

A LINEAR INSCRIPTION FROM OLYMPIA:  
MINOAN AND/OR MYCENAEAN?\*

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In 1994 an inscription was found at Kaphkania, 3 km from the site of ancient Olympia. It has been the subject of much discussion on account of Godart's premature claim (1995) that this inscribed stone with 9 signs proves that Linear B was invented on the Mainland and not used just for economic transactions. The present author disagrees with Godart, for reasons which are discussed below, and will briefly re-examine this inscription in the light of Minoan and Mycenaean epigraphy.

	OLYMPIA	OL Za 1 <sup>1</sup>
1	08-16-36	A-QA-JO
2a	08-12-06	A-SO-NA
2b	77-02-32	KA-RO-QO

The inscribed small egg-shaped stone (4.9 x 4.08 x 1.62 cm, 48 g in weight), was found in an undisturbed destruction level dated to MH III, i.e., 17th century B.C., along with objects including a marble female figurine, which is still unpublished but comparable to examples from Crete. Minoan finds from nearby Olympia have also included an incomplete kylix with a scene including a double-axe and 4 anthrop-

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<sup>1</sup> See reports by the excavator X. Arapoyianni in Kathimerini in the Hellenic press, reprinted in Blackman 1996/97, 44-45, translator not stated; Godart 1995; Godart *et alii* 1995; Olivier forthcoming; Vasilakis 1997, for the inscription reprinted here; Owens/Nikolidaki 1997, for previous discussions of the Olympia Linear inscription since its discovery in 1994. This inscription was allegedly found on April 1st 1994, so perhaps "... qu'il permis de rire entre mycenologues!",

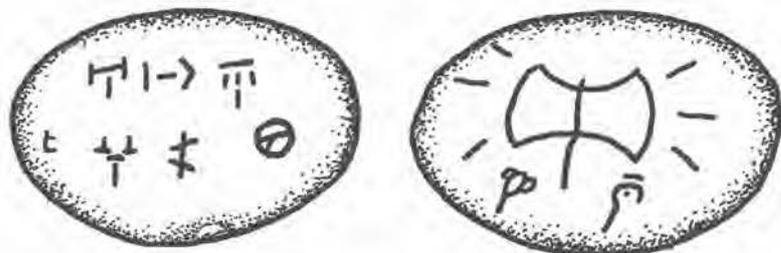


Fig. 1. OL Za 1 (after Olivier forthcoming, Vasilakis 1997 and Owens/Nikolidaki 1997, 279).

morphic Minoan clay votive figurines. The inscription has 9 signs, 8 of which are different, 08 = A (twice), 02 = RO, 06 = NA, 12 = SO, 16 = QA, 32 = QO, 36 = JO and 77 = KA. The signs for JO, QO and SO are found at present only in Linear B and this is the sole premise of Godart's argument.

On the other hand having established that the Minoans were no strangers to Mycenaean Greece and to the area of Olympia and Kaphkania in particular, then the likelihood must be considered of this inscription actually being Minoan in origin. The Minoan characteristics (archaeological, epigraphic and philological) are as follows:

- i) The established custom of taking pebbles to sanctuaries, and of using an inscribed stone as a votive object, is clearly Minoan.
- ii) The direct connection between cult and script is well documented for Minoan Crete but not at all for Mycenaean Greece; and the probable direction of reading, i.e. boustrophedon, is known from Crete but not once from Mycenaean Greece.
- iii) There are comparanda with Minoan and Mycenaean inscriptions.

### *Comment*

1            08-16-36            A-QA-JO

The meaning of this word is uncertain but the "capital" initial double axe may indicate a name or title, which ends in -JO, suggesting a Hellenic ending -ios.

2a           08-12-06            A-SO-NA

Interpreted by the excavator as metallurgist, presumably based upon the reconstructed Indo-European \*ayes which developed into Latin aes. This is not a convincing argument to support a Mycenaean interpretation for two reasons. Firstly, a reconstructed common Indo-European root could equally be explained as a Minoan term if the language of

Minoan Crete was Indo-European as the present author has extensively previously argued. Secondly, A-SO-NA, for metallurgist would seem strange given that Mycenaean Greek already had the word *khalkos* *kako* for bronze and *ka-ke-we* “bronze-smiths” occurs more than 50 times on tablets from Pylos. The sign group A-SO-NA occurs just once in Linear B (PY An 129.6) below PU-RO-JO “man of Pylos” and a line above PA-RO, KA-KE-U-SI “at the place of the bronze-smiths”. No interpretation was offered by Ventris and Chadwick or by Bennett and Olivier in their studies of the Pylos tablets. Indeed a personal name or toponym may be more likely. Thus it is not easy to interpret the sign group as Mycenaean Greek when found at Olympia and it should be noted that more sign groups end in Consonant+A in Minoan Linear A than in Mycenaean Linear B.

2b            77-02-32            KA-RO-QO

This can be interpreted as as “Haropos” or “Harops” found in both Linear B and Homer. It is of note that the earliest occurrence is from the LM IIIA1 Room of the Chariot Tablets at Knossos (Sc 257.1) and the root of this name has cognates in Linear A and can be compared to KA-RO-NA and KA-RO-PA<sub>2</sub> both from LM IB Haghia Triadha, but the sign group has been changed to an ending of -QO which is a sign to represent Mycenaean Greek. This may well be a hybrid word adopted and adapted from the Minoan language to that of Mycenaean Greece.

### *Conclusion*

These three words probably record a Mainland name or title (A-QA-JO), a word which sounds more Minoan than Mycenaean (A-SO-NA), and a word with cognates in Minoan Linear A but which has been adapted to Mycenaean Greek (KA-RO-QO). As suspected the historical situation is far less clear than that stated so unequivocally by Godart. What tentative conclusions can be drawn? Was this Linear inscription written by a Minoan scribe (perhaps a priest/priestess at Olympia), on a Minoan votive object, and dedicated in a Minoan manner, but perhaps by a pre-literate Mycenaean? The present author believes that there is still no evidence that the Mycenaean Greeks wrote before the Linear B archive of Knossos c.1400 B.C.

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