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INSCRIBED CUP FROM A LATE MINOAN I B DEPOSIT AT  
KNOSSOS

Two joining fragments ( $0.037 \times 0.040$  m.) from the rim of a plain conical cup with a linear inscription. In Heraklion Museum, Cat. No. 1613. The diameter of the cup can be estimated as about 0.095 m. The clay is orange, the fabric rather soft. The cup had been used as a lamp, to judge from traces of black from burning around the edge of the rim inside and outside. The inscription appears to have been engraved after the cup was fired. No doubt the cup was inscribed before it was used as a lamp, but this is uncertain.

These two inscribed fragments were found at Knossos during the 1961 season of excavations by the British School of Archaeology at Athens<sup>1</sup> on the north side of the Royal Road immediately west of the Armoury<sup>2</sup>. The fragments were in that part of a great deposit of vases of the Late Minoan I B period recovered from a basement-like space on the north-west edge of the excavated area<sup>3</sup>. Parts of the same vases were found both in the basement and above a floor at a higher level a few metres away to the east. The vases had evidently been lodged in an upper storey of the building, and when it was destroyed the pieces of them were scattered over a wide area<sup>4</sup>. This inscription has a particular interest as the first to be recognised at Knossos from a deposit of Late Minoan I B date. It is therefore more or less contemporary with the Linear A tablets from sites such as Ayia Triadha, Zakro and Tyllissos, which suffered a major catastrophe in Late Minoan I B.

Plain conical cups like the one from which these inscribed fragments came are in general the commonest type of clay vase in use during both the earlier (A) and later (B) phases of the Late Minoan I

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to the Managing Committee of the British School for permission to publish this inscription before the appearance of the main report.

<sup>2</sup> The Armoury or Arsenal was explored by Evans in 1904–5. BSA X (1903–4), 54f.; XI (1904–5), 1–2. Knossos Survey, No. 122.

<sup>3</sup> Excavation level JK 65 of RR: N (Royal Road: North Side).

<sup>4</sup> Archaeological Reports for 1960–61, 26–7; 1961–62, 25–27; BCH 85 (1961), 879; 86 (1962), 893f. Arch. Deltion 17 (1961–2): Khronika 294–5.

period. They have been found in huge quantities at Knossos, and at many other Late Minoan I sites both in Crete and elsewhere in the Aegean, as at Ayia Irini in Kea<sup>5</sup>. Little cups of this shape far outnumbered the total of all other vases of every kind in the Late Minoan I B deposit on the north side of the Royal Road. Over a hundred of them were recovered here complete and unbroken, together with some 1400 profiles from rim to base, and 6500 fragments of rims. These cups from the Royal Road Late Minoan I B deposit ranged from between 0.030 and 0.065 m. in height, and 0.05 and 0.12 m. in diameter; but they were mostly between about 0.04 and 0.05 m. high with a diameter of between 0.08 and 0.09 m. Our inscribed fragments therefore belonged to a cup which was slightly above the average in size.

These small cups of simple conical shape with no handles were evidently used for many different purposes, and mostly no doubt in everyday life as receptacles for food and drink. But our two fragments have marked traces of black from burning round the rim. Similar traces of burning were noted on the rims of nine out of the hundred or so complete examples, and on about one in every fifteen of the thousands of rim fragments of cups of this type found in the Late Minoan I B deposit north of the Royal Road. The marked traces of burning, confined to the area of the rim, seem to reflect the use of the cups in question as lamps with a simple wick floating in oil.

Plain conical cups of this type were also used in religious rites. During the first year of the Knossos excavations in 1900 Hogarth came upon a large number of such cups placed in orderly rows upside down on top of the offerings which they had contained in a "Pillar Room" of a house on Gypsades hill south of the Palace<sup>6</sup>. Many of the fine decorated vases found in the Late Minoan I B deposit on the north side of the Royal Road were of a specialised ritual character. Among them were a number of rhytons in a variety of shapes; and other objects apart from clay vases from the deposit included two rough stone "Libation Tables" and a small stone "Horns of Consecration". These suggest that the vases in the deposit may have been the furniture of a sanctuary or house-shrine. The vast number of the plain conical cups, several thousand of

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<sup>5</sup> *Hesperia* 31 (1962), 283 and pl. 98. Plain conical cups accounted for 1164 out of a total of 1318 pots and fragments catalogued!

<sup>6</sup> House B. BSA VI (1899—1900), 76 pl. vi, 1, 2. Knossos Survey, No. 120.

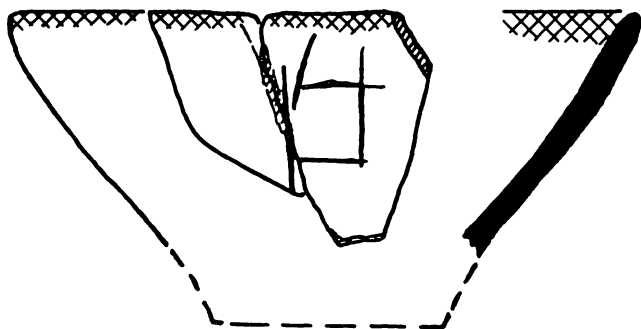


Fig. 1

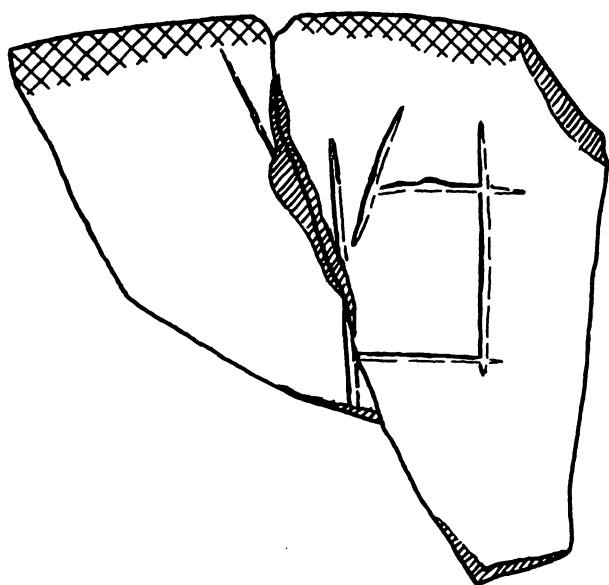


Fig. 2

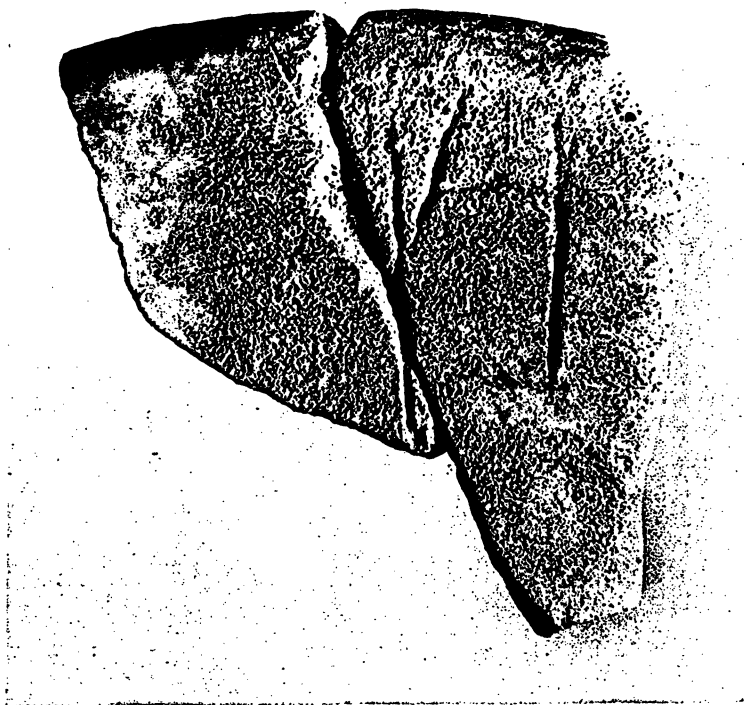


Fig. 3

them at least, and the use of a high proportion of them as lamps, is consistent with the idea that they came from a shrine. The inscription on a small cup of this simple character is also most easily explained as having a religious motive.

The inscription appears to consist of two signs in ligature. That on the left is probably a sign  $\Psi$  with three straight arms. But the left arm of the sign has disappeared owing to the flaking away of the surface of the fragments along each side of the break between them. The incision for the left arm of the sign may have encouraged the break to run along this line. A thin scratch reaching nearly to the rim of the left hand fragment is just possibly a continuation of this arm of the sign. This sign, which occurs in the Hieroglyphic Script<sup>7</sup>, and which is also recorded as a "Mason's Mark" on stone, was assigned by Sundwall<sup>8</sup> to Linear A. He took it for a variant of Brice L 54. Myres<sup>9</sup> also took it for a variant of L 54, while Evans<sup>10</sup> conflated it with L 34b. But it looks as if it should really be considered as a separate sign in its own right.

The sign on the right must be Myres AB 68 which is the equivalent of Linear B 81. This is classified as a measure sign<sup>11</sup>. Evans called it an "acre" sign, and thought it might indicate a plot of land of a standard size<sup>12</sup>. But Ventris and Chadwick suggest that it represents an unit of weight<sup>13</sup>. Only two examples of this sign are quoted from the repertory of the Linear A scripts. In both cases the sign occurs alone in isolation on a fragment of a large jar found at Palaikastro<sup>14</sup>. On one of these fragments from Palaikastro on display in Heraklion Museum (Cat. No. 4818) the sign has been boldly engraved while the clay was still wet before the vase was fired. This fragment is from the incurving rim of a large jar which may be Middle Minoan or Late Minoan I in date. The sign is of more common occurrence in Linear B. But ligatures of this kind are more characteristic of Linear A<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Scripta Minoa I, 215; II, 13, where it is included under AB 31.

<sup>8</sup> Die kretische Linearschrift, Jahrb. d. Dtsch. Archäolog. Instituts XXX (1915), p. 44 No. 12

<sup>9</sup> Scripta Minoa II 13 AB 31

<sup>10</sup> PM I Fig. 476 No. 20.

<sup>11</sup> Brice, Inscriptions in the Minoan Linear Script of Class A (1961), Table 2, Lm 5.

<sup>12</sup> PM IV, 721 fig. 705.

<sup>13</sup> Documents in Mycenaean Greek, 50f.

<sup>14</sup> Brice, loc. cit. 16, II, ii. BSA XL (1939—40), 48—9, No. 43, fig. 40.

<sup>15</sup> Brice, loc. cit. Table 3.