to update the picture of current knowledge and foster future studies, even if it is, of course, not conclusive in itself.

KN F(1) 51

(124-D)

HORD T 7 v 5 z 3[

⇒

- | | | |
|----|----|--|
| v. | .1 | wa HORD T 1 v 3 po-ro-de-ḫ-qo-no v 2 z 2 |
| | .2 | di-we HORD T 1 HORD T 4 z 1 ma-ka HORD v 6 |

Final remarks

By combining the new digital technologies with the traditional methodology, we strived to steer away from the bi-polar methodology including the epigraphical (philological) and stylistic approach that impedes exploration into literacy and its display. In addressing the materiality of the tablets through 3D-laser scanning and RTI, we examined how shaping techniques, and the handling of tablets after they were dried out and inscribed may illuminate us on the *chaîne opératoire* followed by the scribes. RTI technology has also helped to address the debated reading of KN F(1) 51 v.2 and to establish the presence of *ma-ka* on the tablet beyond doubt.

si-da-o-ne (?); Myc. *po-se-da-o* (gen. *-o-no*, dat. *-o-ne(-ni)*) and related forms, cf. Gr. πόσις, Skr. *páti-*), obviously if the interpretation Lord of (the) “Earth” is correct.

³⁹ As remarked by GARCÍA RAMÓN 2010, 81 n. 46, this does not pose an insurmountable difficulty.

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