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## A LINEAR A TABLET FRAGMENT FROM PHYLAKOPI IN MELOS

(with a note on the inscription by WILLIAM C. BRICE)

Literacy at Phylakopi in Melos has been recognised since the original publication of the potters' marks incised on pottery from the site<sup>1</sup>, and in particular since the recognition by Evans<sup>2</sup> of a group of signs in "the earlier class of linear script" which he already identified as closer to the Hagia Triada tablets and those from Cnossos of "the penultimate period" (i.e. Minoan Linear A) than to the ordinary Knossian series (i.e. Linear B). The discovery of two joining tablet fragments in the same Linear A script casts new light upon the extent and nature of this literacy. In the following account the description of the discovery and the final discussion are by Renfrew and the consideration of the inscription by Brice.

### The Stratigraphic Context

Stratigraphic excavations were begun at Phylakopi in the summer of 1974 on behalf of the British School of Archaeology at Athens under the direction of Colin Renfrew, with the participation of Mr Sinclair Hood representing the Management Committee. Their principal aim was to review the stratigraphic succession revealed in the previous excavations by the School from 1896 to 1899<sup>3</sup> and in 1911<sup>4</sup>.

In order to date the Mycenaean megaron in squares J1 and J2 of the original site plan<sup>5</sup>, excavation was begun in room 15, where traces of the original floor level remained. The trench, II A, was divided into four quadrants, of which the south-east and south-west, each measuring 1.60 m N-S by 1.20 m E-W, were first excavated leaving a baulk of 0.20 m

<sup>1</sup> Hogarth D. G., 1898, *Excavations in Melos 1898*, BSA 4, 12 fig. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Edgar C. C. and Evans A. J., 1904, *The pottery marks*, in Atkinson T. D. et al., *Excavations at Phylakopi in Melos*.

<sup>3</sup> Atkinson T. D., Bosanquet R. C., Edgar C. C., Evans A. J., Hogarth D. G., Mackenzie D., Smith C. and Welch F. B., 1904, *Excavations at Phylakopi in Melos* (Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies, Supplementary Paper 4).

<sup>4</sup> Dawkins R. M. and Droop J. P., 1911, *Excavations at Phylakopi in Melos 1911*, BSA 17, 1—22.

<sup>5</sup> Phylakopi 1904, *op. cit.*, Pl. II

between them for stratigraphic control. The trench was bounded on all four sides by walls of the megaron (Pl. I).

The trench was found to contain a make-up fill between the megaron walls which extended to a depth of approximately one metre below the megaron floor. The fill contained abundant pottery, including frequent Late Minoan IA sherds and several of Late Minoan IB date. It was dated, however, and with it the construction of the megaron itself, by the latest material which it contained, namely several sherds of Late Helladic III A 1 style<sup>6</sup>.

The megaron walls were underlain by the substantial walls of an earlier structure of Late Bronze I date. Several sherds of Late Minoan IA date were found in stratigraphic association with these, but the absence of Late Minoan IB pottery need not indicate that the structure went out of use before that period, since characteristic sherds were not abundant in those levels.

On July 16th 1974 the make-up fill in the south-west quadrant of  $\Pi$  A had been removed to a depth of approximately 0.80 m (layers 14, 15, 18 and 20) and layer 21, some 10 to 15 cms deep underlying layer 20, was removed. It overlay the top of the Late Bronze I wall at the east, and layer 22 at the west. The pottery fragments from these levels (where sieving was in operation) were bagged in the normal way. They were routinely washed on July 17th in the excavation workroom in Plaka, under the supervision of Miss Sara Paton, and both the tablet fragments were at once recognised as such when the sherds were set out for drying. Both fragments (to which the Small Find number 55 was assigned) came from layer 21 (pottery bag 225).

The stratigraphic section of square  $\Pi$  A will be published in the final report. The main facts are perfectly clear. Layer 21 itself contained no pottery material identifiably later than the LM IA period, but layer 22, which it in part overlay, contained a sherd of LH II or LH III A 1 date. Layer 21 is thus to be regarded as the bottom layer of the LH III A 1 fill, although, in common with many other excavated units from the fill, it contains nothing later than Late Bronze I. The tablet fragments are thus to be regarded as of Late Bronze I date (the stratigraphy does not here allow a discrimination between LM IA and LM IB), and probably found their present position as the result of the levelling of the Late Bronze I building in the area, the predecessor of the LH III A 1 megaron. Logically it is possible that the tablet fragments could be as late as the

<sup>6</sup> We are grateful to Mrs Susan Sherratt, Mrs Vronwy Hankey and Dr Elisabeth French for their comments on the pottery.

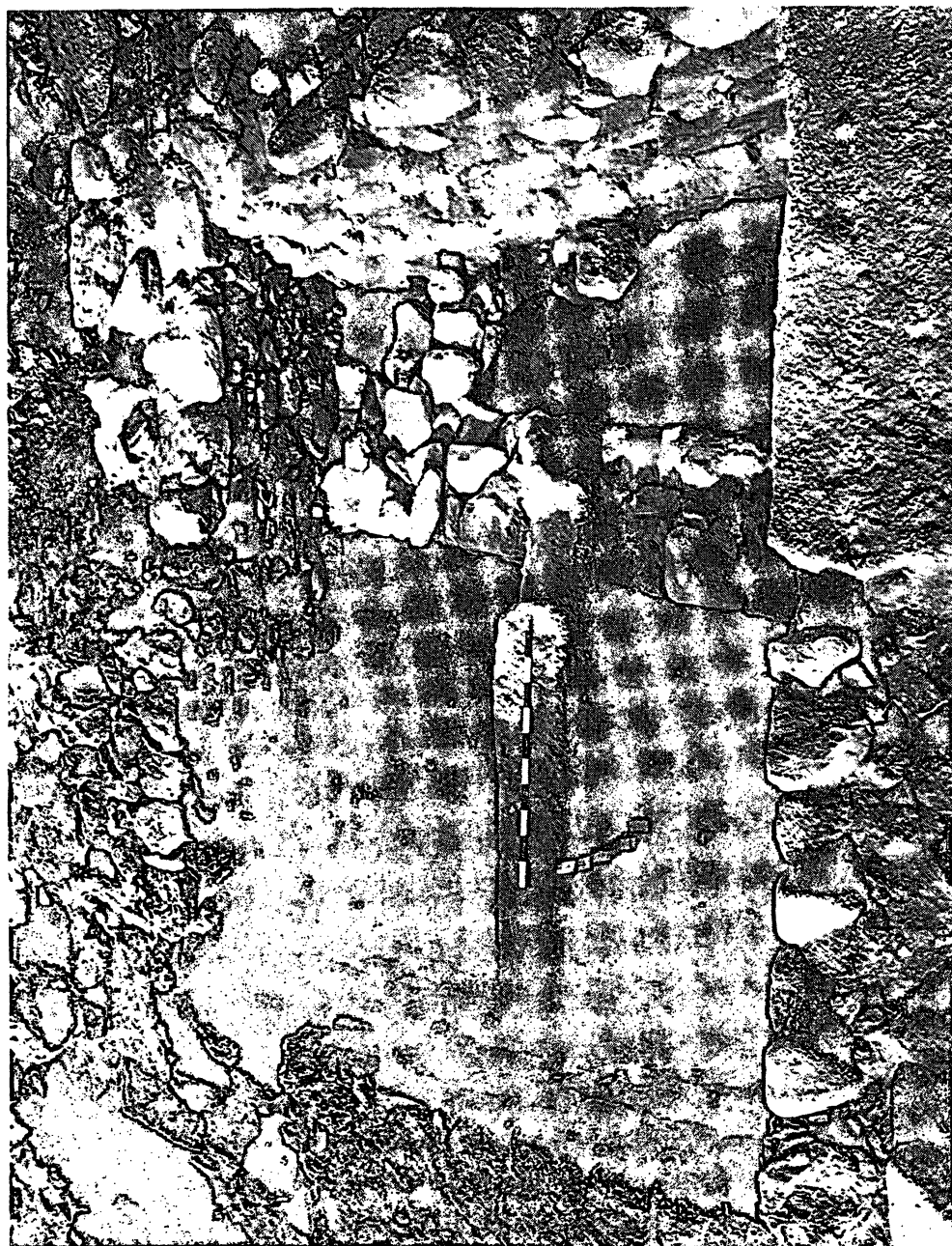


Plate I.

Excavation square  $\Pi$  A at Phylakopi, seen from the north after removal of the north-south baulk. The LH III A 1 megaron walls define the trench: the remains of a LB I wall run north-south. The tablet fragments were found in the top-right (south-west) corner.



Plate II.

The two joining Linear A tablet fragments from Phylakopi (length 4.5 cms).

LH IIIA 1 material found higher in the fill, but the balance of probabilities on the basis of the frequency of the accompanying sherds favours the ascription to Late Bronze I.

During the 1975 excavation season the north-east and north-west quadrants were also excavated, confirming the stratigraphic interpretation, but no further tablet fragments were found.

During the 1975 season soil samples from this and other trenches were taken for examination by Drs Dorothy and Charles Vitaliano of the University of Indiana. Samples of tephra originating in the 'Minoan' eruption of the Santorin volcano were found in a number of layers. The significant point is, of course, their earliest occurrence. Tephra occur below and on the penultimate floor associated with the Late Bronze I walls in II A, and are then found in succeeding layers up to and including the lower layers of the LH IIIA 1 fill. The tablet fragments in layer 21 are from make-up fill stratified some way above the uppermost of these floors.

### Description

There are two preserved fragments, which join. Lengths 3.5 by 2.0 cms, and 2.4 by 1.3 cms, with a joined length of 4.5 cms. The thickness is 0.7 cms. The tablet is flat on the upper and lower surfaces with

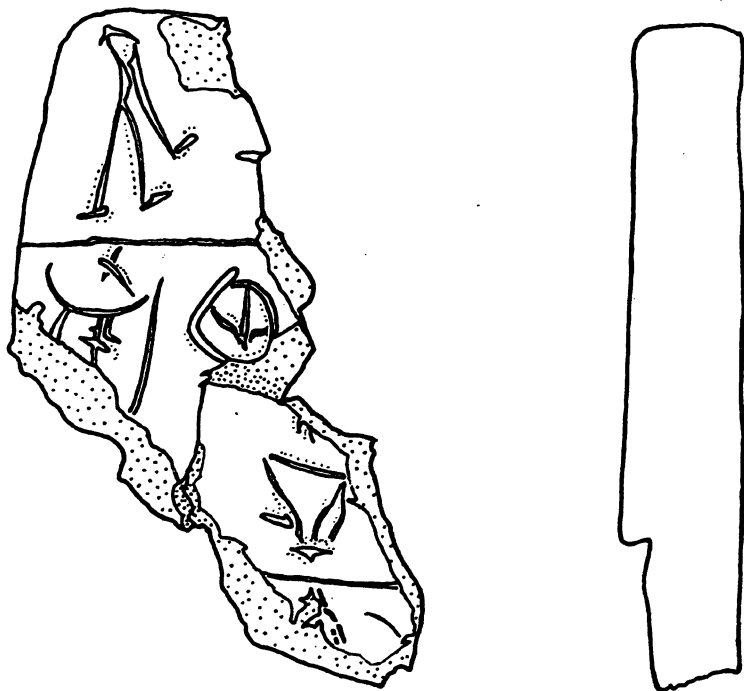


Fig. 1. The Linear A tablet fragments (length 4.5 cms).

the upper face inscribed. The original corner with parts of two sides is preserved (Fig. 1, Pl. II).

The tablet is made of fine reddish clay, evenly fired (whether deliberately or not is a matter of interpretation).

The back is smooth, and the back surface of the smaller fragment is missing.

Parts of two bands of writing and the top of a third are preserved, separated by horizontal incised lines. Of the uppermost band one sign remains, of the second three signs (two in an upper row, one in a lower) and in the third band part of a fifth sign. The orientation of the signs indicates that the dividing lines are horizontal, and that this is the upper left-hand corner of the tablet.

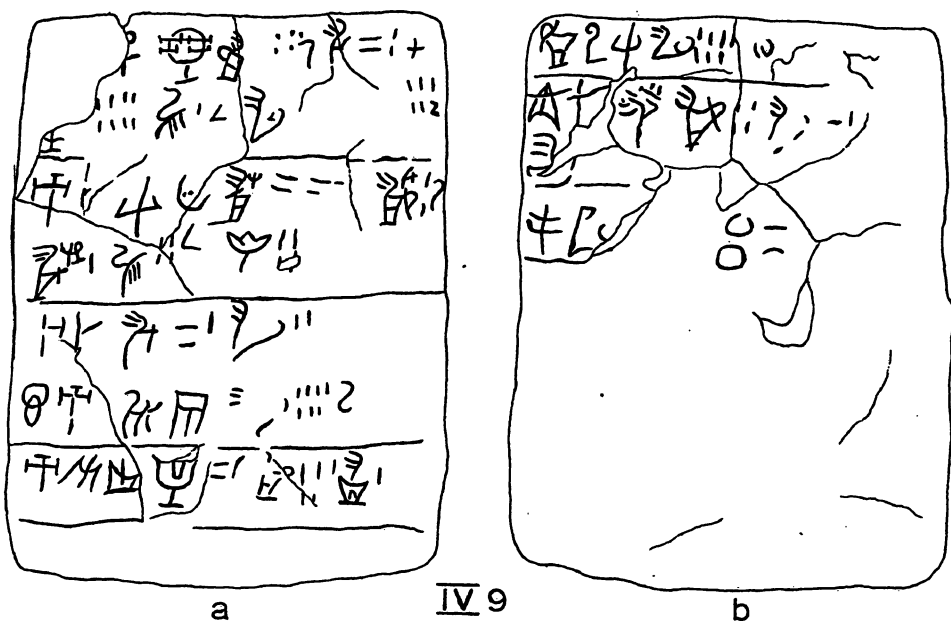


Fig. 2. The Tylissos tablet ILA IV 9 = TY 3

### The Inscription (by W. C. B.)

Maurice Pope, Jacques Raison and I have studied the inscription independently, and in what follows I have incorporated the valuable remarks of my two colleagues. They have allocated it the index number MI 2 on their system.

We all three instantly noticed the resemblance in format with the Tylissos tablet ILA IV 9 = TY 3 (here Fig. 2), which also has registers

divided by horizontal lines. Some more specific comparisons with that tablet are noted below. HT 45b and 96a are divided in a similar way, the lines evidently being intended to separate elements of the inscription rather than to guide the writing.

In line 1 we agree that the first sign is L 64 (= Lin. B 50, *pu*; here Fig. 3), though Pope raises the possibility of L 99 (a 'human' sign) and the tentative idea that the two may be variants of the same sign. The surviving trace of the second sign could belong to L 22, in which case we would have the common Linear B group read as *pu-ro*: but there are many other possibilities, one of which, raised by Raison, is L 6, the 'vase' sign, of which the surviving stroke would form part of the base, while the left edge of the fracture would follow its side.

On the first sign of the second line, Pope remarks: "Ideogram. The major component is probably L 70, the minor perhaps L 31 (cf. Lin. B 31 = *sa*).". Raison puts forward the possibilities of L 80, L 98, or a complex new sign. In favour of Raison's perceptive suggestion of L 98, the 'flying bird' sign, which as he rightly says is sometimes drawn thus vertically, with the head pointing upwards, one may refer to the second sign in line a 7 of the Tylissos tablet ILA IV 9 (Fig. 2). I am inclined to see both this sign and that in the following line as vessels with adjoined minuscule signs. For the superscribed sign over this 'vessel', one may compare Lin. B 183 on PY U 1053 bis. The 'adjoined' sign within the vessel recalls the first of the three signs superscribed over Lc 71 from HT 38.

The second sign of line 2 is evidently L 29 (cf. Lin. B 77, *ka*).

The sign in line 3 may be compared, Raison suggests, with Lc 44 from HT 33. Pope writes: "Ideogram. Its major component, the cup (cf. Lin. B 215) is new to Linear A. I do not know what to make of the lines on each side of it. The sign above is possibly L 81 (as in Lc 45)". This certainly looks like a 'vessel' with side supports or handles, possibly a

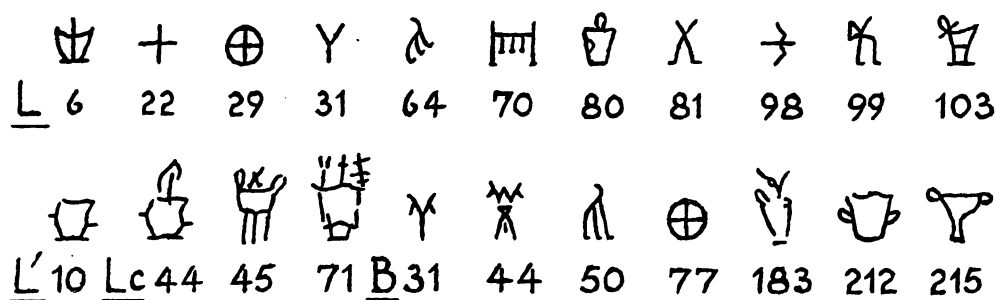


Fig. 3. Signs mentioned in the commentary.

variant of L'10 or Linear B 212 ('*udoro*'). The superscribed sign could be L 81, as remarked by Pope, or Lin. B 44, quite common as an adjunct.

The vestige in line 4 could belong to L 29 as in line 2, but we all agree that there are other possibilities.

In view of its general arrangement, compartmented by horizontal lines separating single or double rows of writing, and of its contents, evidently lists of commodities identified by ligatured combinations, including the 'vessel' signs L 103 and L 6, the Tylissos Tablet ILA IV 9 would seem to be the piece most closely comparable to the newly found fragment from Phylakopi. One might compare in particular with the 'vessel' in the second line of the Melian tablet the ligatured sign at the end of line a 7 of the inscription from Tylissos, notably in respect of the concave form of the 'rim' of the 'vessel'.

### Discussion

The foregoing consideration of the inscription makes clear that it is in the Minoan Linear A script. This harmonises with the stratigraphic position which strongly suggests that the tablet is of Late Bronze I date. It should be noted, however, that a date as late as LH IIIA 1 could also be argued without inconsistency so that an inscription in Minoan Linear B would not have been paradoxical.

The find of a tablet of Late Bronze I date has to be set within the context of the archaeology of the site at the time. It has long been recognised that the 'Third City' at Phylakopi shows many signs of Minoan influence and contact, most notably in the pottery, where the Cretan imports are predominantly Late Minoan Ia<sup>7</sup>. There are, however, fairly numerous Late Minoan Ib finds also.

The recent excavations have made clear that what was hitherto regarded as the 'Third City' in fact comprises two major phases of activity. The first was in the Late Bronze I period, with which we are here concerned. The second is initiated by the construction of the LH IIIA 1 megaron building, and continues in LH IIIB with the strengthening of the fortification walls and the construction of a shrine at the south side of the site. In this LH III period, mainland influence, as reflected in the imports, predominates.

The first important result of the 1974—1976 excavation seasons has been to reveal the significant developments on the site in the LB I period.

<sup>7</sup> Scholes K., 1956, The Cyclades in the Late Bronze Age — a synopsis, BSA 51, 9—40; Barber R., 1974, Phylakopi 1911 and the history of the later Cycladic Bronze Age, BSA 69, 1—55.



We now have firm evidence that a major construction of defences was undertaken in this period (dated by LM Ia import sherds), while we found none for any earlier defences, although these may nonetheless have existed. This then was an episode of major fortification.

A second, and perhaps the most interesting, discovery is that the LH IIIA 1 megaron was preceded by a substantial building of approximately the same dimensions, datable in its construction to early LB I. The LB I wall beneath the south-west corner of the megaron in square Π A was probably related to this 'mansion' or 'Herrenhaus', as we must now regard it — for certainly it is much larger than any contemporary or earlier buildings recovered at the site.

Thirdly, stratigraphic excavations undertaken near the 'pillar crypt', from which some of the finest frescoes came in the earlier excavations<sup>8</sup>, have led to a re-assessment of the date of those frescoes. It is now clear that most of the important frescoes at Phylakopi are of LB I date, and it is doubtful whether any belong to the period of the Second City. The new fresco material from Phylakopi is to be published by Mr Mark Cameron.

All of this is relevant to the cultural context of the tablet, which belongs to a time when the overseas links of the site were predominantly with Crete. Such was also the case for several other Cycladic sites of the time<sup>9</sup>, including Aghia Irini on Kea<sup>10</sup>.

In interpreting the tablet, our first question must be, was it locally made or is it an import? The question is crucial in the case of a single find. No definitive answer can yet be given, although microscopic examination will be undertaken in the summer of 1977 for petrological indications. The balance of probabilities must surely lie with local manufacture, however, since it is difficult to envisage a motive for the import of these 'baleful signs'.

Assuming that the tablet was locally made, what was its purpose? The overwhelming majority of the Linear A (and Linear B) tablets so far discovered are interpreted as part of the records of an administrative bureaucracy, receipts, disbursements (including offerings) and dues. The possibility should not of course be overlooked that clay tablets could be used for purely religious purposes unrelated to commercial transactions, as in the case of many of the Linear A inscriptions on other

<sup>8</sup> Bosanquet R. C., 1904, The wall paintings, in Atkinson et al., Phylakopi.

<sup>9</sup> Scholes 1956, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> Caskey J. L., 1972, Investigations in Keos II, A conspectus of the pottery, *Hesperia* 47, 357—401, notably phases G and H.

materials; and an argument of this kind has been put forward for one of the few Linear A tablets found in Crete outside the major centres<sup>11</sup>. The straightforward interpretation, however, would be that the Phylakopi tablet is the only surviving part of a small archive. It is a melancholy thought that most of the interior of the Late Bronze I mansion was excavated in 1911 without "any positive result" and without any proper record, and fragments may have escaped detection at that time. But of course it is clear that the Late Bronze I structure was almost entirely demolished to make way for the LH IIIA 1 megaron and much must have been lost in that clearance.

The tablet might then be taken as evidence that there was on the island at this time a local and literate administrative bureaucracy, whose centre may plausibly be identified as the newly recognised Mansion, and whose actions included the construction of substantial fortifications at the site, probably for the first time. That the Cyclades had literacy of a sort was already established by the marks on pottery from Phylakopi and by graffiti from Kea<sup>12</sup> and Thera, and it may be that these short inscriptions represent the 'spin off' from the use of the Linear A syllabary for bureaucratic recording on tablets.

The existence of bureaucratic administration, with the use of a Cretan script, at Phylakopi would also have historical implications. Furumark<sup>13</sup> has already suggested, on the basis of the pottery imports from Crete, that Melos at this time was under Minoan rule, and I have referred elsewhere<sup>14</sup> to the legend of Rhadamanthus, the brother of Minos, and to his lordship over the isles. It is important to make a distinction between two senses which the term 'colony' may hold. It could imply the acquisition of power in Melos by a force of men from Crete, and the setting up there of a palace administration on the Minoan model which thereafter developed without direct administration from or political association with the mother foundation in Crete; the legend of Euxantios, son of Minos, on Kea<sup>15</sup> might suggest a situation of that kind. Or it could signify continuing centralised direction from Crete,

<sup>11</sup> Cadogan G. and Morpurgo-Davies A., 1971, A Linear A tablet from Pyrgos, Myrtos, Crete, *Kadmos* 10, 1971, 105—9.

<sup>12</sup> Caskey J. L., 1964, Excavations in Keos 1963, *Hesperia* 33, 325; Caskey J. L., 1970, Inscriptions and potters' marks from Ayia Irini in Keos, *Kadmos* 9, 1970, 107—11.

<sup>13</sup> Furumark A., 1950, The settlement at Ialysos and Aegean chronology, *Opuscula Archaeologica* 6, 200

<sup>14</sup> Renfrew C., 1964, Crete and the Cyclades before Rhadamanthus, *Kretika Chronika* 18, 134.

<sup>15</sup> Pauly-Wissowa, *Real Encyclopedie*, 'Keos', Vol. XI. 1, 185

with the local administration in Melos in the hands of a governor at Phylakopi, much as Rhadamanthus himself is said to have given his generals command in Paros, Andros and Delos<sup>16</sup>.

On the other hand, it could be argued that neither conquest nor direct rule is needed to explain the evidence. Intensive site survey on Melos in 1976, directed in the field by Mr John Cherry, indicates that dispersed rural settlement on the island was effectively abandoned towards the end of the Early Bronze Age, and that the population then concentrated at Phylakopi. The site thus became a small town as early as c. 2100 B.C., and the development of a local administration already in the Middle Cycladic period is altogether possible. Such an administration might have adopted the Minoan recording techniques, perhaps by importing one or two scribes in the Late Minoan Ia period. But between these three possibilities — of Cycladic independence with Minoan literacy; of Minoan conquest and subsequent local autonomy; or of Minoan conquest and subsequent direct rule — it is difficult to decide at present.

In any case, the find sheds new light on the extent of literacy<sup>17</sup>, which is much more evident in the Aegean in the sixteenth and fifteenth centuries than during the heyday of Mycenaean influence in the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C.

### Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Mr Maurice Pope and M. Jacques Raison for their comments upon a drawing of the tablet. Miss Jennifer Moody drew figure 1, and plates I and II are by Mr David Leigh and Mr Clive Tilley. Mr Sinclair Hood acted as supervisor of Trench II A in the 1974 season, and Mr John Cherry in the 1975 season. We are grateful to Miss Sara Paton, Mrs Susan Sherratt, Mrs Vronwy Hankey and Dr Elisabeth French for their comments upon the pottery from II A.

<sup>16</sup> Diodorus V. 79

<sup>17</sup> cf. Coldstream J. N. and Huxley G. L., *Kythera, Excavations and Studies*, 205—6 and fig. 59 and pl. 60.