

NOTES ON TWO BROKEN TABLETS FROM PYLOS

The excellent observation of M. S. Ruipérez¹ (and of Ventris and Chadwick²) that the two tablets PY Sn64 and An218 are parts of a single record has led to a re-examination of the classification which separated them, the copies and the texts, and the photographs. The first result of this examination was to confirm the suggestion of Ruipérez that Sn64 and An218 are written by the same hand; this had been recognized at least by 1947, but did not lead to a comparison of their texts. This hand is not the same hand as that of An724 or 830, so that there is no reason to consider them as parts of the same record. There are no others of comparable format by the hand of 64 and 218.

The examination of the photographs revealed something unexpected, however, and very likely autopsy could add to what the photographs show. There are available photographs of the faces of both tablets and of the back of 218, since it was inscribed. When the two photographs of the faces were placed side by side for comparison of the handwriting, the symmetry of the breaks within the tablets was suddenly noticed, and this led to a more careful examination of the tablets themselves. The noteworthy observations include the plotting of the directions of the lines of the breaks on all the known surfaces of the tablets, the noting of the positions and shapes of the missing portions, the examination of the condition of the edges of the cracks, both on obverse and reverse, the marking of differences in the shade of the clay in the various fragments, particularly of 218, where fragments dark on one face are light on the other, and finally consulting the sketch plans which had been made to show the positions in which tablets and their fragments had been found within the Archives Room. The conclusions which

¹ «Une charte royale de partage des terres à Pylos», *Minos* IV, 1956, 2, p. 146-164.

² *Documents in Mycenaean Greek*, Cambridge 1956, p. 175-177 (appeared after this article was written).

seem possible from the examination of the photographs and the plan of the Archives Room and from two or three informal experiments follow without explanation of the steps of argument and experiment by which they were reached. *Caveat lector.*

The two tablets which are now PY 64 and 218 formed the parts of a complete record. They were written by a single scribe at one time on two tablets similar in size and in format. They were written long enough before the destruction of the palace by fire to have dried normally. The scribe began with 64, ruled the blank in his normal fashion, placing the first ruling near the top of the tablet to be the top of the first line of text, and making the lines average 1.0 cm. in height. In this way he made 20 rulings, which gave him 19 blank lines in which to inscribe his text. He wrote his heading and the first paragraph in lines 1-8, left three lines blank, and wrote the second paragraph in lines 12-16. Then he probably regretted having left the space of three lines, considering the amount of text he still had to inscribe. He thought first that he might put his next paragraph in this tablet, despite the little room he had left himself, for he erased the rulings he had made below line 16 and reruled that section with six rules in place of three, so that the tablet had 22 lines in place of 19. The traces of the old rulings are visible in the photograph. The rule number 17 is that below the last line (16) of writing. Old rule 18 runs between new 18 and 19, touching 19 at the right; old rule 19 begins at the left between new 19 and 20, and ends at the right between new 20 and 21; old rule 20 begins at the left with new 21, and ends at the right with new 22. But the six blanks the scribe had thus recovered were not enough to put in a text of six lines and keep it as a separate paragraph, too, so he abandoned the newly drawn spaces and turned to tablet 218. If he had not already ruled this tablet he did so now, with somewhat larger spaces, averaging 1.3 cm. The crowding of the last three lines suggests that he ruled the tablet only now, knowing how many lines he had to have, and seeing after the 14th rule that he should have to crowd an extra one in. At any rate, he did not have to erase and rerule the end of this tablet. He then inscribed the text of the two paragraphs in 218, and was done.

The order of the next three operations is not clear. The tablets were dried, but not baked. The two tablets were placed together, face to face, with their tops together, and tied together with string.

218 was inscribed on the back, and the direction of the writing was probably determined by the writing on the face. The writing is shallow, so that the tablet may have been dry or partly dry when it was done.

Finally the two tablets, tied together, were placed on a shelf, with 64 on the bottom and 218 on the top, with the bottom of 218 nearest the edge of the shelf, so that the index on the back of 218 could be read without picking them up. It seems most likely that they were placed directly on the shelf and that no other tablets were above them, but there may have been. Very likely the En tablets were on the same shelf and near. It is perhaps too much to expect that we could tell the construction, design, and number of the shelves; let us suppose that there were at least two, that they extended almost the length of the short end of the room, that they stood on the bench, and were not fixed to the wall, that they were not enclosed cupboards but open shelves, and rather more flimsy than rigid in their construction. Our bundle of two tablets then was placed near the right end of the shelf which stood at a guess a meter above the bench, which was ca. 0.40 m., so that the shelf was close to eye-level. They were still there when the palace was destroyed.

It is not our business to show exactly how and why the palace was destroyed, yet a bit of the sequence within the Archives Room can be guessed. The first thing that happened was that through deliberate or accidental human agency, or through natural forces, and while the room was still unencumbered with fallen debris of the destruction of the roof or upper story, the shelves were toppled over and fell forward into the room, spilling their contents of archives. The scattering of archives on the bench and over the floor is chiefly to be attributed to this fall, though some tablets may well have been left in various other places about the room. In the fall the bundle of two tablets fell onto the bench, still right side up, and very likely slid a short distance along the bench. They were then in exactly the right position to receive the blow of what fell off the shelf above them at the same moment — the wicker basket containing the tablets of the Aa series written by the hand of Aa60, and labelled with the label:

Wa114 *me-ni-jo* WOMAN
pe-ra₃-ko-ra-i-ja [

The wicker basket was probably open; at any rate it spilled its

contents chiefly on the bench near and beyond the then position of 64 and 218. The blow fell on the back of 218 at the hole opposite the middle of line 6. The impact was felt most strongly by 218, of course, but the closeness of 218 and 64 ensured that the two tablets broke in very nearly the same lines. It was probably at this moment that the string tying them together was broken. As has happened in several possibly pertinent experiments, the lower tablet was not widely scattered, and suffered fewer breaks, and the pieces remained with the same face up as when the blow fell. In the sketch plan of the Archives Room the fragments of 64 are those marked with solid black, on the bench. The upper tablet, 218, was more thoroughly shattered, the pieces more widely scattered, and some of them landed on the floor right side up, while others fell back side up. The difference in color or shade of the clay will indicate which pieces fell which way. In the sketch plan the fragments of 218 are those marked with solid black on the floor. The fragments of 74, which fell partly on the bench and partly on the floor, are almost touching 64 on the bench and the most distant bits of 218 on the floor. Thereafter the falling of the wood of the ceiling or roof covered the room and bench with burning coals which baked the tablets more or less thoroughly.

It will be admitted that there are difficulties in this account, and further study of the Archives Room and the tablets may show it to have been almost pure fancy. Some of these guesses, however, may be true, and it may be partly through exploring the implications of the circumstances which are here supposed to have obtained in the last moments of the Archives Room that their truth or falsehood can be decided.

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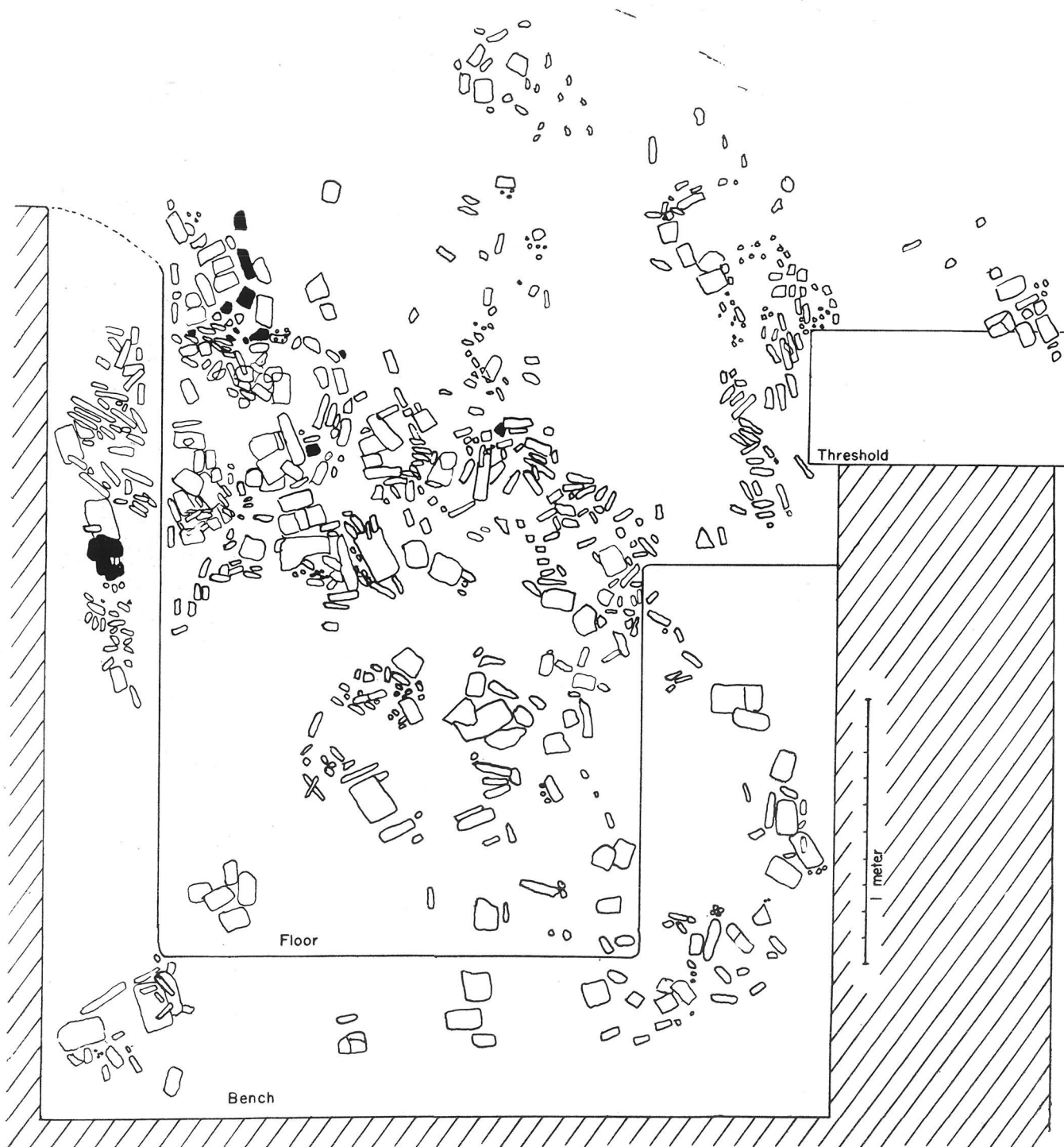
PY 218 reverse.



PY. 218 obverse.



PY 64 obverse.



Sketch plan of Archives Room, Pylos.