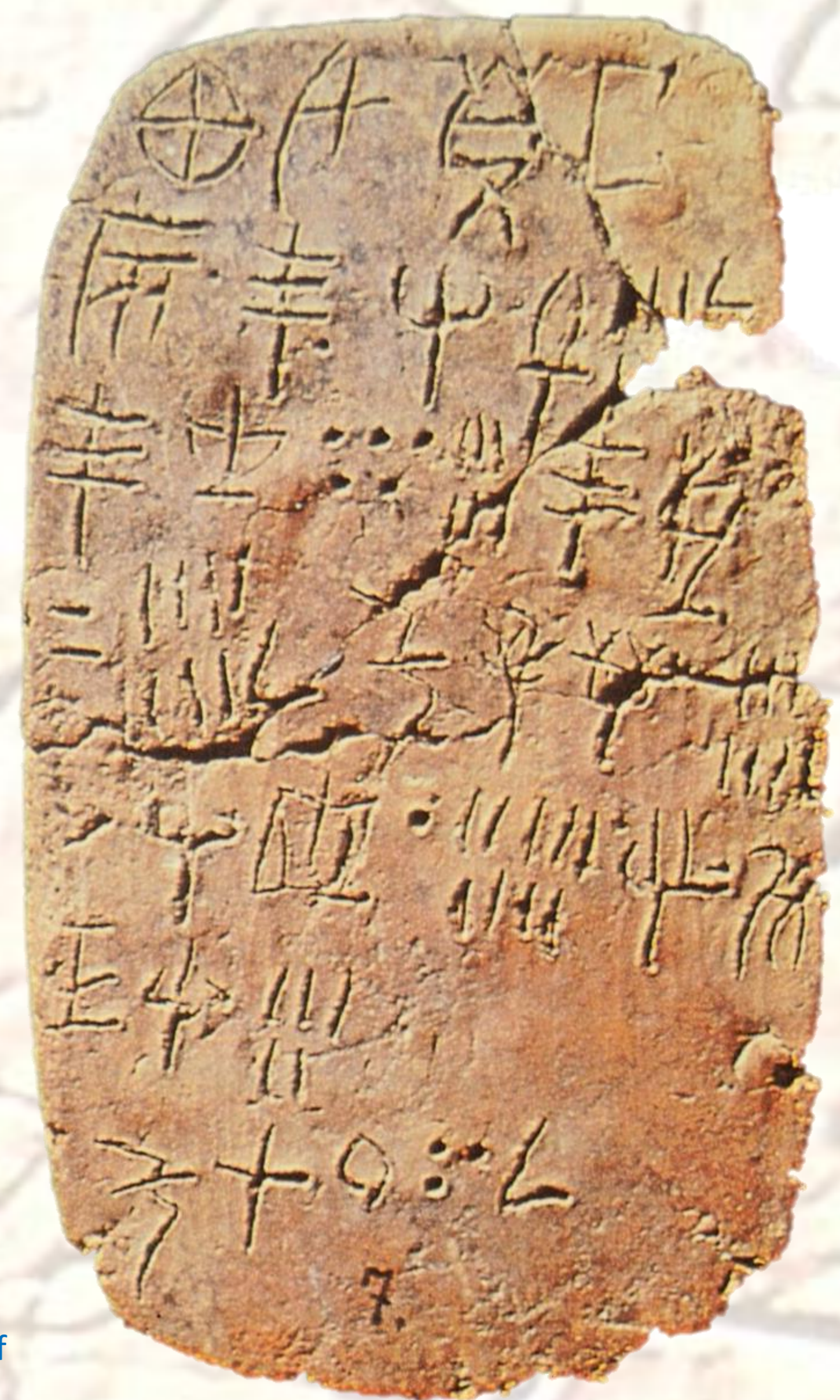# Glyph-Breakers at Work:
The Decipherment of Linear A

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Project Background

Linear A is one of the writing systems used in Crete (mainly), Cyprus, and pre-Archaic Greece before the introduction of the Greek alphabet.
Currently undeciphered, it presumably transcribes the language of the ancient Minoan Civilization in Crete during the Bronze Age (c. 3000 - 1450 BC).
It was first discovered in 1886 by Sir Arthur Evans in the Palace of Knossos in Crete, along with its descendant writing system, Linear B, transcribing Mycenaean Greek.
Linear B was deciphered in 1952 by Michael Ventris and John Chadwick.
Linear A has hundreds of symbols, possibly logograms and syllabograms.

Methodology

The Linear A glyphs have been often interpreted in the light of the phonetics of Linear B.

	D	J	K
A			
E			
I			
O			
U			

However, the phonetic clusters reconstructed with this procedure do not produce any meaningful word in ancient Indo-European and Semitic languages. This Project provides a systematic study of Linear A tablets according to frequency analysis criteria, derived from Cryptanalysis.

Project Aim

· Short-term aim: to search and study significant clusters of Linear A symbols
· Ultimate goal: to decipher Linear A

Challenges

· Linear A shares with Linear B a number of symbols; other symbols are, conversely, unique
· The corpus of Linear A tablets and documents is much smaller than the Linear B corpus
· Trying to read the Linear A symbols through the Linear B phonetic values has been proven to be fruitless

Project Value

· Enhance our knowledge of Linear A as an ancient writing system by scrutinizing recurring clusters
· Improve our understanding of how orthography can evolve to adapt to language change
· Provide new perspectives for the decipherment of Linear A

Ideas

· Materials used for votive figurines and libation formulas' inscriptions could indicate their dedicants' social status
· The appearance of specific clusters only on stone vessels suggests that the material of the vessel was ritually significant
· The language hidden behind Linear A could be characterized by affixation
· Significant clusters of symbols have to be studied in their frequency, in their position, and in their relationship with other possibly compatible clusters from contemporary and neighboring languages
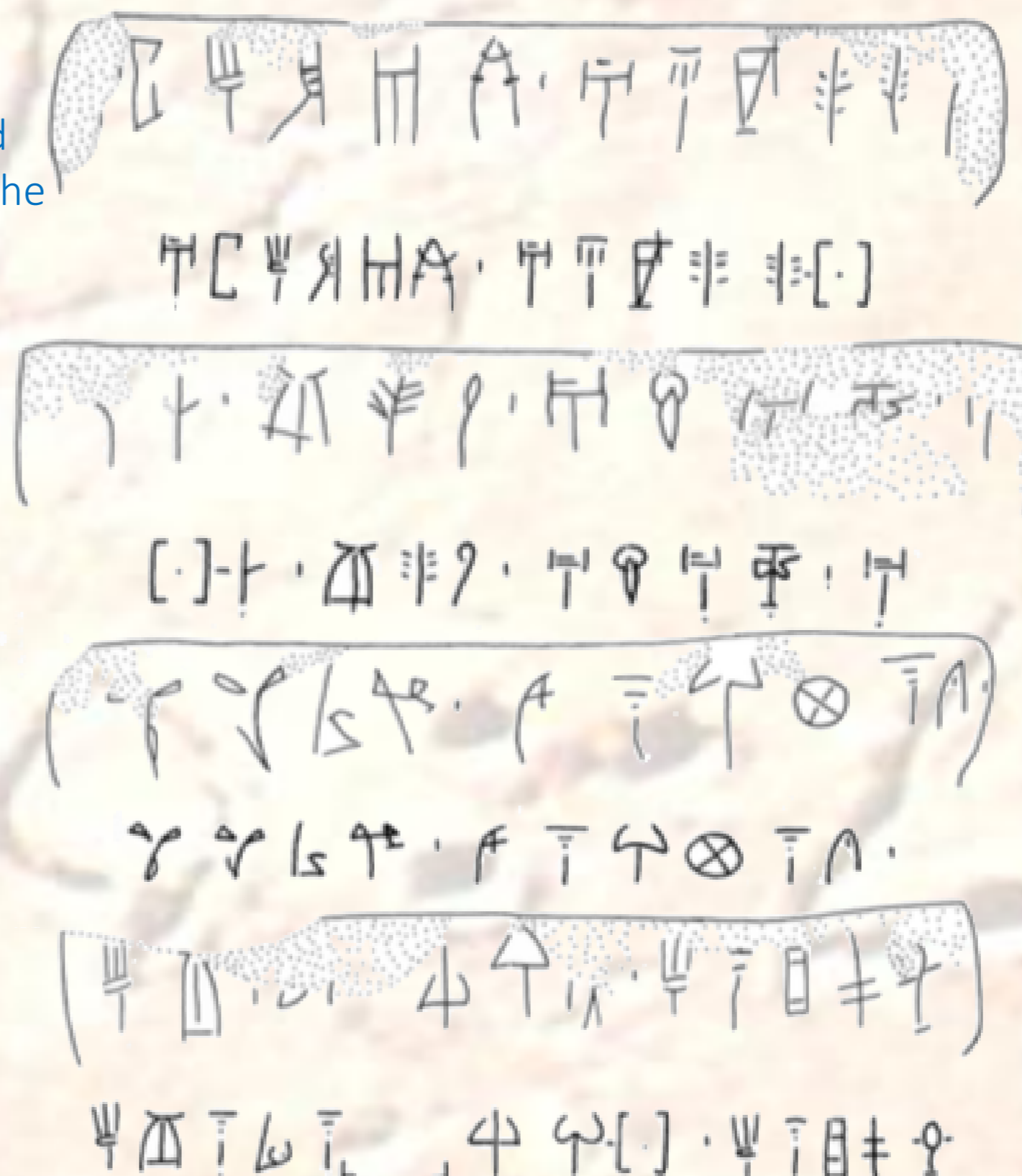
Sample Findings

On the right are a square pedestalled libation table and inscriptions from Petsofas (GORILA PK ZA 1). Here are the possible transcriptions through Linear B phonetics:

A-TA-I-A301-WA-E . A-DI-KI-TE-TE-DU
-PU-RE . PI-TE-RI . A-KO-A-NE . A-
SA-SA-RA-ME . U-NA-RU-KA-NA-TI .
I-PI-NA-MI-NA . SI-RU-DU . I-NA-JA-PA-QA

Significant strings:

A-TA-I-A301-WA,
SA-SA-RA,
JA-DI-KI-TU,
I-PI-NA-MA.

These clusters can be compared with words from deciphered neighboring languages, which may allow to identify a related language.

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