

PO-NI-KI-JO IN THE KNOSSOS Ga TABLETS

1. The Knossos Ga tablets are receipt and delivery accounts dealing with certain commodities, which seem to be mainly *aromata*. These documents have been systematically studied by A. Sacconi¹ in her examination of ideogram *123. The commodities recorded in the Ga tablets vary in accordance with scribal hand: scribe 223 deals with *ku-pa-ro* (set 3); scribe 135 does both with *ku-pa-ro* and *ko-ri-ja-do-no* (set 1); scribe 136 records entries both of *ko-ri-ja-do-no* and *po-ni-ki-jo* (set 2); documents in hand 137 deal with *po-ni-ki-jo* alone (set 4) and, finally, those in hand 221 do with *ki-ta-no* (set 5).

All of these commodities, except for *po-ni-ki-jo*, are recorded by dry measure. Therefore it is obvious that they were handled as grain². On the contrary, the commodity named *po-ni-ki-jo* is weighed. Is it an *aroma* too? Although one can assume that it may be a kind of *aroma* not handled as grain, but as bark, herb or powder³, there is no satisfactory identification of this *po-ni-ki-jo* yet (cf. § 6).

2. The commodity *po-ni-ki-jo* is recorded in documents in hands 136 and 137. It has been noticed that those in hand 137 list *po-ni-ki-jo* alone, whereas those in hand 136 list both *po-ni-ki-jo* and *ko-ri-ja-do-no*.

Scribe 136 is responsible for a homogeneous set of tablets (Ga 2) and also for two isolated records, E 749 and 489⁴. The Ga documents fall easily into three groups: they list *po-ni-ki-jo* (424) or *ko-ri-ja-do-no* (415) alone, or both of them. All of them

¹ «L'idéogramme *123 dans les texts mycéniens», *Acta Mycenaea* II, Salamanca 1972, pp. 18-32.

² Cf. A. Sacconi, *op. cit.*, p. 28. On the unidentified *ki-ta-no* see our «*ki-ta-no* en las tablillas de Cnoso», *Darius* 2, 1974, pp. 45-55; on *ku-pa-ro* see *Emerita* 42, 1974, pp. 307-336, and on *ko-ri-ja-do-no* see *Minos* 15.

³ Cf. A. Sacconi, «The monogram *KAPO* in the Mycenaean Texts», *Kadmos* 11, 1972, p. 25 n. 18.

⁴ Cf. J.-P. Olivier, *Les scribes de Cnossos*, Roma 1967, pp. 82 f.

are receipt tablets as can be inferred from the term *a-pu-do-si* (cf. 421.a, 424.b, 425.B, 427.1, 428.a? and 7425.1?) and also from the deficit accounts (cf. 427.2, and 7431). A place-name is written in majuscule signs on the heading of each tablet and sometimes personal names are also recorded. So, it is plain that these documents do list receipts from different sites (and sometimes from persons as well).

Taking into account only the tablets dealing with *po-ni-ki-jo*, the evidence can be tabulated as follows:

TABLETS	PLACE-NAMES	<i>po-ni-ki-jo</i>				
		M	N	o	M	N
Ga 417	<i>qa-mo</i>	5				
418	<i>su-ri-mi-jo</i>	3				
420	<i>pu-na-si-jo</i>	[
423	<i>qa-ra-jo</i>	[
424	*56-ko-we-i-jo	5				
425	]	1				
426	]	4	1			
427.1	<i>da-wi-jo</i>	8	[		1	
.2	<i>da-wi-jo?</i>	8	1		1	1
1335]	[
7286	]	8				
7425	]	2				
7426	]	14				
7429]	[
7431	]	2	1		1	1
8439]	[
TOTAL OF <i>po-ni-ki-jo</i>		60	3	o	2	2

The figures of five entries are lost (420, 423, 1335, 7429 and 8439). If we consider a mean entry of M 5, a total of M 25 must be added to the total figures already preserved. Therefore we are led to restore \pm M 85 as the total amount of the *po-ni-ki-jo* recorded in the Ga tablets of scribe 136.

On the other hand, it is necessary to mention the fragmentary tablet in the same hand Ga 7446, whose text reads as follows:

.1]41 M 2
 .2] vacat

It would seem that this record deals also with *po-ni-ki-jo*, since a weight measure is written here. The figures on the left must refer to the L weight measure. If we convert the L amount into M, we obtain a total of M 1232, i.e. ± 1232 kgs., of *po-ni-ki-jo*. This total is so high that we are led to consider that this record is some kind of totalling tablet of the Ga individual documents ($\pm M$ 85). Therefore we must seek for another interpretation (cf. § 4).

3. We can observe in this table that nine place-names are not preserved. The extant places are *qa-mo*, *su-ri-mo*, *pu-na-so*, *qa-ra*, *56-*ko-we*, and *da-wo*. However it is possible that some of the lost places are attested in the tablet in hand 136 E 749+5532 +*fr.* This document lists entries of GRA by places, the toponyms being *qa-ra*, *ru-ki-to*, *ti-ri-to*, *su-ri-mo*, *qa-mo*, *u-ta-no* and *pu-so*. So, three out of these seven place-names recur in the Ga tablets, a fact that might indicate a geographical specialization of the scribe 136.

On the other hand, these place-names might be now located in central and southern Crete, particularly in the Messara plain and neighbouring areas ⁵.

4. As far as we can see, the Ga tablets in hand 136 are receipt records of *po-ni-ki-jo* and *ko-ri-ja-do-no* from certain sites. It is implied that these places (located in the south of Crete) yielded both commodities. The tablet Ga 7446, whose figures are so high as to be the totalling record of the set, records perhaps the *po-ni-ki-jo* crop of some place in Crete.

5. The tablets in hand 137 concerning the B and Ga series have been discussed by L. Godart ⁶. As he has pointed out ⁷, all of them make up a coherent set of receipt records, except for Ga 834, which might be a delivery account. However, there are two kinds of receipt tablets: those of the B series and those classified as Ga.

⁵ Cf. L. R. Palmer, «Mycenaean Inscribed Vases: II. The Mainland Finds», *Kadmos* 11, 1972, pp. 35 ff.; and our *Studies on Some Mycenaean Inscriptions from Knossos Dealing with Textiles*, Suppl. No. 5 to *Minos*, Salamanca 1975, pp. 118-134.

⁶ «Les tablettes du scribe 137», *AC* 39, 1970, pp. 385-394.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 389.

a) The former list *a-pu-do-si* of *po-ni-ki-jo* in relation to certain groups of VIR. These tablets make up the second set of the B series. They are four individual records (B 810, 813, 818, and 55+7423+*fr.*) and a totalling one (817). Their purpose is to record the amount of *po-ni-ki-jo* delivered by/to fixed men groups⁸. The ratio between the number of VIR and the amount of *po-ni-ki-jo* can be stated from B 818 (VIR. 30 M 6 N 2), namely $\pm 1/4$ kg. of *po-ni-ki-jo* for each man.

Let us point out that the text of the totalling tablet B 817 has been enlarged by a recent join of fragments by J.-P. Olivier⁹. This join has restored the figures after the ideogram VIR (32) and a new text in minute signs which reads *ko-wo, di[* . This restored entry prevents us from assuming the tablet under consideration as the totalling record concerning the B tablets in hand 137.

The occurrence of men groups and *po-ni-ki-jo* on the same records might somehow indicate the purpose of the *po-ni-ki-jo* entries in such documents. We can produce the evidence from similar tablets: for instance, the Ai tablets of the second set, which deal with several groups of MUL and *ko-wa/wo* along with certain allowances of GRA. It is obvious that such GRA allowances were records of food delivered to the said groups¹⁰. The tablet Am 819 could have also a similar object. It records a group of VIR 18 *ko-wo* 8 along with HORD 9 T 7 V 3, probably a monthly ration of food.

We can assume, therefore, that the *po-ni-ki-jo* in the tablets in hand 137 has the same purpose, i.e., to be used as food for certain workmen groups.

b) The latter record receipts of *po-ni-ki-jo* from different places. These tablets make up the set 4 of the Ga series. Leaving the delivery tablet Ga 834 aside, the evidence from these records can be tabulated as follows:

⁸ On the problem of the fixed men groups see L. Godart, *op. cit.*, pp. 391 ff.

⁹ L. Godart - J.-P. Olivier, «119 raccords et quasi-raccords de fragments dans les tablettes de Cnossos», *SMEA* 15, 1972, pp. 34 f.

¹⁰ Cf. our «Algunas consideraciones sobre las tablillas Ai(2) de Cnoso», *Estudios Clásicos* 16, 1972, pp. 209-214.

TABLETS	PLACE-NAMES	<i>po-ni-ki-jo</i> M
Ga 992	<i>pu-si-jo</i>	[
1020	]jo	[
1021]	[
1040	*56-ko-]we-i-jo	[
8438]	[
7682 ¹¹	tu-]ri-si-jo	[
5736	]	30 2

The tablet Ga 5736 is problematical. L. Godart¹¹ thought that an ideogram VIR must be restored before 30 (then, this tablet should be reclassified as B). However it is striking that only M 2 answers to VIR 30. Therefore it should probably be classified as Ga, as *KT*⁴ does. Then, we must restore a L weight measure instead of VIR. If so, the total amount of *po-ni-ki-jo* reaches ± 902 kgs.

The question arises, is this tablet a totalling record, or the lost figures in the Ga tablets in hand 137 were as high as that? There is no way of answering.

On the other hand, we can observe that the place-names of these records fit in the same geographical area of those in hand 136. It is hardly a mere coincidence.

Finally, let us point out that the delivery tablet Ga 834 reads as follows:

] *po-ni-ki-jo*, *ko-no-si-ja* M 34[

The difficulty of this document is similar to that of B 817, i.e., the occurrence of two words which cannot agree with each other. L. Godart¹² has pointed out that it is necessary to understand *ko-no-si-ja* [*qa-si-re-wi-ja*] or the like (e.g. *a-pu-do-si*).

To sum up, our analysis of the tablets in hand 137 has shown that *po-ni-ki-jo* was used as food and that the geographical area which *po-ni-ki-jo* entries are referred to is the same as that of scribe 136.

¹¹ This fragmentary tablet is actually classified as X, but it is alleged to be in hand 137.

¹² *Op. cit.*, p. 385.

6. The commodity *po-ni-ki-jo* has been repeatedly interpreted as an aromatic substance, a spice. M. Ventris and J. Chadwick understood it as *Phoenician spice* in allusion to its red colour or Phoenician origin¹³. Such an interpretation is still accepted almost without changes¹⁴.

Recently P. Chantraine¹⁵ has summed up the interpretations he thinks likely. He writes: «c'est un neutre φοινίκιον, pour lequel on peut hésiter entre produit du palmier, produit pourpre, o plus probablement produit phénicien».

There are thus three possibilities. But it is necessary to rule out those which are not in keeping with the evidence from the tablets.

First, «produit phénicien» (the likeliest interpretation for P. Chantraine). Such an interpretation implies that the Phoenicians were known and named «Phoenicians» by the Mycenaeans. It implies also that this commodity was a characteristic product of the Phoenicians, but whether it was their most important trade-product or simply a product of Phoenician origin, is impossible to say.

However it is by no means sure that the Phoenicians were known as «Phoenicians» by the Mycenaeans¹⁶. It is also striking that the *po-ni-ki-jo* is the only spice named after the name of the Phoenicians, who are supposed to deal in all kind of spices in the trade between Asia and the Greek world¹⁷. Was it the first to be known among the spices sold by the Phoenicians? Perhaps the most important? But which one? Let us emphasize the high figures of *po-ni-ki-jo*: this commodity was actually a *common* «spice». On the other hand, let us point out that the Phoenicians have nothing to do with the trade of *po-ni-ki-jo*, since it was yielded somewhere

¹³ *Documents*, p. 222.

¹⁴ L. R. Palmer, *Interpretation*, p. 277, «a spice»; L. Godart, *op. cit.* in n. 6, p. 391, «le *po-ni-ki-jo* est sans doute une substance aromatique»; G. Maddoli, «*Ko-no e po-ni-ki-jo micenei in un'iscrizione cretese arcaica*», *Atti Roma II*, p. 647, «un'erba aromatica».

¹⁵ «A propos du nom des Phéniciens et des noms de la pourpre», *Studi Classici* 14, 1972, p. 11 n. 17.

¹⁶ Cf. P. Chantraine, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

¹⁷ A. Sacconi, *op. cit.* in n. 3, p. 25 n. 16.

in Crete. Then, were they the first to root it in the island? It is not probable at all.

We must therefore conclude that the *po-ni-ki-jo* is not a Phoenician product of any kind.

Secondly, «produit pourpre». But which one? It is a common «spice», which grows in Crete and, whether it is bark, herb, or powder, is weighed in great quantities. The evidence does not support the identification of *po-ni-ki-jo* with any red spice at all.

Thirdly, «produit du palmier». We must consider *in extremis* such interpretation as the likeliest. In addition, the evidence from the tablets does strengthen the identification of *po-ni-ki-jo* as a palm-product.

7. If the *po-ni-ki-jo* is a palm-product, it is likely to refer to palm-dates. Then, *po-ni-ki-jo* is to be understood as *phoinikioi* [*karpoi*], i.e., palm-dates.

We know that where date-palm trees grew abundantly palm-dates were used as a main component of the diet among ancient peoples. Its consumption was important at Ur. We have a text of 2050 B.C. which mentions the crop from the date groves¹⁸. Fresh, dried or pressed dates were commonly used as food in Ancient Egypt¹⁹. On the other hand, dates provided some kind of wine, which is precisely mentioned in an archaic inscription from Gortyn, Crete²⁰.

The existence of important date-palm groves in Crete in the second millenium B.C. can be deduced from the artistic (and sometimes stylized) palm representations on pottery, frescoes and sealings²¹ and from the Mycenaean words *po-ni-ke*, *po-ni-ki-pi*, etc.²² as well. Moreover, in spite of its enormous disafforestation,

¹⁸ D. & P. Brothwell, *Food in Antiquity*, London 1969, pp. 144 f.

¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 145.

²⁰ For the φοινικεῖος οἶνος see Hdt. 1.193, 2.86; D. S. 5.31, etc. This kind of wine is attested in IC IV. 145.5 (*SEG* I 414), cf. G. Maddoli, *op. cit.*, p. 648. On the existence of such a wine in Linear A records see J. G. P. Best, *Some Preliminary Remarks on the Decipherment of Linear A*, Amsterdam 1972, p. 32.

²¹ For instance, R. Matton, *La Crète Antique*, Athens 1960, p. 55 n° 3.

²² Cf. among others L. R. Palmer, «A Mycenaean Tomb Inventory», *Minos* 5, 1957, pp. 64 f. *po-ni-ki-ja* in the Knossos chariot tablets is perhaps to be interpreted as «of palm wood».

Crete has still date-palm groves in the east ²³. The subtropical climate of the island was indeed an environment favourable to the date-palm tree and it is tempting to assume that palm trees grew everywhere.

Such an interpretation of *po-ni-ki-jo* as palm-dates fits well in the fact that this commodity was recorded in the Ga tablets, which deal with commodities used as food additives. Moreover, we have already seen that the *po-ni-ki-jo* of the B tablets in hand 137 is to be interpreted as food. In addition, we must emphasize that the *po-ni-ki-jo* is growing in southern Crete, precisely in the most subtropical region of the island.

Since *po-ni-ki-jo* is to be interpreted as palm-dates, such a fruit is likely to have been measured by weight.

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²³ Sp. Marinatos, *Crete and Mycenae*, London 1960, p. 12.