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LINEAR A INSCRIPTIONS FROM KNOSSOS

Although the Knossian inscriptions form only a small part of the Linear A corpus published by Brice (Inscriptions in the Minoan Linear script of class A), they present some interesting material for the history of Cretan writing. We might have expected them to provide a link between the Hieroglyphic inscriptions from Knossos and the Linear B tablets, so that we could follow in some detail the development of writing from its very beginnings right up to a stage at which it became ossified and admitted no further appreciable changes. Brice indeed contends that the MM III texts from Knossos, together with certain inscriptions from other parts of Crete, belong to a 'proto-B' class rather than to 'Linear A', a category which he feels should be reserved for the tablets from Ayia Triadha¹. Brice is here taking to its natural conclusion the suggestion of Grumach that the history of writing in Bronze Age Crete cannot be expressed in terms of a simple succession of scripts: Hieroglyphic superseded by A, and this in turn replaced (only at Knossos) by B². I have great sympathy with the view that there was probably no abrupt break between Linear A and B any more than there was between the Hieroglyphic scripts and Linear A. Our very patchy evidence from several sites, especially Knossos, Mallia, and Phaistos, would suggest that from the beginning of MM I into at least LM Ib there were a number of local scripts in Crete, most of them moving in the same general direction but at different speeds³. There is nothing implausible in the assumption that the same process continued with the evolution of Linear A

¹ *Op. cit.*, 2. Cf. *Cronon* xxxi (1959), 392.

² *OLZ* III (1957), 307. Cf. *Schachermeyr, Saeculum* x (1959), 70.

³ Several inscriptions refuse to be brought into any coherent picture as it can be drawn at present: such are the signs on an axe from Arkalokhori, the pictographs on the Phaistos disc (on the assumption that this is a Cretan product, and not an import as Evans believed), and two linear inscriptions of unknown affinities—IV 8 (Tyllesos) and IV 12 (Knossos). It is apparent also from the new Phaistos inscriptions published by Carratelli, *ASAA* xix—xx (1957—1958), 368—388, that a 'proto-Linear' script began to take shape earlier at Phaistos than at Knossos. Cf. Grumach, *BJRL* xl (1964), 848, and *Studium Generale* xviii (1965), 744.

into B, and it would be satisfying to be able to point to some inscriptions which shew the same kind of transition between A and B that is attested at Mallia⁴ between Hieroglyphic and Linear A. In Brice's view, such a transition from A to B can be seen in the fact that some of the individual signs in the inscriptions classed as 'Linear A' are already tending toward the shape they ultimately assume in Linear B; thus, the sign L 100 which appears on I 13 is closer to the shape predominating in Linear B than to the form which prevails at Ayia Triadha⁵. A clearer example still is seen in the sign on the Troullos ladle (I 16), which Brice identifies as L 80. This is a very doubtful equation, and the sign is much closer to *61 (which, however, faces right in the B script⁶). The sign does not appear elsewhere in our extant Linear A material, and it would seem that in this case a sign which belongs essentially to the 'B' script is embedded in an 'A' context⁷.

Brice's conclusion that the 'A' inscriptions from Knossos should be classed as 'proto-B' is based principally on the evidence of certain signs on the cup II 1 and on the three tablets IV 1, 2, 3. On II 1 Brice sees two signs in particular which seem to him to be forerunners of Linear B, L 98 (the flying bird sign) and L' 18. Whenever L 98 appears at Ayia Triadha it has a clean, uncluttered look; strangely enough, its Linear B successor (*81) is drawn far more naturalistically, by some scribes with an almost fussy attention to detail. The shape of the birds on II 1 does seem to look forward to a form which becomes very common in Linear B; however I do not think that Brice makes sufficient allowance for the fact that the characters on the Knossos cups are written in ink and so are bound to be more cursive and to allow greater scope for elaboration than signs incised on clay⁸. For some reason which is


⁴ By the clay bar IV 10.

⁵ This argument must not be pushed too far, since we should consider the possibility that the sign fluctuated constantly throughout the history of the Linear scripts (as is certainly true of e. g. L 6 > *69, L 26 > *06, L 98 > *81). Just as in B a 'three-pronged' shape is sometimes found, so in A there are considerable variations: a 'five-pronged' form without righthand projection (I 1) is an extreme example, but even at Ayia Triadha a shape with four 'prongs' is seen (HT 151).

⁶ Such a fluctuation is seen also in e. g. L 53, L 88, L 103.

⁷ So already Evans, PM IV 683; cf. Grumach, *Gnomon* xxxiii (1961), 737. The exact opposite, a unique survival of a Linear A sign (L 87, not L 89 as MT II, 102) into Linear B, is seen on MY Ue 611 rev.

⁸ The same is true of signs painted on vases — MT II, 105. See also Pope's remarks on the shape of L 6 on a cretule from Ayia Triadha, *ABSA* li (1956), 133.

not clear to us the Linear B scribes favoured greater elaboration in their signs than their predecessors had done⁹, and the flying bird sign was caught up in this general trend away from the simple and towards the ornate. The flying bird on one of the Linear A tablets from Knossos (IV 1a) is no less austere than are its counterparts at Ayia Triadha, and the highly elaborate interpretation of the birds on the Knossian cup may be characteristic, not of Knossos as opposed to Ayia Triadha, but of painting as opposed to incision. On the same cup II 1 only the upper part of the sign L' 18, namely , can now be read. It is however a reasonable inference that the scribe wrote ¥ , a sign very close to *28 in the Linear B syllabary (AB 29 in Myres' notation), which seems to be unique in Linear A. But even here we are not on certain ground, for a variant of L 100 on the Ayia Triadha tablets written with a prominent horizontal stroke ¥ sometimes comes very close to the sign on II 1¹⁰, and, given the wide fluctuation in the drawing of characters in Linear A and the very poor state of preservation of this sign, we cannot be sure that it is an incipient member of the Linear B script.

Of the three Linear A tablets which Evans discovered at Knossos, IV 1 was found in the East Temple Repository in association with vases and sealings¹¹. IV 2 und 3 came from quite a different part of the Palace—the Corridor of the Loom-Weights¹². Each tablet carries a slightly different system of writing from that of the other two, and IV 3 in particular stands by itself: its clay is brick-red, compared with the brown colour of IV 1 and 2, and a much finer point has been used to produce the inscription. As far as IV 1 and 2 are concerned, there is nothing at all to justify our placing them in the ambit of Linear B; I agree that their script is slightly different from that of the Ayia Triadha tablets, but because it has a more archaic appearance not because it is more advanced—I have already mentioned the shape of L 98 on IV 1a. Of IV 3 only a fragment survives. Side (a) has three signs (each followed by a numeral) which, according to Brice, "are reminiscent respectively

⁹ Cf. Goold and Pope, Preliminary investigations into the Linear A script, v—vi.

¹⁰ E. g. HT 120; cf. Raison, *Kadmos* ii (1963), 24. The first sign on HT 91, transcribed by Brice (probably rightly) L 100, is similarly dubious and is in fact taken by Myres as an example of his AB 29; SM II, 13.

¹¹ ABSA ix (1902—1903), 51—54 fig. 27. For the reading of the first line, cf. BICS x (1963), 26.

¹² Evans' drawing of IV 2, PM I, 619 fig. 455a, rightly represents the second sign as L 26 (it is not a numeral as would appear from Brice's transcription).

of B *51, B *72 reversed, and B *24." The first sign is certainly "reminiscent" of *51, at least in some of its manifestations: I noted the *51 on KN Og 426. 2 as an especially close parallel—that is, if we think the exaggerated loops on the left of our sign are significant; if we do not, we could easily see it as yet another variant of L 93, which appears in many different forms on the Ayia Triadha tablets¹³. We need not see in the second sign a reminder of *72 reversed, since it is exactly similar to the Linear A sign L 63 as it occurs several times at Ayia Triadha (not reversed!)—HT 85b offers a very clear example, where even the 'banding' of the sign on IV 3a can be seen distinctly. The third sign also I find easier to place in the Linear A signary than in Linear B; it seems to be quite close to L 120 on HT 126a where also, however, the lower half of the sign has been lost. Side (b) presents a problem in the second line: I cannot identify this sign but I do think it is a ligature of some kind—it appears from Evans' drawing¹⁴ that he regarded it as a ligature of L 74 + L 92 — and not simply L 74 followed by a numeral as it is transcribed by Brice. The tablet IV 3, considered as a whole, so far from pointing forward to the Linear B script, actually looks back to a system of writing which appears very early in the history of the Bronze Age in Crete¹⁵. We have a series of single (ideographic?) signs, each representing perhaps a commodity, and each simply juxtaposed with a numeral to indicate the amount of the commodity involved—for very early examples of this archaic system we may mention a clay bar from Knossos inscribed with signs of the Hieroglyphic class¹⁶ and a fragmentary tablet from Phaistos belonging to the first phase of the palace there¹⁷. This very simple form of writing does of course survive here and there in the Ayia Triadha tablets and even in the Linear B texts; its presence in IV 3 must likewise be regarded as a survival, not a forward-looking innovation. All in all, I do not consider that Brice has adduced any evidence from the Knossian Linear A material that would compel us to recognize its 'proto-B' character¹⁸.

¹³ Cf. especially HT 4, 14, 36, 51b. Even the less common sign L 111 sometimes approaches the one we are considering, e. g. on HT 82.

¹⁴ PM I, 619 fig. 455b 2

¹⁵ Cf. Grumach, BJRL xlv (1962), 40—41

¹⁶ P. 101c, d (SM I, 171)

¹⁷ IV 17 vi = Carratelli, op. cit., no. 3

¹⁸ See further Grumach, Kadmos iv (1965), 52—53, and Pope, KretChron xv—xvi (1961—1962), 312