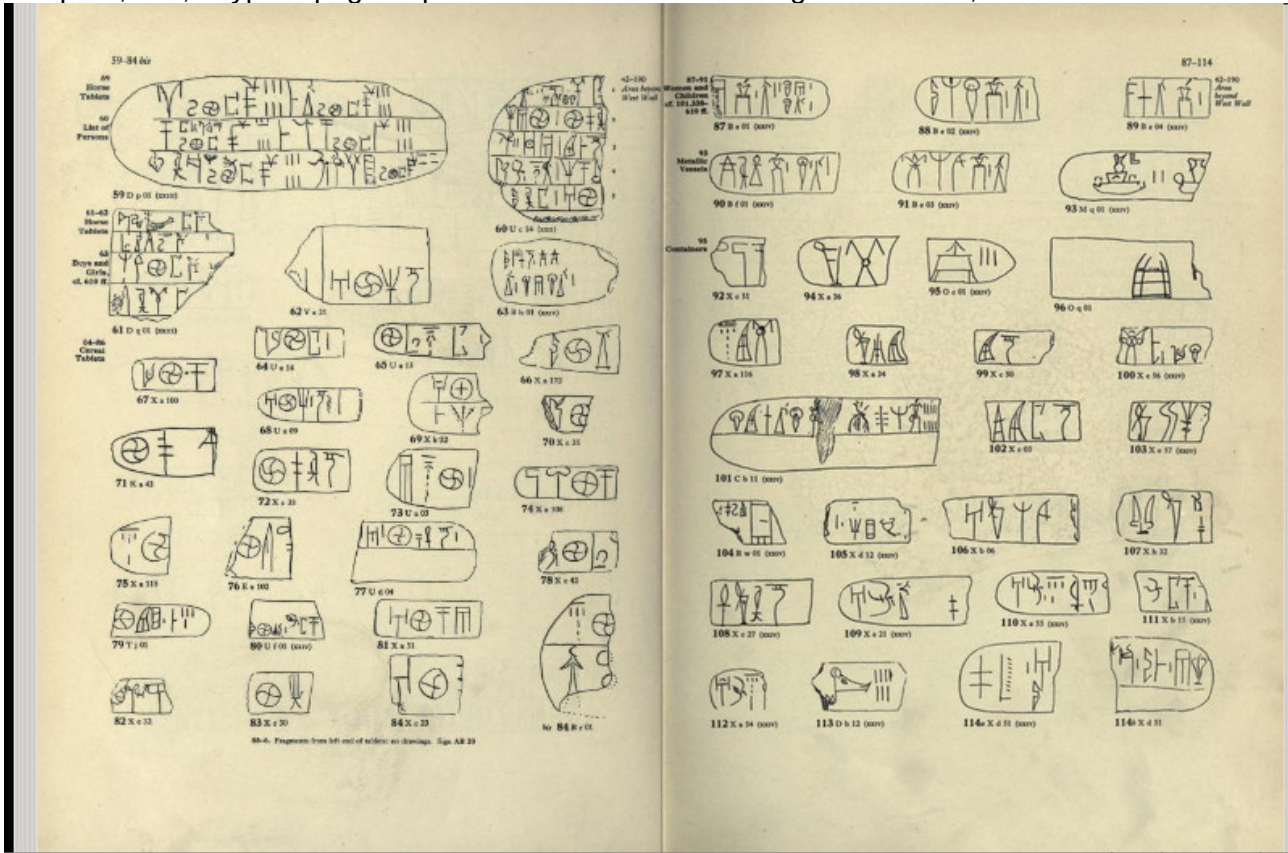


The arrangement of tablets on the photographic plates of Scripta Minoa II

The photographic plates in the latter part of Scripta Minoa II (SM II)¹ may appear to be a “simple” record of each individual, chosen find or Linear “tablet”, the arrangements of the tablets either random or a reflection of the rough order in which the items were excavated or a reflection of their approximate find location or a combination of those several things². But none of those parameters nor any combination of them provides a wholly satisfactory account. For there are features of the arrangements which are, as I now realise, quite extraordinary³. To illustrate the point, it is useful to compare, first, a typical page or plate of Sir Arthur Evans’s sign-dominated, tablet “sketches”.



Plainly the size and shape of tablets has some effect on their disposition here, but in the drawings they appear, so far as possible, horizontally, even vertically aligned and spaced, giving an impression of strictly regular, objective, “scientific” order.

By contrast, in the photographic plates one may observe, for example, as below:

- the unnecessarily close juxtaposition of tablets in Plate XV so that their corners almost touch;
- the extreme slope of the tablet in Plate XXI, again apparently needless;
- the unnecessary both juxtaposition and sloping of tablets in Plate XXXIV;
- the positioning of one tablet mid way down another in Plate XXII.

1 *Scripta Minoa II, The Written Documents of Minoan Crete*, Arthur J. Evans, edited and supplemented by John L. Myres, Clarendon Press Oxford 1952, <https://archive.org/stream/scriptaminoawrit02evanuoft#page/n291/mode/2up>

2 See *A review of the find-places of the Linear B tablets from the palace of Knossos*, Richard J Firth, *Minos* 35-36, 2000-2001, pp. 63-290, <http://revistas.usal.es/index.php/0544-3733/article/view/16425>

3 Page 12 of *Linear and cult art: addenda, corrigenda, concludenda*, <https://hcommons.org/deposits/item/hc:27115/> stated that the nature of the Scripta Minoa II plates served to qualify any duplicity in Evans’s activities, as there discussed. I had in mind the quantity as well as perhaps apparent objectivity of the tablet photographs. As I hope this further note shows, the statement was probably correct, but for the wrong reasons. Sic clausum recludendum. The note is freely available for any lawful public or private non-commercial use so long as the source, and its sources, is duly acknowledged, and such use exercises rights regarding its own use by others that are no more restrictive. Regard should also be had for the rights of those whose work I have used, which may be different. My use of their material in no way reflects their approval or otherwise of my statements or graphics (including extractions from and enlargements of photos). All mistakes are my own. I cannot guarantee that web pages are still live.

Plate XV

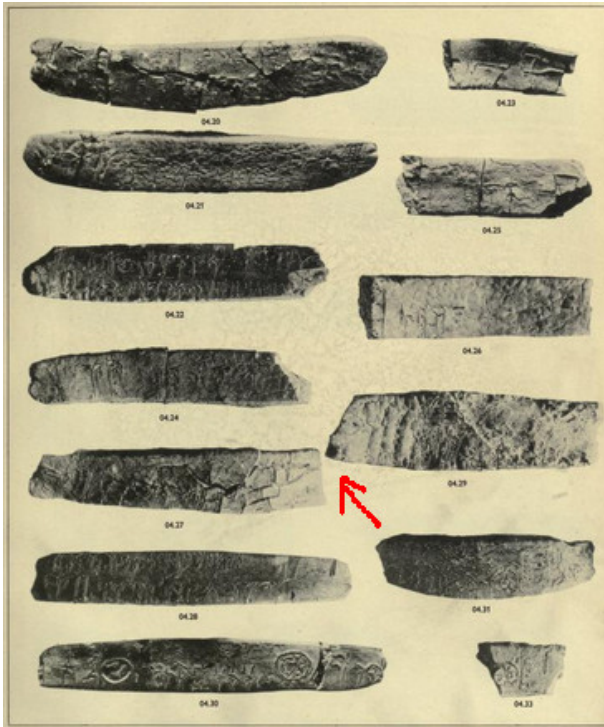


Plate XXI



Plate XXXIV

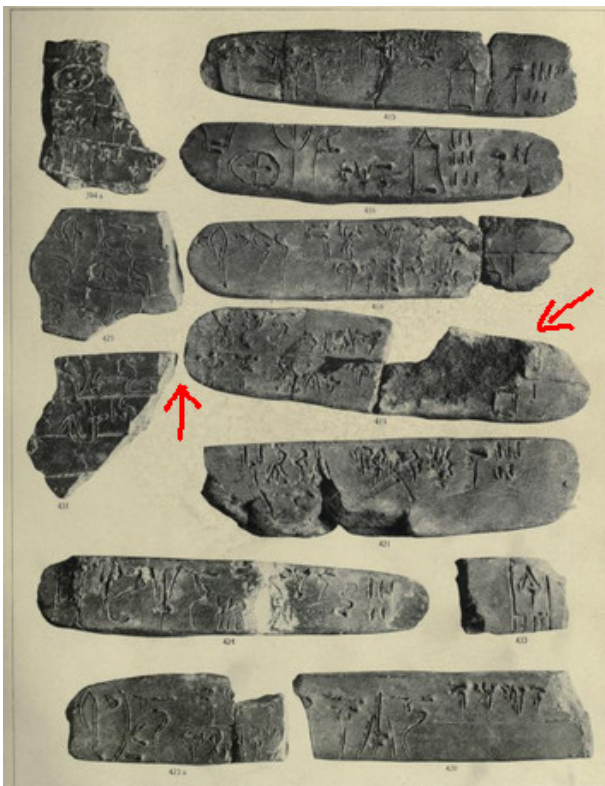
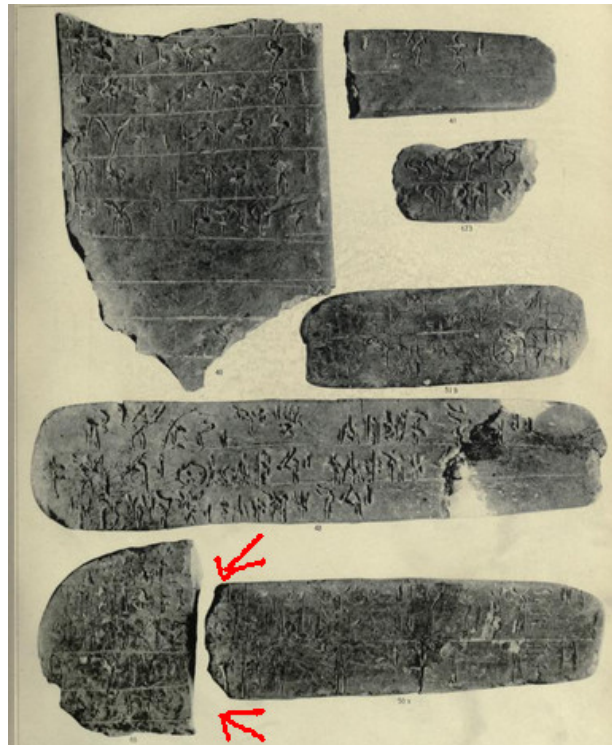
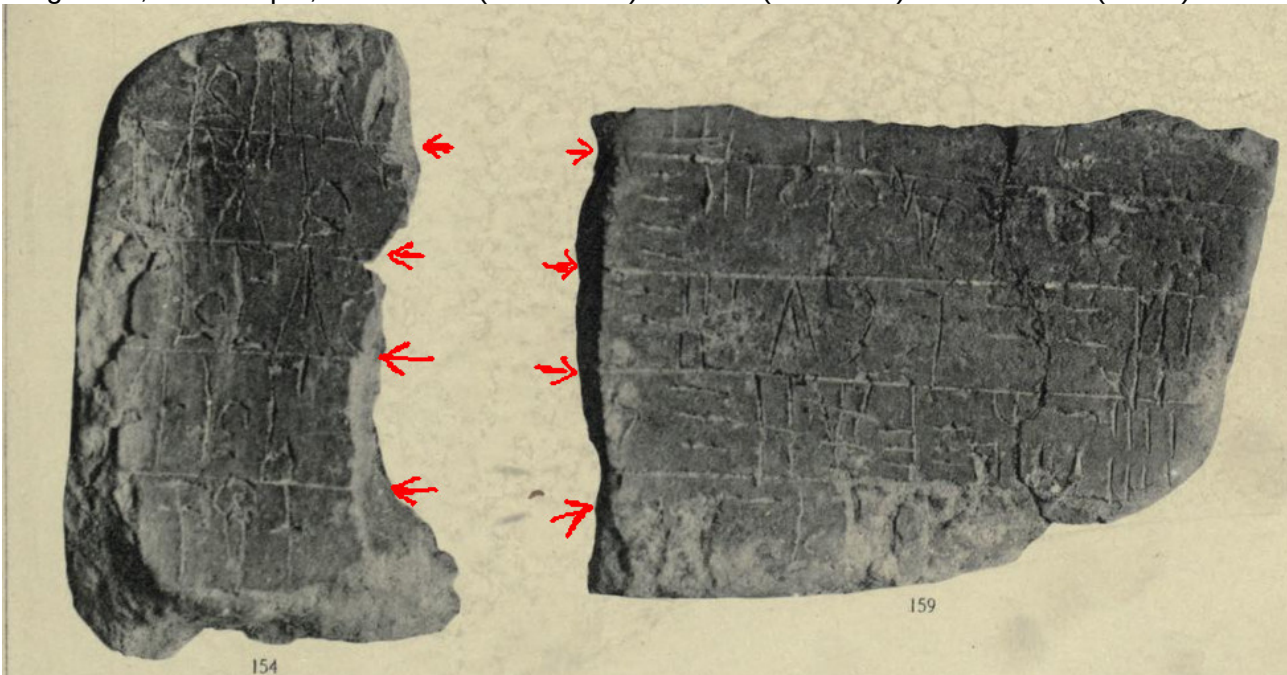


Plate XXII

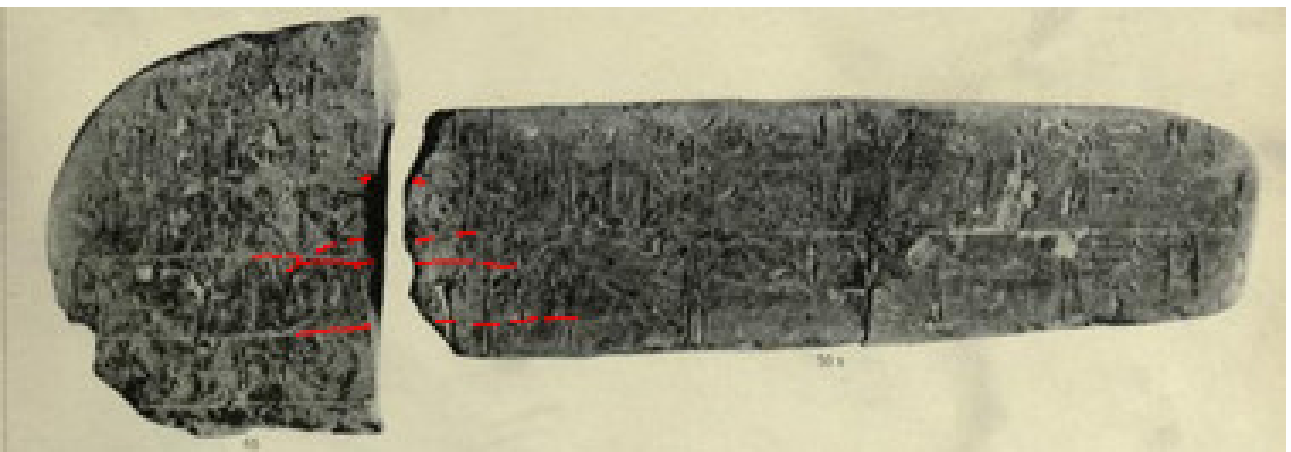
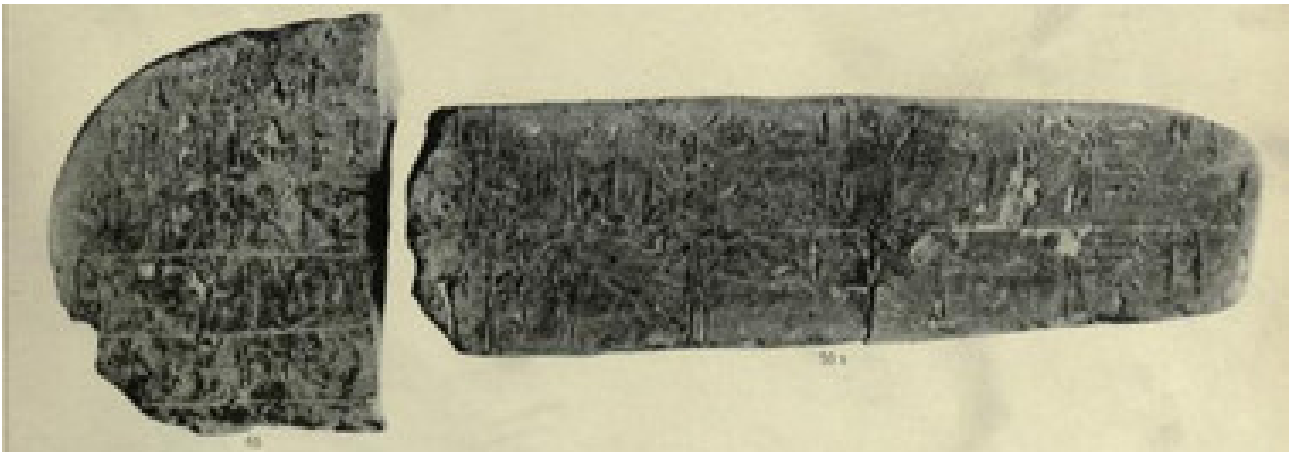


It is possible to posit explanations, such as accident or carelessness or the back of the tablets causing various kinds of displacement. But they are not particularly good explanations as it is reasonable to counter, for example, that the photographs were difficult, expensive, and therefore deserving of the utmost care and attention.

And, as if by way of illustrating such contradiction, some putative tablet “fragments” appear to be very carefully co-aligned on plates because horizontal Linear grid lines on each tablet also exactly align. So, for example, tablets 154 (KN Xd 154) and 159 (KN V 159) in Plate XXVI (below).

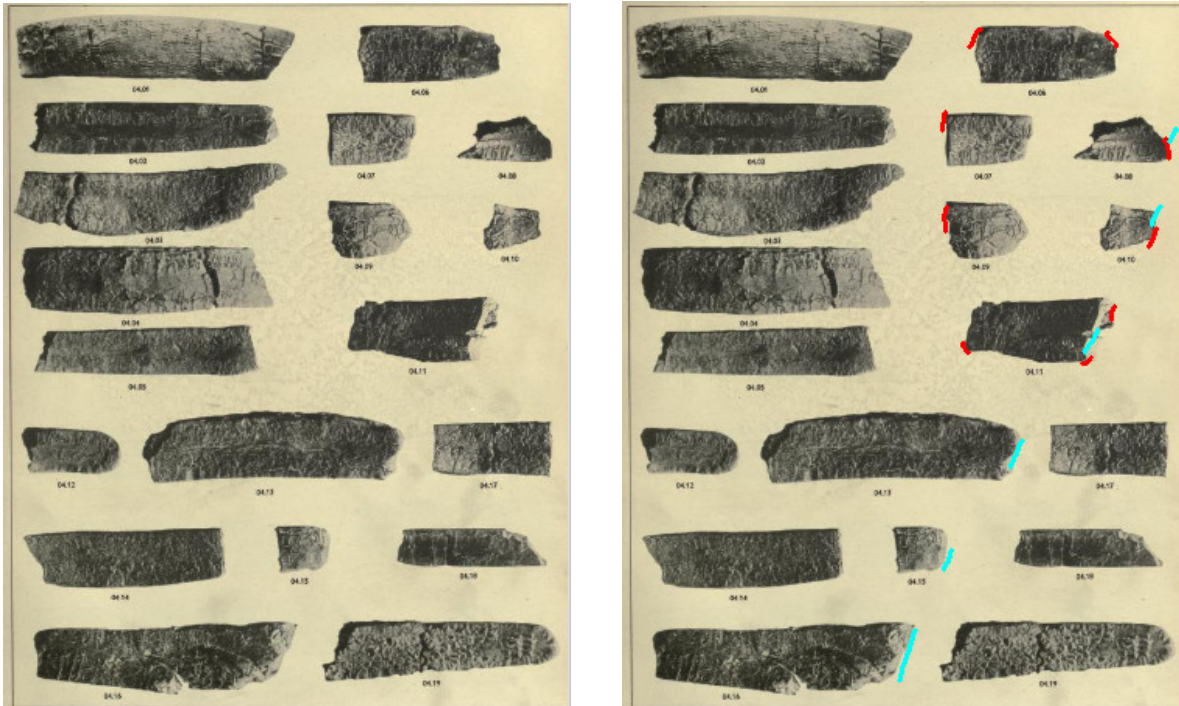


In the case of tablets 60 (KN V 60) and 50a (KN Ce 50) on Plate XXII, the alignment, albeit fainter and less rectilinear, seems to help explain the relative positioning of the tablets highlighted earlier.



Again, it is possible to posit various explanations for such apparently careful arrangement, but a more economical and potentially convincing rationale for both the alignments just described and for the irregularities outlined earlier might be that the tablets in the photographic plates have generally been deliberately arranged by virtue of some kind of underlying design.

Initial further support for such a supposition might be the simple observation that some groups, particularly of smaller tablets, do indeed appear to have been arranged in a distinct pattern. Note, for example, the extended sine curve formed by the top edge of the two top tablets in Plate XV above (not highlighted), or the separable, oval grouping (red) in Plate XIV (below), or the oblique near straight of the right edge of several tablets in the same (turquoise).



But is there a single, deeper design concept underlying the layout of the plate tablets generally? Elsewhere I have tried to show how individual "tablets" are informed by common artistic techniques and motifs that I have called "Linear and cult art"⁴. One possibility is that the same, hidden art form influences the arrangement of tablets on each individual plate as a whole. So formation, colouration (shades of "black and white"), and various incisions would be arranged across different tablets to suggest multiple, complex, but never complete or perfect recurrent images.

I think such images are indeed present on the plates, also artistically convincing in terms of Linear and cult art, but hard to see and difficult to highlight because of the scale, because of the grey rather than colour, and because of their layered multiplicity. I highlight only some of the many that are perceptible, if one has the time, and only on a small area of a small sample⁵.

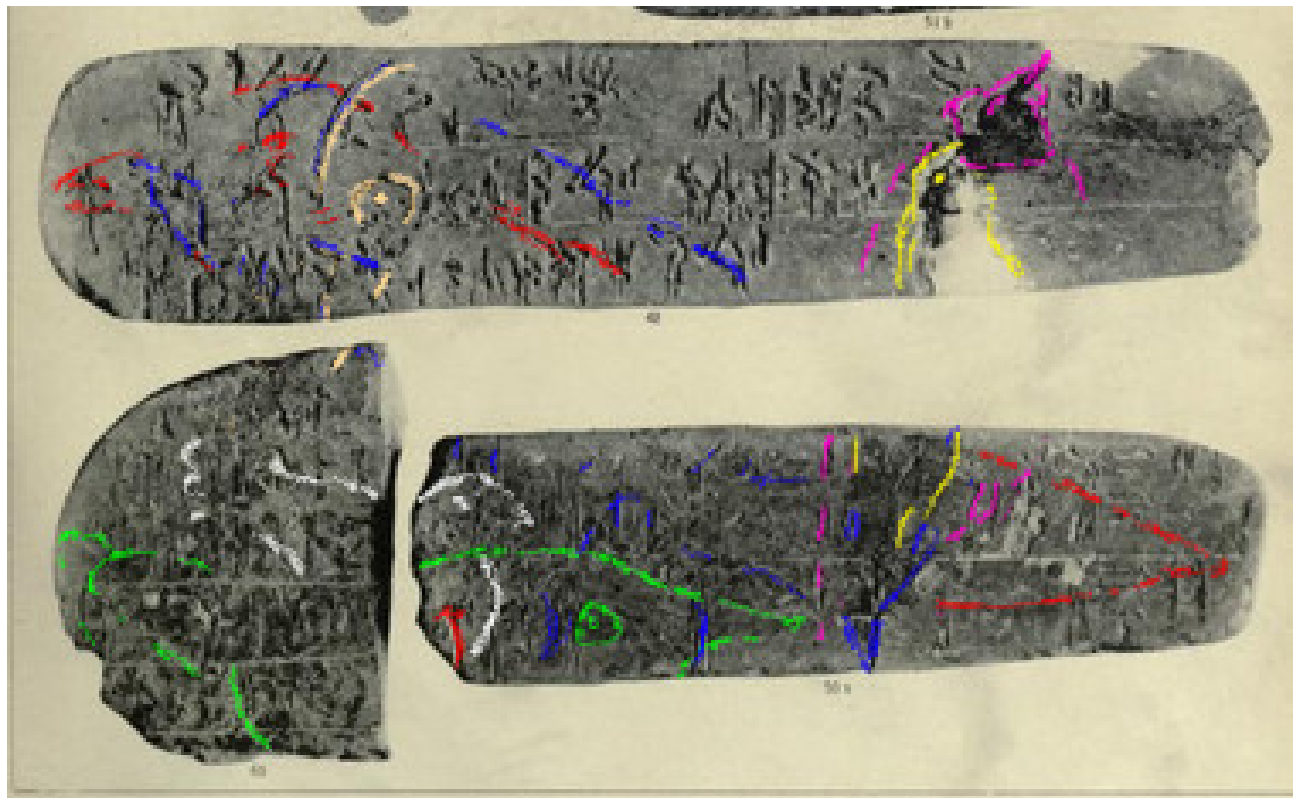
So the arrangement at the bottom of Plate XXII (below) features a good deal of bird imagery crossing the several tablets, including probably a partially right-profiled wren (green), a smaller roosting gull or duck (white), a larger left-profiled corvid with alternative head and beak profiles (red, brown), a right-profiled head-down corvid or peacock (blue), and a right-profiled maybe wader or perched song bird (purple, yellow).

Although my art work is incapable of doing justice to the subjects, I think it is reasonably apparent that several of the birds are suggested in different shapes, sizes, species, but all occupying the same approximate area, and sometimes sharing the same creative interventions.

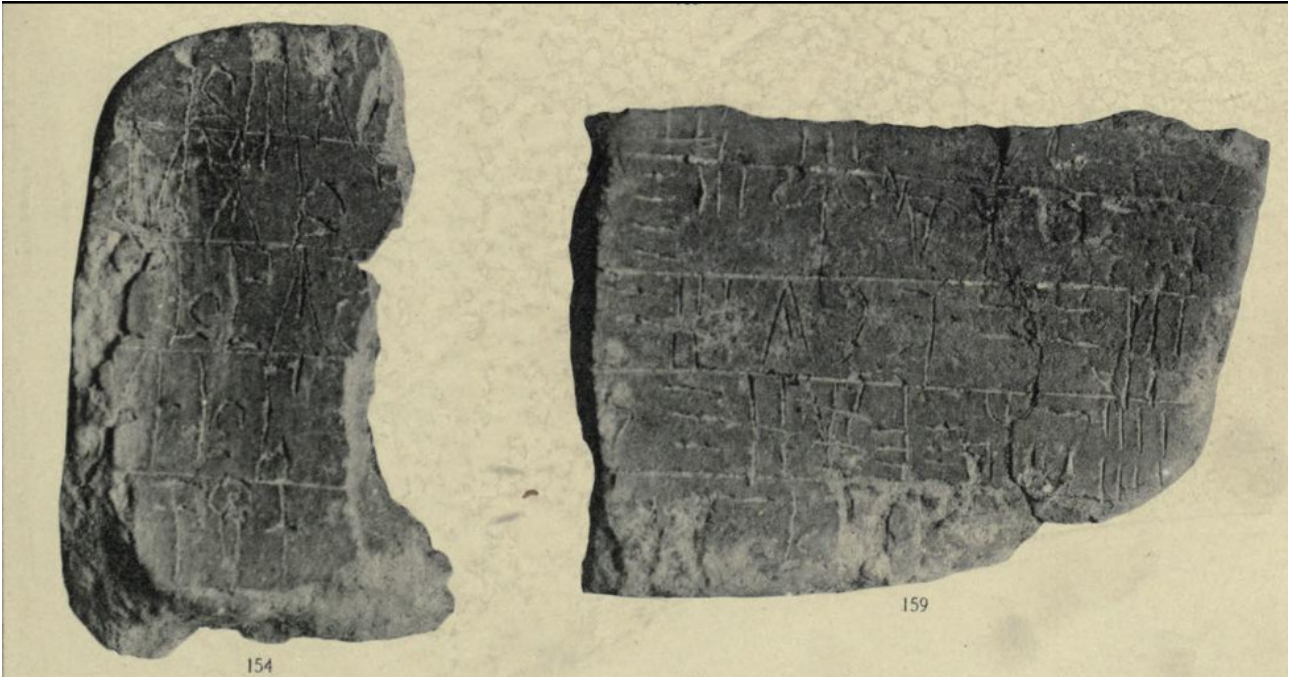
⁴ See for example sections 6 and 10 of *The Problem with Linear B* <https://hcommons.org/deposits/item/hc:20833/> and pages 1-2 of *Linear and cult art: addenda, corrigenda, concludenda* (see note 3 above).

⁵ I am also reluctant to provide further illustrations of Linear and cult art for the reasons given on page 4 of *Addenda, corrigenda, concludenda* (see note 3 above). But I think some minimal exposition is justified here.

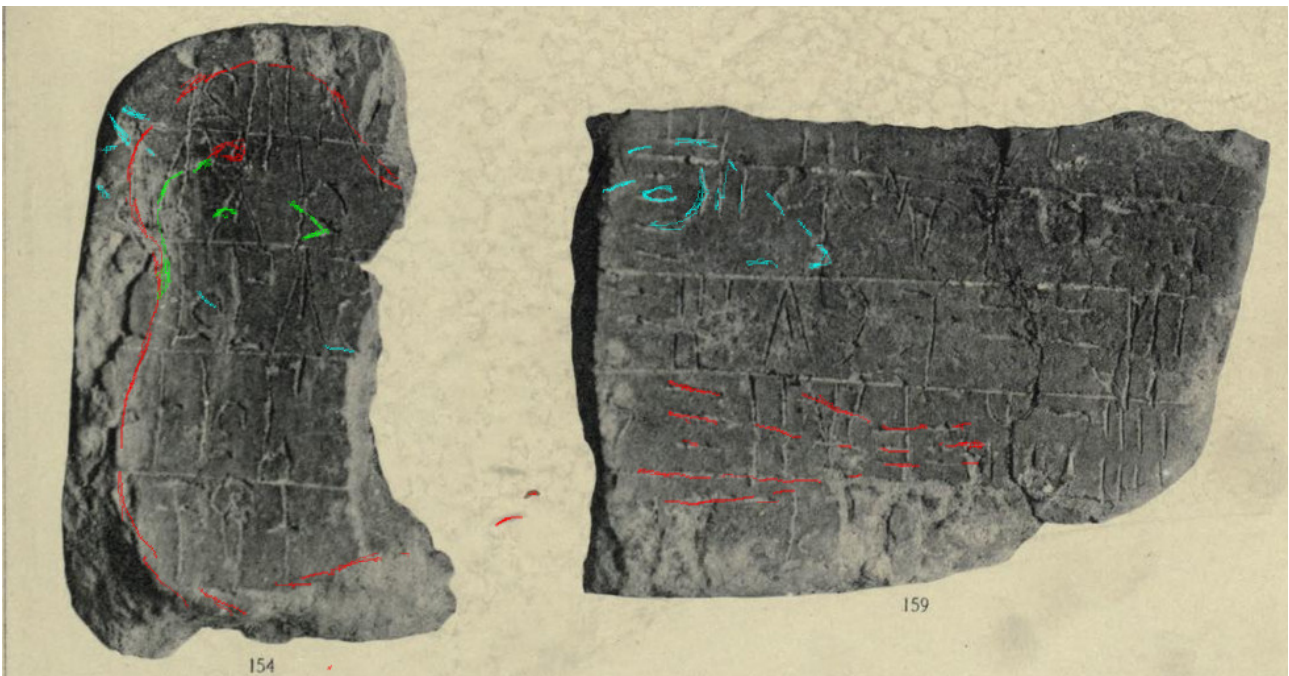
Plate XXII



Similarly intensive bird images cross tablets 154 and 159 on Plate XXVI. So in "A" below, a left-profiled roosting bird, perhaps gull, looks back over its shoulder from the left tablet (red). The incised suggestion of its body and tail feathers helps explain the numerous, sloping putative Linear B signs, for example for 10 ("--"), in tablet 159. There are other bird heads suggested on the left tablet and I have highlighted only one (green). But a right-profiled duck also crosses both tablets (turquoise).

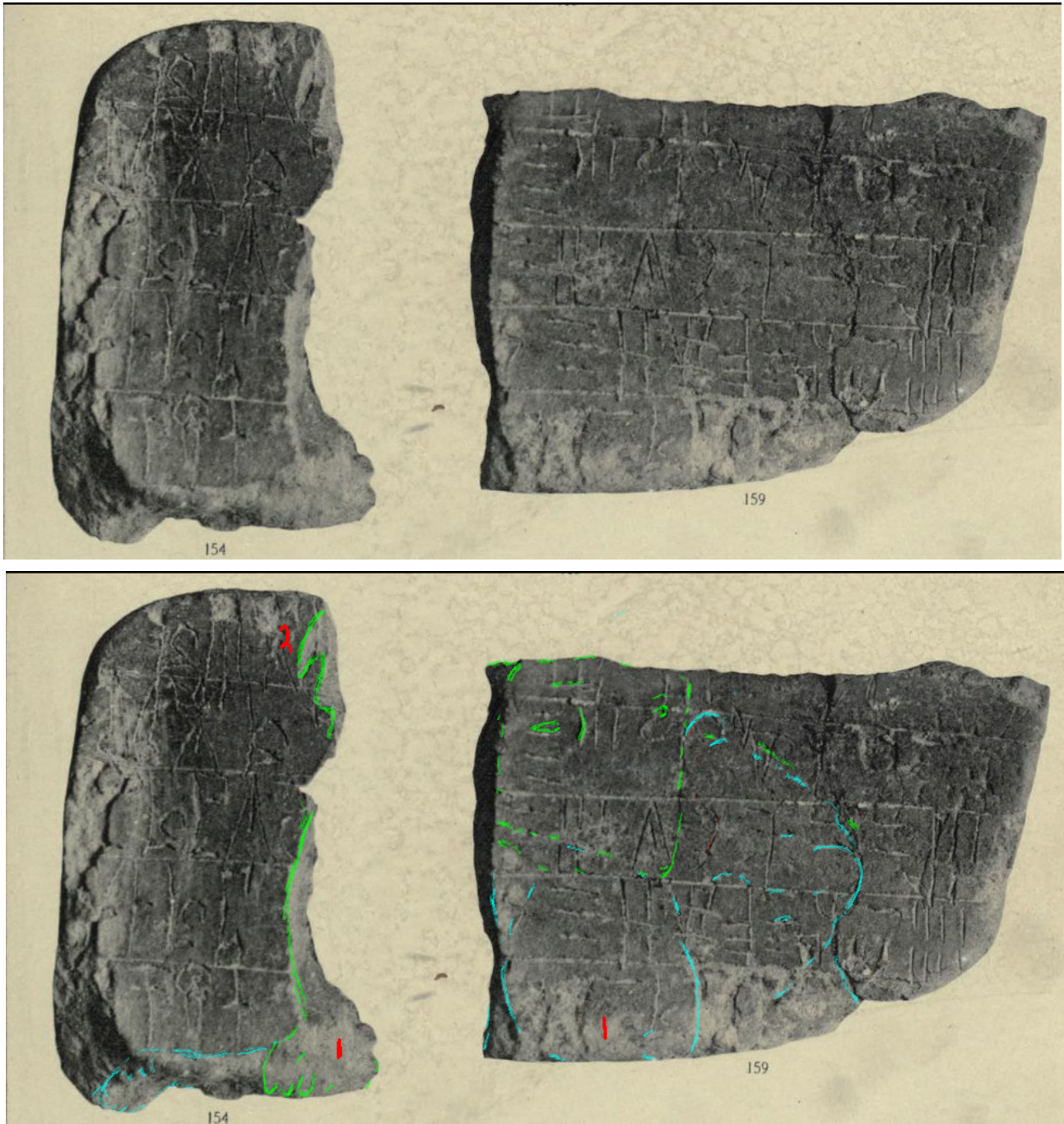


A



In "B" (below) a reclining frontal man or woman (green), head tilted, eyes suggested by incision, but the outline of right arm, hand and fingers, wild hair and brow by moulding and colouration of the clay. Also suggested are thighs (red 1), viewed from in front or behind, of which I have highlighted the (if frontal) left (turquoise), the right being suggested by the same curve as the outside of the larger reclining figure's right arm.

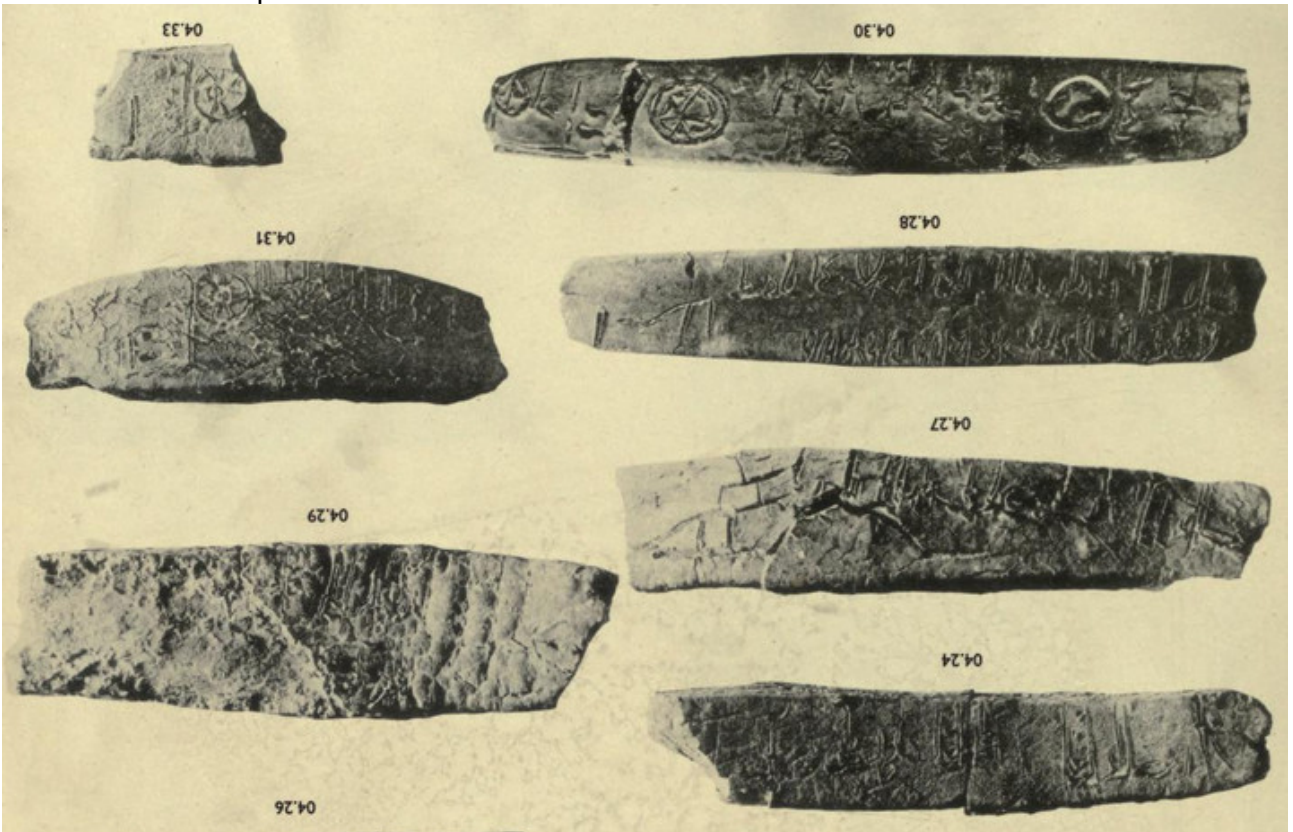
B



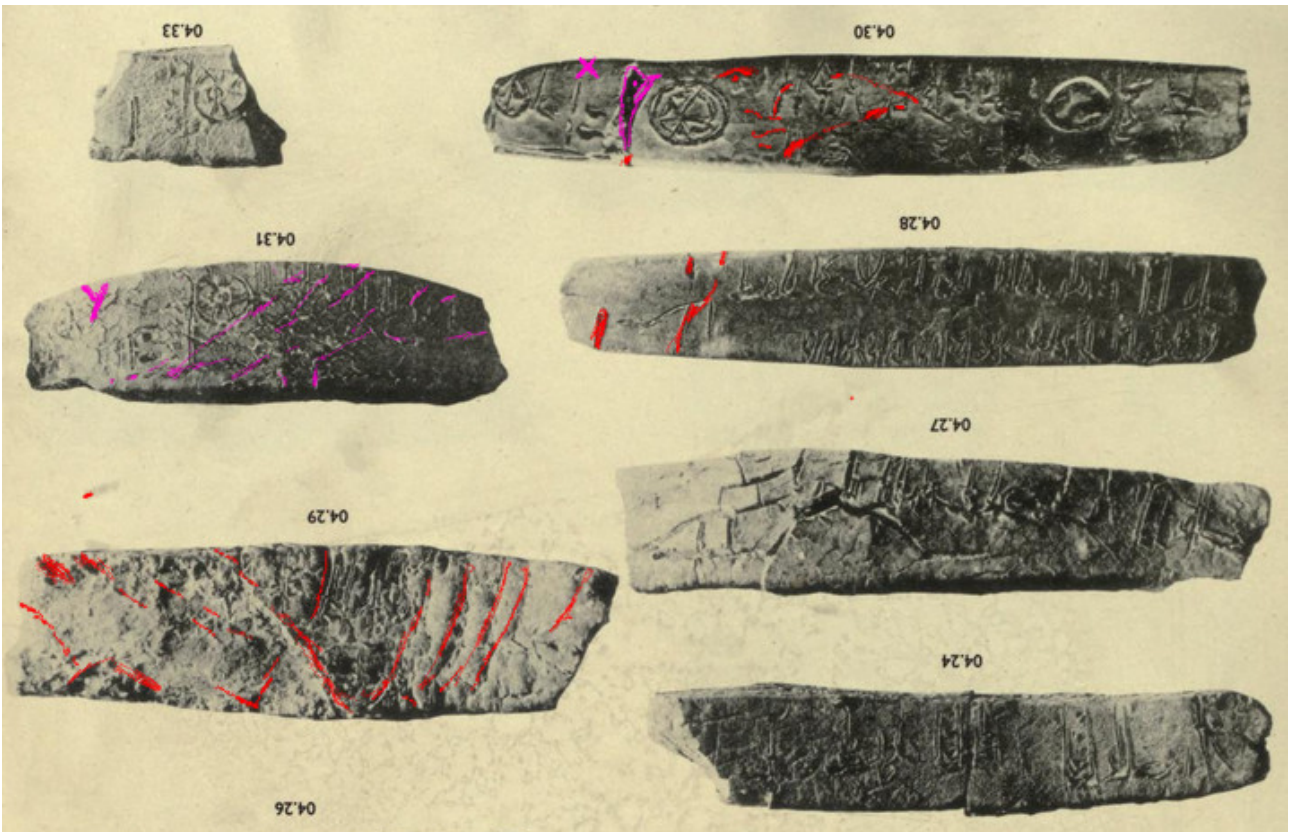
But clay moulding and incisions also serve to suggest the fore-shortened, partially right-profile of a semi-recumbent woman (also turquoise), probably with headdress or top-knot, whose posterior, thighs and right calf are again suggested by some of the same features. The implications are erotic, including perhaps the suggestion of her uplifted dress (red 2) in what is also the tousled hair of the larger reclining figure.

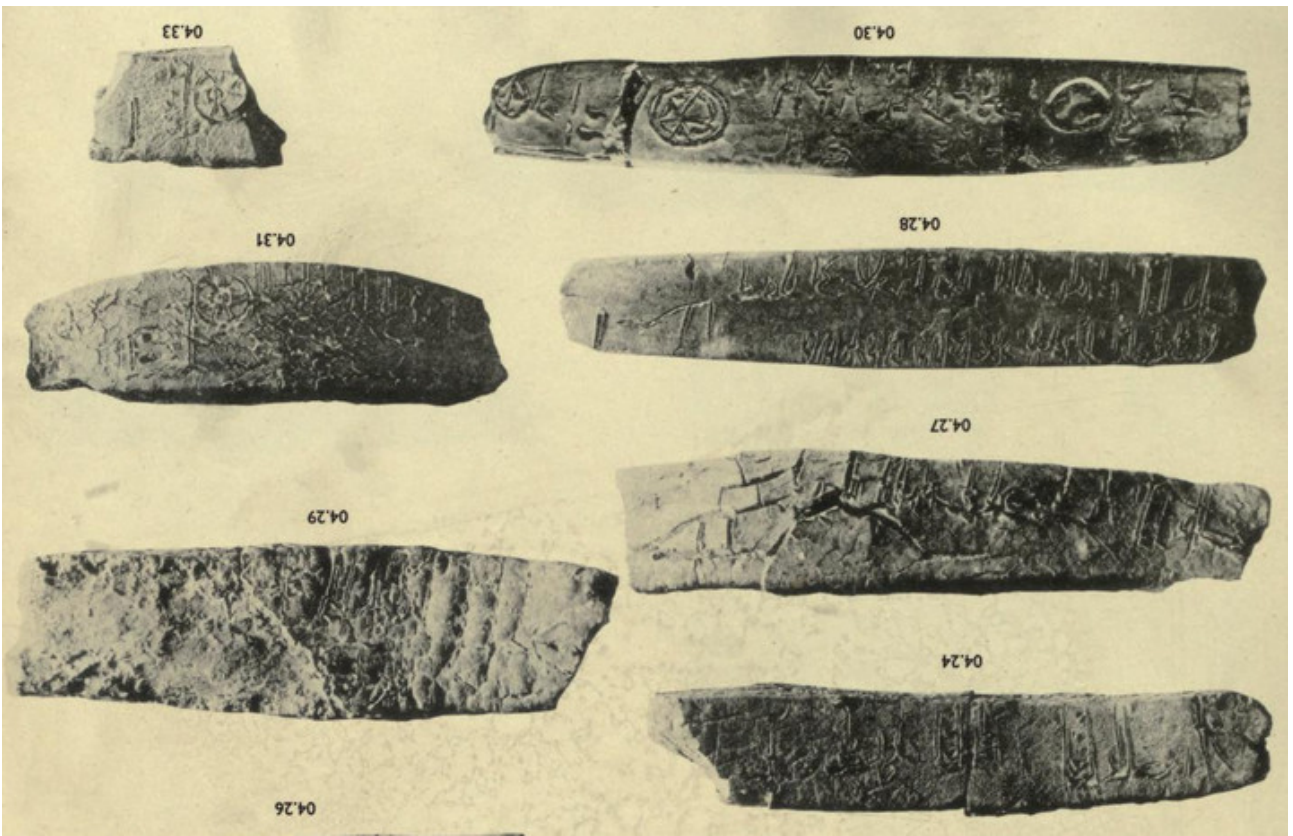
Similarly, the positioning, incisions and especially colouration of tablets 60 and 50a on plate XXII (above), particularly in conjunction with other tablets higher on the same plate, perhaps more obviously and crudely suggest a right-profiled phallus engaged in various erotic activities.

One diagnostic, almost *sine qua non* of Linear and cult art is projection of imagery in different rotations. So with the lower half of the "Arsenal" tablets Plate XV, rotated 180 degrees, as discussed after the pictures that follow.

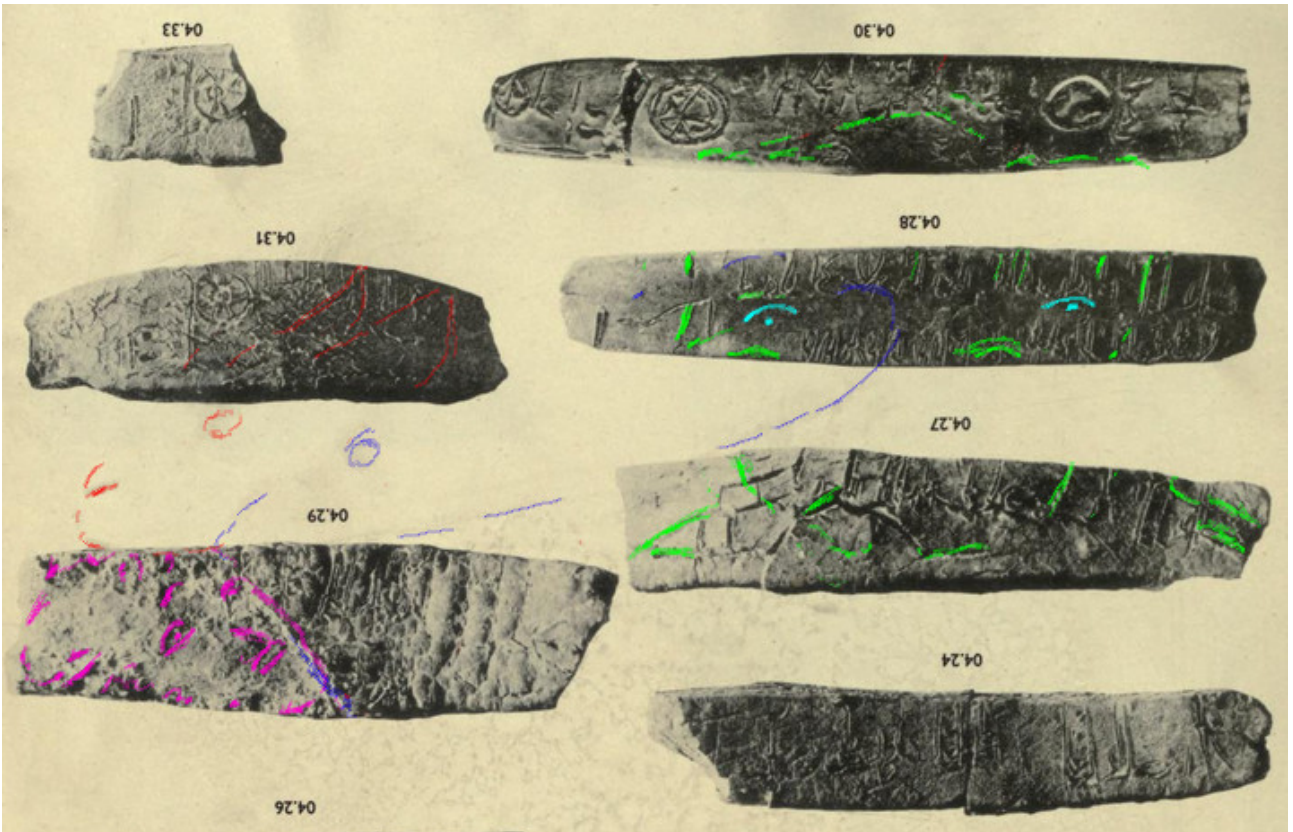


A





B

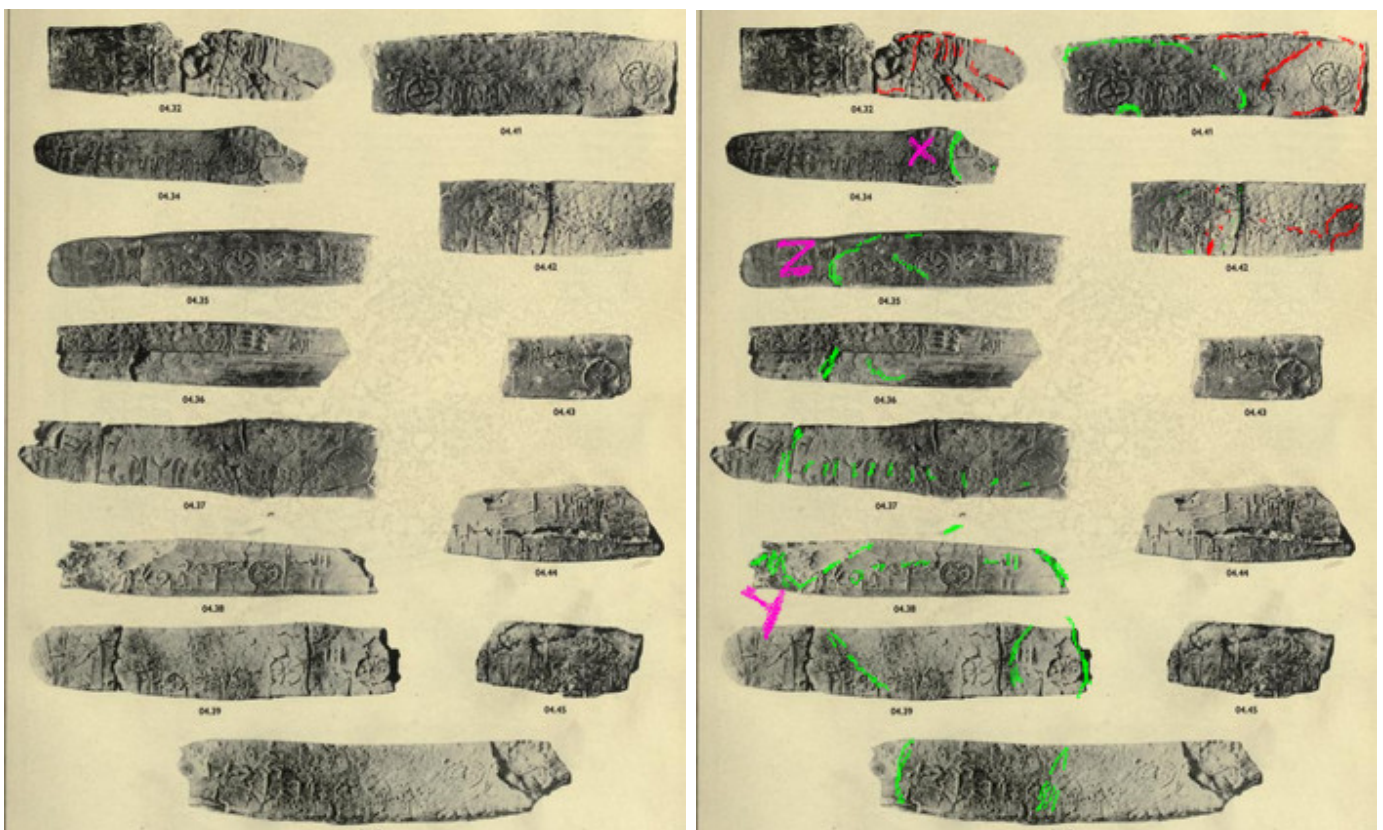


In A above, the head and neck of a right-profiled goose (red) crosses tablets 04.28 and 04.30, but the bird's furred wing and tail feathers are probably suggested (multiple times, maybe for multiple related images) by moulding, incisions, maybe colour in tablets numbered 04.29 and 04.31. The left side of the bird's head (purple at X) is suggested by a similar but much smaller right-profiled bird whose peacock tail may also be suggested, again repeatedly, in 04.31 (at Y).

In B above, the frontal face and shoulders of a large, plump baby child (green) looking onto various, smaller, more complex but typical motifs (not highlighted). Its eyes may alternatively be seen higher up (turquoise), though those better serve to suggest another frontal face, as if behind the child. The position of a partly right-profiled upturned face (purple) conforms with Linear motifs as it probably looks onto female anatomy (as does the child), suggested in the same and adjoining tablets, but I find that too hard to illustrate effectively.

Trace "smudges" on the blank space between 04.31 and 04.29, and 04.27 and 04.28 seem to help suggest or supplement the tablet's latent imagery, so, for example, a left-profiled hare's head (blue), and possibly lamb or kid's (red). Similarly informed and informing inter-tabular "smudges" may be found on other plates, including Plate XXVI A above. But they might post-date publication.

Finally, I shall try to give an example of how some images appear to cross all the tablets on a plate (Plate XVII).



A large, right-profiled babe (green) sits or squats. Diagnostics are the back of the head at purple X and the upper thigh and bottom at Y. At Z the child's right arm may be raised in typical baby fashion, and the child is arguably supported by the left shoulder and upper arm (red) of a seated figure suggested behind it. But it is again, I think, readily apparent that though this is a reasonably convincing image in terms of Linear and cult art, it also breaks down into many alternatives of a similar but also different scale and kind. So the babe's right leg can appear to divide into two smaller ones, slightly differently angled, and arguably belonging to the same image (projecting a different perspective) or another entirely. Incisions ("signs") help suggest the various kneecaps. The highlighted left shoulder (red) also carries the features of a right-profiled woman's head.

Further discussion

Thus the individual "tablets" featured in the plates of SM II – though each tablet also has its own artistic integrity – appear both constructed and arranged to form part of larger designs across one or more other tablets, the art in question being what I have elsewhere called "Linear or cult art".

I do not know whether all the relevant SM II plates can be so explained (though I think so), or all the pieces on them. Some of the latter, particularly around the plate edge as it were, may have been so placed more in hope than conviction.

What about the obvious gaps between the tablets? Two, not necessarily mutually exclusive scenarios might be that:

- the gaps were filled with unwrought filler carrying no artistic interventions. As Linear and cult art seems so often to rely on minimal suggestion to achieve its effects, it is possible that the artist or artists relied on the susceptibility of the human eye to make connections wholly and solely based on disparate tablet features;

- gaps were filled by media that did contain further suggestive and suggested art work, maybe some of it self-contained, but some also assisting or supplementing designs intended to cross the tablets (and gaps). Hence the tablets, as featured in the plates, would represent an abstract form of the so-called P series, as reported by Evans in *Scripta Minoa I*⁶. For the (shapely) lump containing the individual P-series tablets is almost exactly a seemingly complete and unique example of the artifice that is reflected only in a fragmentary or extracted state – disparate individual "tablets" minus a putative in-fill of earth or clay or gypsum or wood, all apparently lost, missed, or too difficult to excavate – in the plates of SM II.

I think this second scenario more likely to be more prevalent, but as Linear and cult art works seem to evolve continually over time, a definitive answer may not be possible in any given case. Similar considerations apply to the question as to where individual pieces of Linear and cult art begin and end. For arguably they often don't, but spread in time and space like graffiti or street art.

If, as proposed, Linear and cult art informs the arrangement of tablets in the photographic plates of SM II, then it seems that the plates must also reflect *one or more of*:

- the arrangement of tablets as found, and largely as originally intended by artist or artists unknown, then more or less faithfully reconstructed *post* excavation, all in itself a remarkable (and unreported) achievement;

- an arrangement partly or wholly fabricated by the excavator, possibly or probably including manufacture of some or all of the individual tablets (also, if true, obviously unreported);

- manipulation of the photographs at some stage before printing, conceivably also thereafter, digitally or otherwise (also all ditto)⁷.

Whichever and whatever the combination of those various scenarios, whoever took or altered or was in some other wise responsible for the photographs must have been aware of the underlying design or artifice, whether as excavated or as devised. But whilst the photographs exactingly, if obscurely reflect it, the perpetrator evidently did not see fit to publicise its presence verbally. Arguably, it was, on the contrary, "buried", deliberately or otherwise, by Evans's putative Linear scripts and larger, "Minoan palace" reconstruction⁸.

Some might conclude that any such behaviour, whatever form or forms it took, can only amount to serious misconduct, most obviously or most plausibly on Evans's leading part. Certainly, from a modern scientific or academic standpoint, it may seem difficult to excuse the silence on such matters – as on Linear and cult art more generally – in the pertinent excavation reports. *Addenda, corrigenda, concludenda*⁹ attempted some preliminary discussion of issues arising, at least as I see them, including some mitigation of Evans's putative offence, but the proposed cross-tabular imagery may now warrant a few additional observations.

⁶ Page 43, Plate XXXVIII of SM II, and see page 7ff of *The Problem with Linear B* (note 4 above).

⁷ See page 5 of *Addenda, corrigenda, concludenda* (note 3 above) for some discussion of photographic manipulation.

⁸ If some incisions or other marks on tablets may now be explained in terms of such cross-tabular imagery, that may plainly also have implications both for the reality of perceived Linear scripts generally and for their constituent parts, their putative signage. However, I do not intend discussing related issues further here.

⁹ Page 12 and note 3 above.

Firstly, it really is hard to discern the Linear and cult art on the larger scale as reflected in the arrangement of tablets in the plates. The art work (however original or old it may or may not be) often relies heavily on colour, unavailable to contemporary photographic and related reproduction. That makes wholesale deliberate fabrication, or "hoax", in so far as not already unconvincing or inappropriate for other reasons¹⁰, less likely. It is true that Linear and cult art, of any time or place, seems to thrive on secrecy and obscurity. But why go to the bother of crafting and arranging tablets, as well as probably photographs, if the results are so invisible, so difficult, frankly so poor, even in terms of the art form itself?

It would have been possible to record the apparent tablet groupings, whether *qua* or *quasi* finds, by full-blown drawings instead of photographs, but Evans evidently chose not to. Possibly, aside from the same colour issue, he realised that whilst drawing can create original Linear and cult art, and also reflect some of its pre-existing manifestations, it is, perhaps totally incapable of representing the overall effect of such art as accumulated over time or by multiple interventions.

At present it seems to me more likely that Evans was doing his best to reconstruct and capture photographically the art form as he found, recognised and respected it in all its myriad manifestations on the Knossos site. But he concluded that for many and varied reasons he could not possibly disclose it publicly. One reason may have been a perception that the eroticism of much of the imagery, howsoever dated, was unsuited to overt publication or exposition in the Edwardian period. The same line of reasoning might explain why his excavation reports are silent, not just about Linear and cult art, but about the fact that, judging by the photographic plates, the digging commendably took cognisance of the relative positions of even relatively small tablets. Evans could not reveal that fact without letting more than one fighting cat out of the bag.

On this same hypothesis, facing the challenge of extracting intrinsically difficult art from the ground without damage, he may have enhanced or repaired artefacts with his own additions, or additions supplied by those with whom he worked, including his Cretan workforce. Linear and cult art probably was, still is a living, sometimes local tradition, in Crete as elsewhere in Greece and the wider world. Such additions *might* help explain the surprisingly "modern" or at least 19th or early 20th century appearance of some of the images.

For the apparent silence, ignorance or conspiracy of Evans's senior team members on such matters there may be many explanations, honourable or not, and I see no point in speculating further here.

I suggested in *Addenda, corrigenda, concludenda* (see note 3 above) that Evans probably knew a good deal about the hidden art form long before he started digging at Knossos. But he may have been unprepared for the sheer scale, quantity, and intractability of what he unearthed. For judging by his early photographs of the excavated site¹¹, as well as others down to the present day, it can be as difficult, even impossible to draw boundaries in space, as it is in time, around the manifestations of Linear and cult art. It pervades the fabric and appearance of structures and artefacts, ruins and fragments, deliberated or otherwise, and probably even the space between them. But then the same might be said of some Christian and other religious art.

It is, of course, for others to explore the plates and any images for themselves, should they so wish, and draw their own conclusions. But perhaps the proposals in this paper might at least begin to help explain not only the arrangement of tablets, as they appear in the plates, but their sometimes variable condition, including some apparently and assuredly early "repairs", as well as photographic anomalies, including not only "smudges" but apparently highly localised over-illumination or blur, such as contributes to the features of the purple and yellow highlighted birds in Plate XXII above.

10 See page 12 of *Addenda* etc and especially pages 174-177 of *The Problem with Linear B* (note 4 above) for conceptual difficulties with the notion of "hoax" in Linear and cult art.

11 Evans included site and object photographs in summary reports published in the *Annals of the British School at Athens* from volume 6, 1899-1900, onwards, available on-line at www.jstor.org. They indicate the contemporary difficulty of photographing such things in "real time". I think probably Evans himself again manipulated the images, in both composition and processing, but again only to highlight, or insinuate, appropriately the presence of an art form that he could not or would not publicise. As apparently often taken outside in strong or variable light, the BSA Annual photographs, though I think still very high quality, are not directly comparable with the "still life" of the SM II plates.