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ON THE DATE OF THE 'HIEROGLYPHIC DEPOSIT'
AT KNOSSOS*

The 'Hieroglyphic Deposit' at Knossos is a collection of clay sealings, bars and labels. It may not be called a closed deposit as the nodules assigned to it were found scattered in a space beneath the staircase at the north end of the Long Gallery as well as in the adjacent magazines.¹ Evans wavered on the dating of this deposit, assigning it first to MM III² but later to MM IIB.³ More recently the tendency has been to propose a later date based mainly on notions of the stylistic development of sealing designs.⁴

Unable to date the Deposit closely either on grounds of ceramic evidence or stratigraphy, Evans relied on the fact that the first stage of the West Wing of the Palace, where the seal impressions were found, was built in MM II but that the associated contents belong mostly to the succeeding MM III period. His earlier argument for their MM III dating was based on the naturalistic style of certain motifs.⁵ On the other hand, Evans also recognised that the majority of the impressions

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CMS = Corpus der minoischen und mykenischen Siegel

GGFR = John Boardman, *Greek Gems and Finger Rings* (1970)

PM = A. J. Evans, *The Palace of Minos I-IV + index* (1921-36)

SM = Idem, *Scripta Minoa I* (1909)

Walberg, Kamares = G. Walberg, *Kamares, Boreas* 8 (1976)

1 M. A. V. Gill, *BSA* 60, 1965, 66

2 SM 19-20. Recently Walberg has argued for the non-existence of MM IIIA as a definable ceramic phase (Kamares 108)

3 PM I 271-276

4 GGFR 34; Hagen Biesantz, *Kretisch-mykenische Siegelbilder* (1954) 125-126; John Reich, *AJA*, 1970, 406-408; O. Pelon, *BCH* 89, 1956, 9

5 Cf. PM I 273 fig. 202a-e, 274 fig. 203

showed either the Hieroglyphic B script or a glyptic style which he dated to MM II.⁶ A late dating for the Deposit also rested on the idea that the Linear Script A supplanted the MM II Hieroglyphic script in MM III.⁷

A MM III dating for the Deposit has been defended by John Reich, whose main argument goes back to Evans' statements regarding the naturalistic style of some of the motifs.⁸ As further support for a MM IIIB dating he refers to the presence of 'MM III' ceramic in the immediate vicinity of the Deposit; to a comparison of the associated roundels with those from MM III and LM I deposits; to prisms or prism impressions from MM III contexts; and, finally, to a MM IIIB dating for the material in the Vat Room Deposit. These points may be treated singly:

1) There is no decisive stratigraphic evidence for attributing the Hieroglyphic Deposit to either MM IIIB or to MM III. The MM III finds that Evans mentioned as belonging to the corridors of the West Wing are not described, but they are evidently the seal impressions themselves and the other materials from the Deposit.

2) At the turn of the century hardly any seals or sealings were known yet from unmixed contexts earlier in date than the MM IIIB East Temple Repository, which was dug in 1903. Intuitively, Evans associated the majority of the impressions from the Deposit with stylistically similar unexcavated seals to form a group which he dated to MM II. Most of the motifs from the Deposit do, on stylistic and typological grounds, belong to a group of homogeneous seals of which impressions have been excavated from MM II contexts in Phaistos and Malia.⁹ This group is characterized by its highly stylized motifs, the exclusive use of hard, semi-precious stones, deep engraving and excellent workmanship.¹⁰

The nodules bearing impressions from the Deposit have a characteristic shape and color and seem to belong together as one find

⁶ PM I 272 n. 2. For seals belonging to this group cf. PM I 275 fig. 204, 277 fig. 207

⁷ SM 30

⁸ AJA 74, 1970, 406-408

⁹ From Phaistos: CMS II 5 204, 299, 300, 311. Impressions in the style of those from the Deposit stem from MM II context in Malia Quartier Mu (Cf. Poursat BCH 95, 1971, 796-799 for the dating). These seal impressions are presently on display in vitrine 25 in the Heraklion Museum. For the signs see Brice, *Kadmos* 11, 1972, 182.

¹⁰ Cf. V. Kenna, *Cretan Seals* (1960) nos. 117-122, 129, 131-133, 135, 138-142, 148, 150, 151 etc. Approximately 150 seals are known which belong to this group.

group.¹¹ Naturalistic and hieroglyphic designs occur on the same nodules and one can thus not argue that the more 'advanced' designs were impressed later than those of the main hieroglyphic group.

The naturalistic motifs which so impressed Evans also find equally naturalistic parallels in MM IIB Phaistos, which came to light long after his death.¹² The naturalism of some motifs can be discounted as a criterion for a later dating of the Deposit, and the style of the majority of the seal impressions actually argues strongly for a MM II dating.

3) Although it seemed likely in 1901 that the MM II Hieroglyphic B script was replaced in MM III by the Linear A script, Linear A has since then been excavated in a MM IIB context at Phaistos.¹³

4) Reich states that MM III ceramic was found in the "immediate vicinity" of the Deposit, i. e. in the Theatral Area.¹⁴ However, Evans actually dated this area to MM II on the strength of the ceramic found there.¹⁵ Even if MM III ceramic had been found in the Theatral Area, this locus is not directly linked stratigraphically to that of the Deposit: nor is the ceramic from nearer findspots of help in dating the Deposit.

5) A comparison of the roundels found in the Deposit with those from MM III and LM I contexts is possible, but clay bars and labels in themselves do not offer many or unequivocal criteria for dating purposes. Tablets similar to those from the Deposit are also known from a MM IIB context in Phaistos.¹⁶

6) Reich states that the jars, sealings and "hieroglyphs" of the Vat Room Deposit are datable to MM IIIB by comparison with the jars and sealings of the Temple Repository.¹⁷ The dating of the Vat Room is not entirely clear, but the majority of the finds there are MM IA, including a mixture of some later material.¹⁸ This writer sees no resemblances between the jars or the seal impressions of the Temple Repository and those of the Vat Room. Nor do the sealing motifs from the Vat Room

¹¹ Gill, BSA 60, 1965, 66

¹² Cf. CMS II5 202, 259, 270, 276, 277, 310, 322. According to Dr. Walberg the latest ceramic from vano 25 in Phaistos is datable to MM IIB (personal communication of 22.III.77). Independently of the ceramic evidence, Dr. Pini dates the most developed motifs from the deposit to MM IIB (CMS II5 p. XV).

¹³ Ibid. for the dating. D. Levi, BdA 41, 1956, 263 fig. 46b and Levi, The Recent Excavations at Phaistos, SIMA 11, 1964, 9 fig. 34 (from vano 25).

¹⁴ AJA 74, 1970, 407 n. 15

¹⁵ PM II 580-581; III 246-247, 249-250; IV 50-54

¹⁶ Supra n. 12 and 13

¹⁷ AJA 74, 1970, 406

¹⁸ P. Warren, BSA 62, 1967, 200 n. 35; Walberg, Kamares, 121-122

find any close parallels among stratified or non-stratified seals. The impressions do not date the Vat Room Deposit but are dated *by* the associated finds. Furthermore, the design in PM I 168 fig. 119a is not hieroglyphic and that of fig. 119c, if it is indeed hieroglyphic, finds no close parallels with known hieroglyphic signs.¹⁹ Finally the absence of hieroglyphic motifs in the Temple Repository does not support the theory that Hieroglyphic B continued in active use in MM IIIB. Neither the Vat Room nor the Temple Repository helps to fix the date of the Hieroglyphic Deposit.

7) The signs on a four-sided prism (HM 2184) found in Malia are similar to those on impressions from the Deposit. Olivier Pelon dates the ceramic accompanying the seal to MM IIIB²⁰, although this coarse ware is not reproduced in the excavation reports.²¹

8) In Mochlos, Grave III, Richard Seager excavated a signet (CMS II2 249) which bears Hieroglyphic B signs. But the MM III dating given this grave by Seager is largely dependent on the style of the seal. While Seager did not publish the scant ceramic of Grave III, he did publish a bird nest bowl and a cylindrical jar, both in stone: Warren dated the first to "MM" and the second to "MM I-LM I".²²

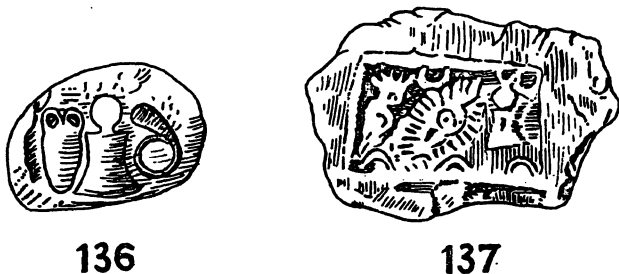


Fig. 1. Two types of sealing from Zakro

¹⁹ It would be useful to check the size of this impression and its shape against the original sealing in Heraklion. The drawings in PM I may not be to scale. This seal impression is not from a prism.

²⁰ BCH 89, 1965, 1

²¹ Daux, BCH 88, 1964, 912-915; J. Deshayes and A. Dessenne, *Études crétoises* 11, 1959, 114-116

²² *Minoan Stone Vases* (1969) 11, 41

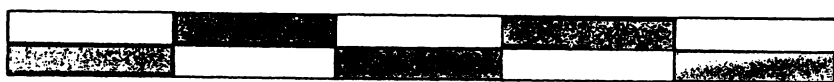
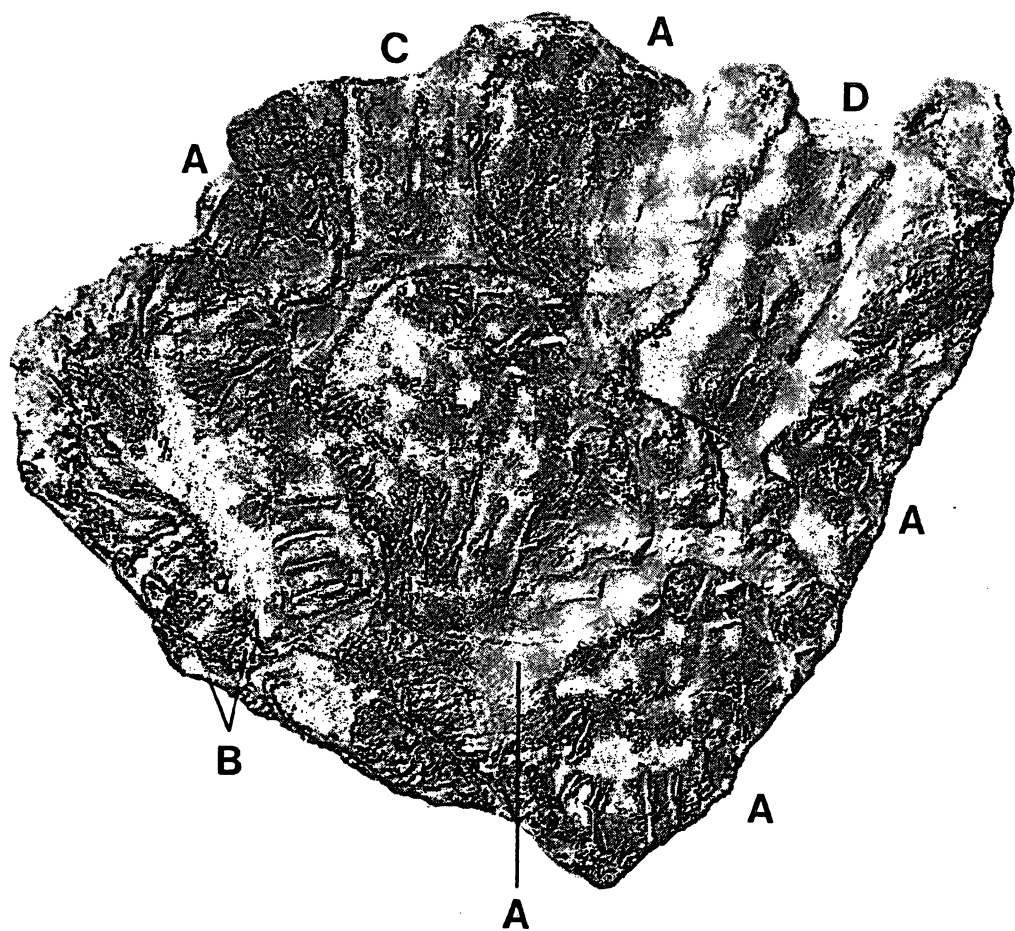


Plate I. The Knossos sealing AM 1938. 1153b

9) Two impressions (types 136 and 137, here Fig. 1) from a LM IB context in Kato Zakro show signs similar to those from the Deposit.²³ Type 137 is unusual as it appears to have been impressed by a cushion seal and not a prism. A third hieroglyphic impression, type 140, is not described and is not reproduced.

10) One of the seal impressions from the LM IB Haghia Triada sealing hoard shows Hieroglyphic B signs.²⁴

11) A nodule from Knossos (Plate I), now in the Ashmolean Museum²⁵, bears multiple impressions from a lentoid and either three sides of the same four-sided prism or possibly different four-sided prisms. This nodule has a blackened surface and measures ca. 5 cms in width. On the basis of the shape of the nodule and its color an attribution to a specific findspot in Knossos is difficult to establish.

One can restore much of the original motif of the lentoid from the five partial and distorted impressions (Fig. 2A). It depicted two horned animals, evidently bulls, standing in opposite directions, one behind the other. Three legs of the far bull are visible although its hind-quarters are not preserved. A salient lion can be seen on the right. Animals crossed in this way are somewhat unusual²⁶, and are unknown.

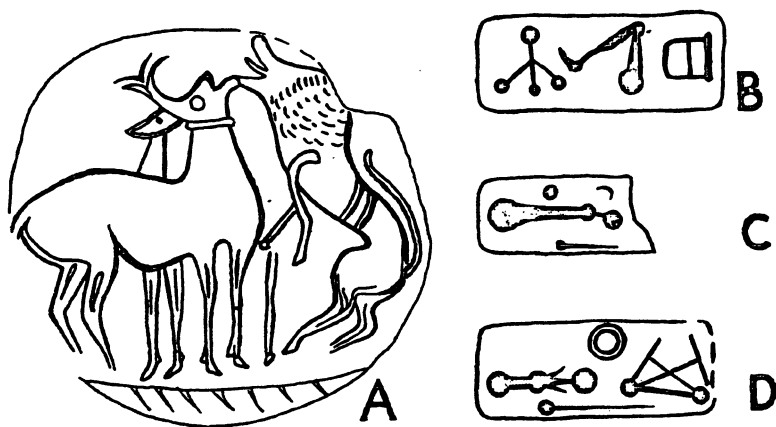


Fig. 2. The four motifs on the sealing from Knossos, AM 1938. 1153b

²³ Hogarth, JHS 22, 1902, pl. 10; Betts, Kadmos 6, 1967, 27–28 for the dating. Reich's identification of this context as "Late Mycenaean" arises from directly citing the terminology current in 1902. Cf. Hogarth, JHS 22, 1902, 333.

²⁴ Levi, ASAtene 8–9, 1925–26, 86 type 2 fig. 29

²⁵ AM 1938.1153b (hitherto unpublished). I have not had the opportunity to handle this nodule.

²⁶ Cf. CMS I 48, 187

in such combination with a lion. The plastic treatment of the belly and hindquarters of the near bull contrasts with the thin cursory treatment of the legs. The upper legs are rendered by three parallel strokes and the lower leg by two. The hindquarters and legs of the lion, however, are more carefully articulated. Nowhere is the drill in evidence. Also unusual is the treatment of the horns and collars of the bulls. The motif as a whole is more complex in the arrangement of the animals than any known from MM II. Its dating is difficult but a parallel for the plastically modelled body and sketchy treatment of the bull's legs is observable in a representation of a deer and fawn from the MM IIIB Temple Repository (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Fragment of sealing from the MM IIIB Temple Repository at Knossos

Impression B (Fig. 2), from a four-sided prism in hard stone, shows a gate, leg and arrow. Preserved in impression C are an unidentifiable pictorialized motif²⁷ and a peg. Finally, impression D bears a stylized cuttlefish, peg, concentric circle and an unknown motif, perhaps a pictorialized rendering of crossed arms.

12) In 1930 F. Chapouthier published a deposit of sealed bars in Malia which he considered to be dated by MM III-LM I ceramic.²⁸ The inscriptions on these bars are not in Hieroglyphic B, but are cursive signs of the protolinear script.²⁹ One hieroglyphic seal impression also occurred.

Based on what is known of the developmental rhythm of Minoan glyptic styles, not many experts would argue that a definable glyptic

²⁷ On pictorialization cf. Walberg, *Kamarea* 65–68, 73–75

²⁸ *Études crétoises* 2, 1930, 6, pls. 1–6

²⁹ E. Grumach, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 46, 1964, 347–8

begins in MM II and continues until LM IB. Thus, the main evidence for a later dating for the hieroglyphic seals characteristic of the Deposit consists of the prism from a MM IIIB context, an impression from a MM III-LM I context and the Ashmolean nodule. But from the style and carving technique, it is clear that the vast majority of the impressions belong to a group whose floruit takes place in MM II and which shares motifs with Early and Classical Kamares pottery.³⁰ Thus, it seems possible that the Malia prism-impression and the prism that impressed the Ashmolean nodule could possibly be heirlooms. In order to argue that the motifs from the Deposit are more 'advanced' in date than those of the MM IIB Phaistos sealing deposit, which are largely simple geometrical designs, it is prerequisite to assume that the same glyptic styles are represented in equal concentrations throughout Crete and that a linear development exists in Minoan glyptic from plain to elaborate. Neither assumption is easily defensible. In any case, we have already noted that in Phaistos naturalistic motifs occur together with simple designs.

With the unearthing of further hieroglyphs in the style of those from the Deposit, but in clear MM III contexts, the arbitrary MM II dating suggested by Evans for this group of seals (and hence for the Deposit) may have to be revised. While there is no reason to believe that the production of these seals suddenly ceased in MM IIB, there is also little reason to believe that it continued into MM III.

³⁰ I plan to treat the relations between Old Palatial glyptic and ceramic motifs in my dissertation; there, I will also augment these preliminary remarks