

LATE MINOAN II KNOSSOS:
MINOAN AND/OR MYCENAEAN?*

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There are two Linear A inscriptions that may date from the LM II period, and in view of their possible date in what is otherwise an epigraphic lacuna between the latest stage of Linear A (LM IB) and the earliest of Linear B (LM IIIA1) they deserve close attention.¹ These two inscriptions are both from Knossos, one on a pithoid jar from the so called Minoan Unexplored Mansion; and the other on the doorway of the Kephala Tholos Tomb, 15 minutes walk north of the Palace of Minos.²

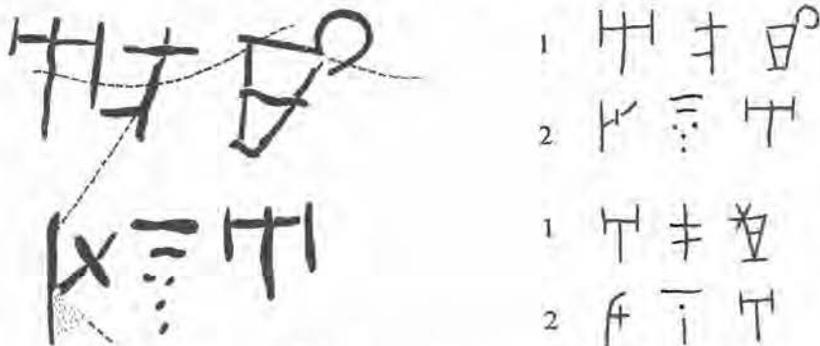


Fig. 1. KN Zb 40 from the Minoan Unexplored Mansion

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¹ See now Olivier/Dimopoulou/Rethymniotakis 1993 for a Minoan inscription from the Mycenaean period and Doxey 1987 for an interesting and readable discussion of the thorny question of the destruction of Knossos.

² See Godart/Olivier 1976-1985, for the systematic publication of the Linear A inscriptions and see Owens 1997 for over 50 Linear A inscriptions discovered between 1985 and 1995.

The pithoid jar inscription from the Minoan Unexplored Mansion, KN Zb 40 (*GORILA* 4, p. 83; here Fig. 1), reads 08-03-67 10-06-08 A-PA-KI U-NA-A.³ This was assigned by the excavator to the LM II destruction of the Mansion and Popham states that although the destruction was dated to LM II, some vases are typologically from the earlier LM I period, and indeed if this inscribed pithoid jar had been found out of context, it also would have been dated on stylistic grounds to the preceding LM I period.⁴ Raison and Pope also state that an LM IB date for the inscription on a jar that survived into the following period is more likely than that it was written in the LM II period.⁵

The inscription 08-03-67 10-06-08 A-PA-KI U-NA-A cannot be exactly paralleled elsewhere, but 10-06- U-NA- is common as the beginning of a sign-group (10-06-77-06-41 U-NA-KA-NA-SI) that frequently appears as part of the repeated libation formula on stone libation tables from Palaikastro (PK Za 8, 11 and 12), Iouktas (IO Za 2 and 9), Kophinas (KO Za 1), Syme (SY Za 2) and Troullos (TL Za 1). The sign-group 08-03 A-PA also occurs once on a libation table from Palaikastro (PK Za 12), where both 08-03 A-PA and 10-06 U-NA are written which can be directly compared to the inscription from the Mansion.⁶ This makes it a distinct possibility that some sort of religious inscription is present on this pithoid jar, which would perhaps explain why it survived in use from the LM I period down into the following LM II period. Popham also states that on the upper floor of the Mansion was a domestic shrine containing a figurine of a goddess, which again indicates a religious dimension to the area where the Linear A inscribed pithoid jar was found. It is most likely that the pithoid jar from the Mansion was actually inscribed in LM IB. Sinclair Hood had also believed that an LM IB inscribed cup should perhaps be interpreted as a Linear A inscription which would have consequences for the LM IB and LM II scribal situation at Knossos (where other previous datable inscriptions are MM III or LM IA).⁷ These signs, however, are not Linear A but probably potters' marks, a perhaps related but distinct system, not unlike the masons' marks.

³ The syllabic signs of Linear A are transliterated according to Linear B sound values with the frequently expressed caveat that this is extremely likely but not yet definitely proved for each and every sign. See Olivier 1975; Godart 1984; Duhoux 1989.

⁴ See Popham *et alii* 1984 and the review of this work by the present author (Owens 1991), for this building which has now been explored, excavated and comprehensively published, giving a detailed account of an LM II building at Knossos. See also Myres/Myres/Cadogan 1992, 130-131.

⁵ See Popham/Pope/Raison 1976, for KN Zb 4, and Kanta 1983, for pithoi that can and do survive for centuries in traditional Crete until today.

⁶ See Owens 1996; Owens 1997, for an in depth study of the religious inscriptions.

⁷ See Hood 1965 for discussion and drawing.

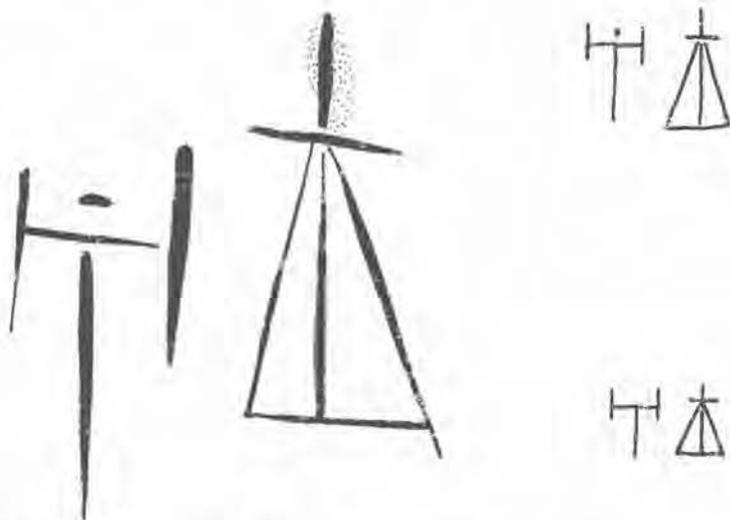


Fig. 2. KN Ze 16 from the Kephala Tholos Tomb

The other possible LM II inscription, KN Ze 16, is located on the central right block of the dromos of the Kephala Tholos Tomb, just before the visitor enters the burial chamber (Fig. 2). Hutchinson dates the tomb to LM IA on the grounds that no pottery from the chamber is later than LM IA. Popham, in a review of Hutchinson's book states that he views the tholos tomb as "LM II rather than LM IA as indicated by joining sherds from the fill".⁸ The editors of *GORILA* (Volume 4 [1982], 138) rather more cautiously prefer not to assign a date to this inscription, following Vandenabeele.

The contents of the tomb had been plundered, but Hutchinson discovered 31 finds including 4 gold fragments; 2 bronze rivets plated with gold from a sword; 1 knife, 2 tweezers, 1 tool (?), 1 finger-ring, 1 earring, 3 pins and fragments, all of bronze; as well as beads, spindle whorls, a steatite mould, a sealstone and an ivory plaque depicting two helmets. These finds may give an indication as to the occupant of the tomb, but the date of construction and the date of the inscription cannot be determined. These few objects, and particularly the sword rivets and ivory plaque, suggest the remains of a warrior-burial in the Knossos area. Warrior-graves were first recognized as such by Hood at the nearby Aghios Ioannis/New Hospital Site and these are still the earliest yet of any warrior-graves in the Knossos area, and not one of them can be dated to before LM II.⁹

⁸ See Hutchinson 1956; Hutchinson 1962, and the review of this work by M. Popham (1964).

⁹ See Hood/De Jong 1951 and Owens 1994/95, for a full discussion of the historical implications of warrior-graves at Late Minoan Knossos.

The inscription consists of two well established AB signs: 08-39 A-PI, followed by a short vertical line that serves as a punctuation mark to denote the end of the word. This makes it clear that syllabic signs are inscribed in the Kephala Tholos Tomb and are not just masons' marks. Although masons' marks were found on blocks in the tomb and although there is some overlap between the repertoire of signs used in the Linear scripts of Crete and as masons' marks, the signs in the Kephala Tholos Tomb are to be read as a Linear inscription.¹⁰ Indeed Hood believes that both the Kephala Tholos Tomb and the Isopata Tomb, with its rediscovered Linear A inscription KN Ze 45, are dated to LM II but with re-used blocks bearing earlier masons' marks.¹¹

The inscription is at approximately eye level on the last block of the dromos on the right as the visitor enters the tomb proper. The dromos is also notable for having side chambers to both left and right. Such side chambers are only otherwise known from tholos tombs at Orchomenos and Mycenae in the Mainland and at Archanes Fourni in Crete, thus strongly also suggesting a Mycenaean occupant for the Kephala Tholos Tomb. The dromos had been filled in after a burial, but the inscription is undoubtedly located where the visitor could not have missed it.

The first sign, AB 08 A, the double-axe sign, is known in all Cretan syllabic scripts and as a masons' mark. The form here, with the horizontal dash above the cross bar, occurs in Linear A and in Linear B records from the "Room of the Chariot Tablets". However this observation does not prove that KN Za 16 is later than the Linear A of LMI, nor does it prove that the records of the "Room of the Chariot Tablets" are earlier than LM IIIA. The epigraphic "no-man's land" of LM II remains. The only other certain Linear A inscription on a stone block (rather than on a stone libation table) is from Mallia, MA Ze 11, which is undated within the Second Palatial phase and is of no assistance in establishing a comparison with the Knossos tholos tomb inscription. The second sign, AB 39 PI, is also known in both Linear A and Linear B, and is less ornate than the double-axe sign.

Both signs are finely executed and their form is more like that seen on tablets than signs executed in the same medium, i.e., on stone libation tables. For example, the double-axe sign is akin to the schematic representations on tablets rather than to the stone libation tables that show the curved blades of the double-axe, e.g., KO Za 1. The closest similarities to the double-axe sign found on stone libation tables are from

¹⁰ See Hutchinson 1956, 76-77; also M.S.F. Hood personal communication, whom I thank for discussions on the subject of Minoan scripts and masons' marks.

¹¹ See Owens 1990/91, for the Knossos Stone Block (KN Ze 44) and Isopata Tomb (KN Ze 45) Minoan inscriptions.

Prassas and Troullos in the Knossos region. These examples correspond to the schematic and linear rendering of the double-axe sign in the Kephala Tholos Tomb. The evidence shows that archaeologically and epigraphically there is no way of being certain whether this inscription dates from LM IB or LM II. The medium upon which the inscription is written, i.e., a stone block within a tholos tomb, means that no exact date can be offered, as it is possible that the inscribed block in the Kephala Tholos Tomb was in secondary use. There are indications, however, both archaeologically and contextually that the Kephala tholos tomb should be dated to post LM IB, i.e. LM II at Knossos.

The Kephala tholos inscription, therefore, is probably LM II in date, as the signs are not executed in a manner that would be expected from an inscription on stone of the LM IB period. An LM II date may also be suggested by the finds that seem to indicate that the Kephala tholos was a warrior-grave in the Knossos area, a phenomenon unknown at Knossos before LM II. Having thus established, albeit tentatively, that the Kephala tholos inscription is to be dated archaeologically and epigraphically to LM II, and is the only Linear inscription from this period, consideration must now be given to two further questions of a philological and ultimately historical nature.

In which script is this inscription written, i.e., in Mycenaean Linear B or in Minoan Linear A and more importantly in which language is it recorded, i.e., in Mycenaean Greek or in the Minoan language?¹²

¹² The present author has seen his name written in English, Greek and the syllabic Mycenaean Linear B and Japanese Katakana scripts, although the name itself is Celtic in origin. Writing is a tool to express a language, but it is language that defines the national identity.

APPENDICES — WARRIOR-GRAVES ON CRETE

Appendix A: Warrior-graves at Knossos and elsewhere on Crete (27x)

Warrior-grave	Weapons	Publication
Knossos (23x)		
Aghios Ioannis 1	1 sword, 2 spear-heads, 1 small spear-head	Hood/De Jong 1951
Aghios Ioannis 2	1 sword, 2 daggers, 4 spear-heads, 2 small spear-heads	Hutchinson 1956
New Hospital Site I	1 small spear-head	Hood/De Jong 1951
New Hospital Site II	1 sword, 1 spear-head	Hood/De Jong 1951
New Hospital Site III	1 dagger, 1 spear-head, arrows, staples	Hood/De Jong 1951
New Hospital Site V	1 sword, helmet	Hood/De Jong 1951
Sellopoulou 3	arrows, bronze vessels	Catling/Popham 1974
Sellopoulou 4	2 swords, 1 dagger, 2 spear-heads	Catling/Popham 1974
Zapher Papoura 14	1 dagger, 1 spear-head	Evans 1906
Zapher Papoura 36	2 swords, 2 spear-heads	Evans 1906
Zapher Papoura 42	1 sword	Evans 1906
Zapher Papoura 43	1 sword	Evans 1906
Zapher Papoura 44	2 swords	Evans 1906
Zapher Papoura 55	1 sword, 1 spear-head, boar's tusk plates	Evans 1906
Zapher Papoura 62	1 dagger	Evans 1906
Zapher Papoura 75	1 spear-head	Evans 1906
Zapher Papoura 86	1 dagger	Evans 1906
Zapher Papoura 95	1 dagger	Evans 1906
Zapher Papoura 98	1 sword	Evans 1906
Silver Cup Tomb	1 sword, stone corselet-jar	Hutchinson 1956
Mavrospelio XVIII	1 sword, 1 dagger, 1 spear-head	Forsdyke 1926/27
Acropolis Tomb	1 sword, 3 spear-heads	Evans 1935
Isopata Tomb	2 swords, 1 spear-head, 1 small spear-head, 1 spear-butt	Evans 1914
Crete (4x)		
Phaistos T. dei N.	1 sword, 1 strip of metal armour	Scavignoni 1904
Archanes Fourni	1 sword, 1 spear-head	Sakellarakis 1968
Archanes Fourni	bronze	Sakellarakis 1972
Khania	bronze	Matz 1958

Appendix B: Other Minoan-Mycenaean militaria

Popham <i>et alii</i> 1984	2 swords, 3 spear-heads and 1 arrow-head
Alexiou 1967	amphoroid vase with depiction of boar's tusk helmet and 'figure-of-eight' shield

Appendix C: Relative chronology of the 21 datable 'Warrior-graves/burials with bronzes' of Knossos and Crete (for details see Appendix A)

LM II	- Aghios Ioannis 2 and Aghios Ioannis 1 - New Hospital Site I, II, IV, Acropolis Tomb
LM II-III A 1	- Silver Cup Tomb
LM III A 1	- New Hospital Site II, Sellopoulou 3 and 4, Zapher Papoura 44
LM III A 1/2	- Zapher Papoura 42, 43, 55, 75, 98, Archanes Fourni, Phaistos T. dei N. and Khania
LM III A 2	- Zapher Papoura 14 and 36

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