

Typesetting Linear B, the Mycenaean Greek Script

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Version 1.0.3, 25 February 2022

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About the script

Linear B, the script found on tablets in excavations of Knossos (Crete), Pylos and Mycenae, remained undeciphered for decades, until, in 1952, Michael Ventris (who profited from the preliminary analyses made by Alice Kober) managed to crack the code. Confirmation of the decipherment followed rapidly: Linear B had been used to write the oldest form of Greek known to us, Mycenaean Greek (15th-13th centuries BCE). Linear B consists of about 90 syllabograms, supplemented with about 165 logograms (or 'ideograms') and the so-called '[Aegean numbers](#)', a numbering system already used by the Minoan civilization (in [Linear A](#)). There are word dividers (a small perpendicular line on the baseline). Linear B is exclusively written horizontally from left to right.

Font and font sizes

Only very few fonts support the rendering of Linear B. We have chosen [Noto Sans Linear B](#) because it has been professionally designed. Even so, there are a few software issues in typeset text; fortunately these can be remedied by the typesetter, provided that precise instructions are given. Anyone can download and use Noto Sans Linear B at no cost.

Noto Sans Linear B font sizes:

- Brill 11 pt ~ Noto Sans Linear B 9¼ pt
- Brill 10 pt ~ Noto Sans Linear B 8½ pt
- Brill 9 pt ~ Noto Sans Linear B 8 pt
- Chapter titles: Brill 16 pt (Bold) ~ Noto Sans Linear B 13½ pt

The Noto Sans Linear B font works on both MS Windows and macOS.

Software issue: Adobe InDesign 'hides' some Linear B characters

Many typesetters use Adobe InDesign to perform page layout for PDF production. It has been observed that Adobe InDesign CC 2022 (v. 17.1) as well as CC 2021 and CC 2020 fail to render a distinct group of Linear B characters, although the character codes remain present in the text: they are (U+10000), (U+10008), (U+10009), (U+1000A), and (U+1000D). The problem seems to be connected with **Adobe's 'World-Ready Paragraph Composers'**, which are used by default by typesetters producing PDF of Brill publications. The older two Adobe Paragraph Composers: **Adobe Paragraph Composer** and **the Adobe Single-line Paragraph Composer** render all Linear B characters correctly.

Furthermore, when importing text from either .docx or .txt (UTF-8) formats, (U+10110, AEGEAN NUMBER TEN) and (U+10112, AEGEAN NUMBER THIRTY) needed a manual application of the Noto Sans Linear B font (the underlying character codes are and remain correct).

These software issues have so far not been found to occur in any other applications including MS Word 365 and web browsers, suggesting that they are connected with the Adobe InDesign software and not with the Noto Sans Linear B font. When another font – Aegean v. 8.91 – is used to render Linear B, the exact same problems occur when one of Adobe's World-Ready Paragraph Composers is active and not when one of the older Adobe Paragraph Composers is used; the fonts are not to blame. Without a doubt, therefore, there is a bug in both of Adobe's World-Ready Paragraph Composers. And there are probably file import filter bugs as well.

Instruction to typesetters dealing with Linear B text

- Adobe InDesign users must switch the paragraph composer applied to all paragraphs containing text in the Linear B script, even if there is just one Linear B character, to either of the older Adobe Paragraph Composers: **Adobe Paragraph Composer** or the **Adobe Single-line Paragraph Composer**.

- If a paragraph containing Linear B characters *also* contains complex-script text (this includes any bidirectional script such as Phoenician, Hebrew, Syriac, Arabic, etc., but also many others!), only switching to an older Adobe Paragraph Composer is very likely to cause new problems elsewhere.

In such an event, Brill personnel must always contact scripts@brill.com. A typesetting program other than Adobe InDesign, such as LuaTeX as used by TAT Zetwerk, does not exhibit this bug.

- Typesetters must also check that (U+10110, AEGEAN NUMBER TEN) and (U+10112, AEGEAN NUMBER THIRTY) are rendered correctly with the Noto Sans Linear B font as well – if these characters occur, of course.

All Brill personnel sending textual material containing Linear B text to typesetting service providers who use Adobe InDesign **must** send along the above instruction with each batch containing Linear B material.

Bibliography

Alberto Bernabé and Eugenio R. Luján, *Introducción al griego micénico*. Gramática, selección de textos y glosario. 2.^a edición, corregida y aumentada (=Monografías de filología griega, 30), Zaragoza (Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza) 2020.