



## The Mistress of the furrow

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Submitted May 28, 2007

### Abstract

The GRANUM sign of the Linear A and B scripts can be read as a ligature of the Linear A syllables SI and TO. Therefore it is likely that the Greek σιτος (corn) derives from a Minoan word *sito*. Minoan *sito* means *of the furrow* or *from the furrow*, which provides a plausible etymology for σιτος. The Linear B si-to-po-ti-ni-ja may then be read as *Mistress of the furrow*, and may be related both to the Vedic goddess of agriculture and fruits of the earth, Sitā, and to the classical Δημήτηρ Σιτω and Δαματηρ Επογμει.

### Introduction

In the past century, various authors reported evidence for a link between the Harappan and Vedic civilizations of the Indus Valley and the Minoan culture of Crete (L.C. Fabri 1935; H. Mode 1944; S. Alexiou; R. Kamm 1967). In 1999, V. Sarianidi provided a plausible explanation for the observed similarities by reconstructing a migration route of Near Eastern Aryans into the Indian subcontinent. The present authors observed that Sarianidi's theory implies the possibility that the Minoan language is close to Vedic and tested this hypothesis on the two best documented Linear A words of the Minoan language, KU-LO and PO-TO. It was found that both words are indeed meaningful and grammatically correct Vedic in their Minoan context. This paper explores the meaning of the GRANUM sign that is known from the Linear A and Linear B scripts and raises the question how much of Linear B is actually Minoan.

### The GRANUM sign

The Linear B scribes of the Mycenaean palaces used a special ideogram for *corn*, known as the GRANUM sign (see Figure 1). A very similar symbol is found on Linear A tablets from Hagia Triada (e.g. Hooker 1980, Consani et al. 1999). The meaning of both ideograms was guessed from their context, being ideograms of agricultural products (e.g. in HT 114) and the explanatory words pe-ma (σπέρμα, e.g. in PY Er 312) and si-to (σιτος, Mycenaean).

Detailed analysis of the GRANUM sign shows that it is a ligature, constructed from the syllables SI and TO (see Figure 1). Ligatures of syllable signs are quite common, both in Linear A and in Linear B, but this case is special since the Linear B ideogram is made from Linear A as well as from Linear B syllables. The Linear A origin is evident because the Linear B si-sign is somewhat different from the SI of Linear A. If we exclude a coincidence, it follows that the GRANUM sign and the word *sito* are originally Minoan.

If *sito* is indeed Minoan, the relation between Minoan and Vedic makes it likely that the Minoan word derives from *sitā* (furrow). Analysis of the Minoan libation texts suggests that Minoan stems on *ā* are inflected in the same way as Vedic roots on *ā* (van den Kerkhof and Rem 2007). In this case, *sito* is the genitive or ablative, *of the furrow* or *from the furrow*, which provides a plausible etymology for the Greek σιτος: (produce) from the furrow.

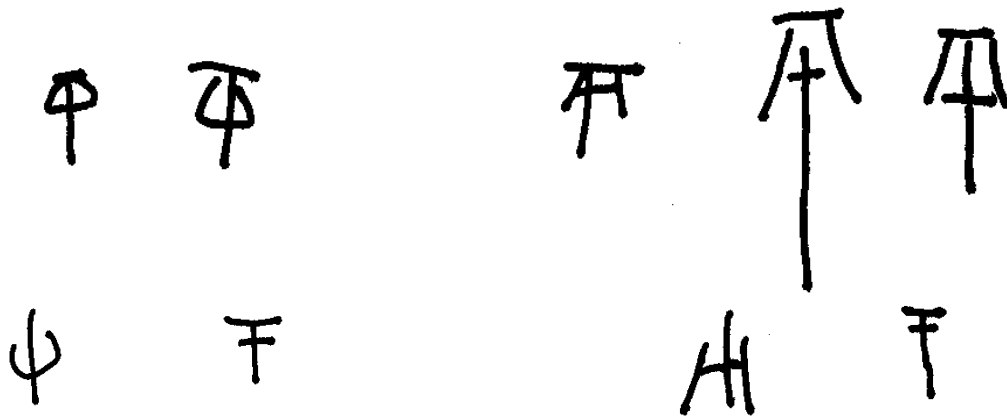


Figure 1: The GRANUM sign, in Linear A (top left) and Linear B (top right), and the Linear A and B signs for SI and TO (bottom left and right).

Apart from its agricultural use, the word *sito* also appears in the name of a Mycenaean goddess. Ventris and Chadwick (1956 p.507) observed the reference *si-to-po-ti-ni-ja* (to the Sito Mistress) on a Linear B tablet (Oi 704.1) from Mycenae, and linked it to a corn goddess with a very similar name, Δημητηρ Σιτώ, which is known to have had a cult in Sicily (Polemon Perieg., Fragmenta, Fragment 39). Indeed, later archaeology at Mycenae produced a cult room with a painting of a goddess or priestess that seems to hold sheaves of wheat (Taylor 1970). If we accept the Minoan interpretation of *sito*, the names of the two goddesses mean *Mistress of the furrow* and *Demeter of the furrow*. The logical conclusion would be that a Minoan corn goddess *si-to-po-ti-ni-ja* was worshipped in Mycenae and lent her title *sito* to Demeter.

Unfortunately, the theory of the Minoan origin and meaning of *si-to-po-ti-ni-ja* cannot be checked directly. But there is quite some indirect evidence. Suidas, for example, mentions an inscription to Δαματηρ Επογμιε, proving that a *Demeter of the furrow* really existed. And the Vedic goddess of agriculture and fruits of the earth is called Sitā (the furrow). According to her legend she is born from the furrow. Therefore, it would not be surprising to find a *Mistress of the furrow* in Minoan Crete. There is also ample evidence for Minoan religion in Mycenaean culture. As W. R. Biers put it: *It is exceedingly difficult to grasp the differences between Mycenaean and Minoan religion*. A final point is that the combination of a Greek and a Minoan name (Δημητηρ Σιτώ and Δαματηρ Επογμιε) for the same goddess is not unique. The Linear B records of Pylos mention both ποτνία ικκ<sup>w</sup>είαι and ποτνία ασφία (An 12081.1: *po-ti-ni-ja i-qe-ja*; Fr 1206: *po-ti-ni-ja a-si-wi-ja*). As it happens, ποτνία ικκ<sup>w</sup>είαι is the Greek translation of Vedic/Minoan *patnyāi acvyai*. In fact, even the word ποτνία may well be originally Minoan.

The example of ποτνία ασφία and ποτνία ικκ<sup>w</sup>είαι shows that Minoan and Mycenaean were used even at the same place at the same time. This raises the question whether the different languages were used by people of different status. Fortunately, the inscriptions on the Pylos tablets have been sorted according to the features of the handwriting, so that we know that Fr 1206 (with the Minoan name) was written by Hand 2. Shelmerdine:

“What we have in the Fr series, therefore, seems to be a carefully organized system in which various scribes had specific responsibilities in specific locations, to which they were sent whenever the occasion demanded. The greatest amount of work went on in Room 23 (a major

oil deposit), so a supply of tablet clay was kept there. This was the base of operations for the supervisor, Hand 2, but he moved from room to room probably to inspect and coordinate scribal activity.”

Apparently, Hand 2 was in charge of the Pylos oil and therefore someone of considerable status. Tablet Fr 1206 further confirms the importance of horses that is known from Homer’s stories of Pylos: nearly 100 litres of oil are spent on the horse goddess:

po-ti-ni-ja a-si-wi-ja to-so qe-to-jo OIL 5V4

## **Acknowledgement**

The authors would like to thank Dr. P. Stork for his support and valuable input.

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