

LINEAR A INSCRIPTIONS FROM THE SANCTUARY
OF HERMES AND APHRODITE AT KATO SYME*

A. Archaeological context

The excavation of the sanctuary of Hermes and Aphrodite at Kato Syme has uncovered the remains of an important religious center where cult activities continued without interruption for almost two millennia, from the Middle Minoan III—Late Minoan I period until the third century A.D.¹ Although the full extent and plan of the sanctuary in the Neopalatial period have not yet been determined, its principal features are clear: the center of the site was occupied by a large building with many rooms, while in the northwest part deep sacrificial deposits extended next to a monumental structure which had no internal compartments and was probably unroofed.

Neither structure can be paralleled at other Minoan cult places, while comparable sacrificial deposits at peak shrines and the cave of Psychro do not seem to reflect the extent and intensity of cult activity attested at Syme; the terracotta chalices and tubular stands, which are the most characteristic Neopalatial finds at Syme, are almost unknown elsewhere.² In contrast, the so-called libation tables of stone, the next most numerous category of votives at Syme, are well-known at peak and cave shrines, and consequently constitute an important connecting link between the Syme sanctuary and other Minoan country shrines.

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¹ The site has been excavated since 1972 under the auspices of the Greek Archaeological Society and the direction of Dr. A. Lebessi. Preliminary reports have been published in *Praktika* 1972–1977, 1981 (in press). For a general overview of the results see A. Lebessi, "A Sanctuary of Hermes and Aphrodite in Crete," *Expedition* 18: 3, 1976, 1–13; "Η συνέχεια της κρητομυκηναϊκής λατρείας: επιβιώσεις και αναβιώσεις," *Archaïologike Ephemeris* 1981, 1–24.

² *Praktika* 1973, pls. 198b–c, 199. Similar 'tubes' have been found only at the neighboring site of Pyrgos-Myrtos (G. Cadogan, "Clay Tubes in Minoan Religion," in the Acts of the Third Cretological Congress, Rethymnon 1971, 34–58). Clay chalices with applied decoration have not been reported from other sites.

Close to four hundred libation tables of serpentinite and limestone have been found at Syme. They are ubiquitous, occurring equally frequently in all areas and levels investigated so far. Quite a few are intact, but most are preserved only in fragments; others have been pieced together from pieces found at great distance or depth from each other, thus illustrating the wide dispersal of finds caused by the long, continuous use of the site.

The three libation tables published here are no exception. Only one is complete with its text entire: the other two are fragmentary and their inscriptions are incomplete. Although it is possible that the missing pieces will be found in the future, all three inscriptions are presented here, since, given close interconnections of religious texts, every addition to the existing corpus, however incomplete, is potentially significant.

Following the system established by Pugliese Carratelli and refined by Raison-Pope and Godart-Olivier,³ the inscriptions from Syme have been designated SY Za 1-3.

B. The inscriptions

1. SY Za 1 (Pl. I).

Fragmentary circular libation table of serpentinite (HM 3459). The missing parts have been restored. It was found in 1973 in MM III-LM I sacrificial levels.⁴

Height: 0.14 m. Diameter: 0.144 m.

The inscription is incised on the rim in fine strokes that have barely penetrated the polished surface of the stone, and faces outward. In some cases, as at the lower part of L 88, 75 and the second L 32, the surface has peeled off along an oblique or horizontal stroke. Nine signs are more or less complete. Traces of two others can be seen, one at the beginning and the other at the end of the preserved text. The signs are separated in two groups by a punctuation mark and are the following:

L 52]-74-100-88-75-32, 100-30-76-32-[

³ G. Pugliese Carratelli, "Le iscrizioni preelleniche di Hagia Triada in Creta," *Monumenti Antichi*, 40, 1945, col. 421-602; J. Raison-M. Pope, *Index du linéaire A*, Rome 1971 (*Incunabula graeca*, XLI) xxxv; *Index transnuméré du linéaire A*, Louvain 1977 (*Bibliothèque des cahiers de l'Institut de Linguistique de Louvain*, II) 9; L. Godard-J.-P. Olivier, *Recueil des inscriptions en linéaire A*, IV, Paris 1982 (*Études Crétoises*, XXI. 4) xx.

⁴ *Praktika* 1973, 195, pl. 201b.

There can be no doubt that they represent the beginning of the text, since the preserved part of the rim to the left of the inscription bears no trace of signs and the first group is well-attested at the beginning of other inscriptions of this type.

The signs:

1. L 52 Although only part of the right vertical bar is preserved, the restoration is secure.
 2. L 74 Well-known form.
 3. L 100 Although the lower part of the sign is missing, its simplified upper part is easily recognizable.
 4. L 88 Angular but clearly executed version.
 5. L 75
 6. L 32 The partial obliteration of signs 5 and 6 does not pose any problems in their identification.
 7. L 100 The preserved upper part is similar to that of the previous L 100.
 8. L 30 Well-known form.
 9. L 76 Clearly executed, classic form.
 10. L 32 Only the middle part of the sign is preserved.
- The vertical bar that follows could belong to any of several signs.

The groups:

The first group is the well known 'formula', L 52-74-100-88-75-32 $\Upsilon \square \Psi \Lambda \Upsilon \Pi \square$, which occurs at the beginning of several inscriptions on stone vessels.⁵ Variant forms, in which L 32 \square alternates with L 52 Υ , or where L 44 Λ appears instead of the final L 32 \square , are also known in this position.⁶ The group is here separated from the signs that follow with a small dot, probably made with the point of the tool that was used to incise the signs. The tiny cavity in the interior of L 76 is similar. In contrast, other marks visible on the photograph on either side of L 76 and in its lower part, as well as inside the vessel's cavity, are due to the wear of the surface of the stone. The signs L 100-30-76-32-[$\Psi \Upsilon \vee \square$]... must therefore be part of a new group. The sequence L 100-30 occurs in PK (Palaikastro) Za 17 and 18. The same signs appear at the beginning of L 100-30-52 in KO (Kophinas) Za 1b-c and of L 100-30-95-92 in AR (Archanes) Zf 1 and 2.

⁵ KO Za 1, PK Za 12, TL Za 1.

⁶ The first variant occurs in AP Za 1, the second in PK Za 11. In addition, a related group, L 52-74-100-88-102-29, is included in ZA Zb 3.2, a pithos inscription from Epáno Zakro.

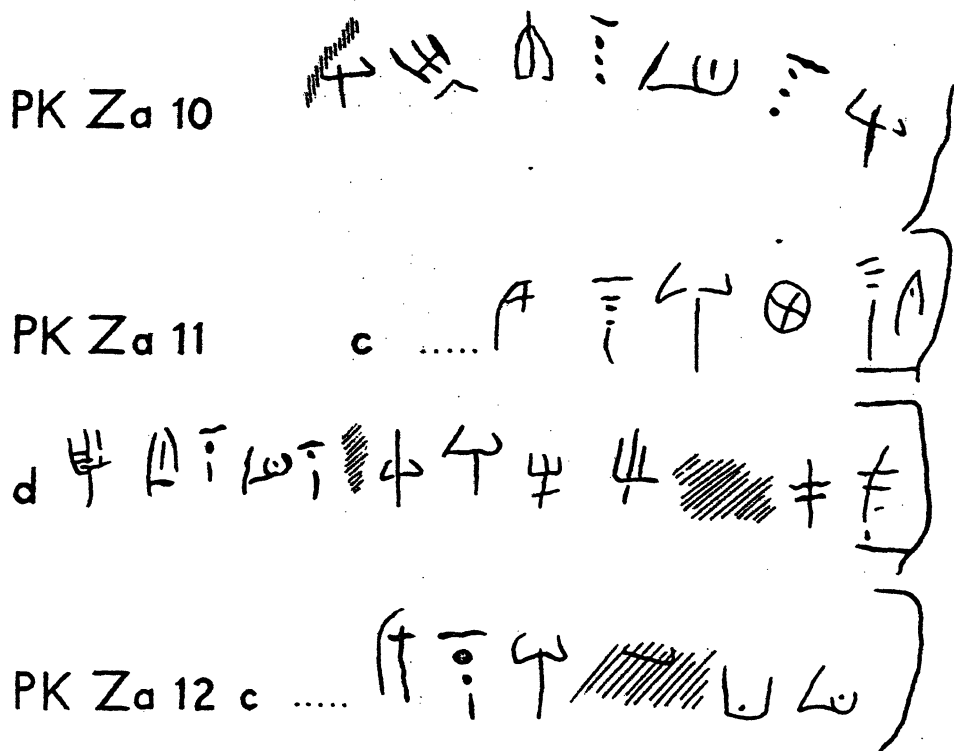


Fig. 1. Quotations from inscriptions from Palaikastro (PK). These, and those in Fig. 2, are taken from the original publications, and may differ in detail from the Author's readings. — Ed.

2. SY Za 2 (Pls. II and III)

Rectangular libation table of serpentinite (HM 3429). It was found in 1973 in what was later identified as Room 8 of the central Neopalatial building with MM III–LM I pottery.⁷

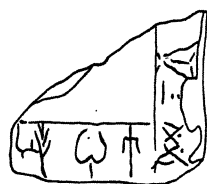
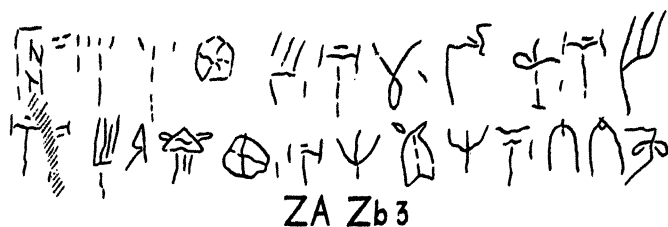
Height: 0.09 m. Dimensions of upper part: 0.18 × 0.18 m.

Except for a few chips missing off the edge of the upper surface, the vase is complete and well-preserved. The material, a variety of grey serpentinite with a dense network of black veins, was widely used in the manufacture of Minoan stone vases,⁸ but is rather uncommon at Syme.

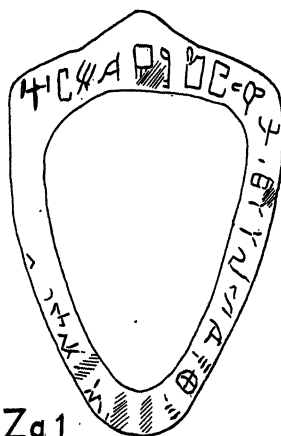
The inscription faces inward and consists of nineteen signs separated into two units of unequal length on the rim of the vessel: two signs were

⁷ Prākūka 1973, 195, pl. 200c.

⁸ P. Warren, *Minoan Stone Vases*, Cambridge 1969, 183, no. 3.



VRY Za 1

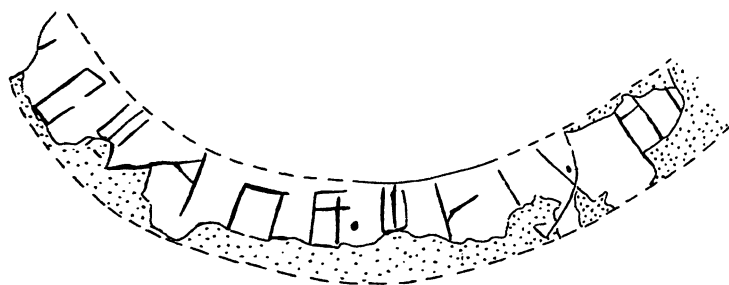
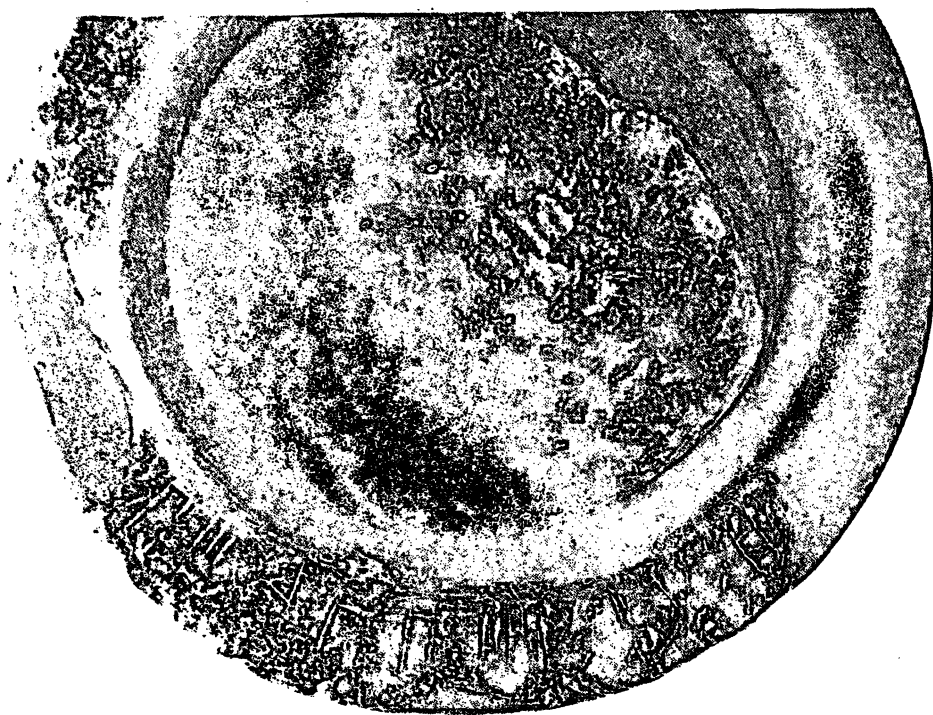


TL Za 1

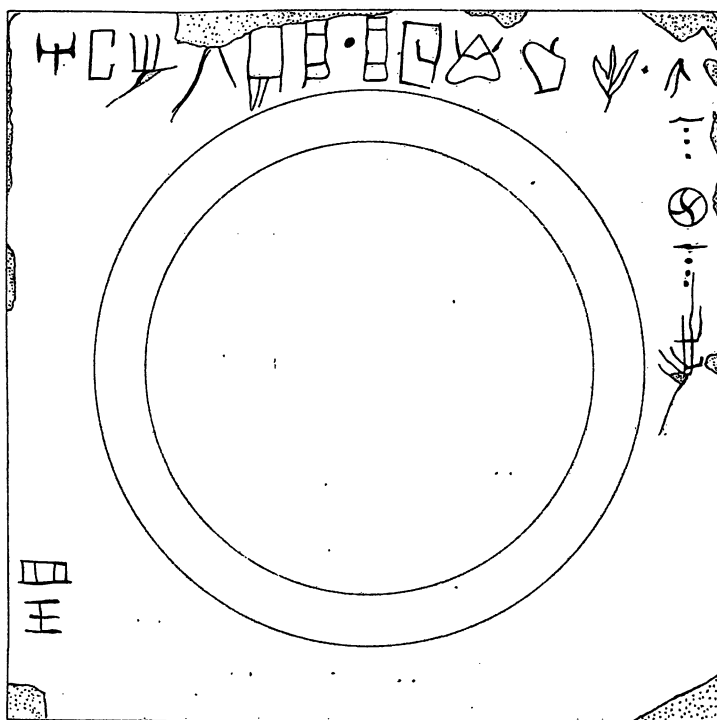
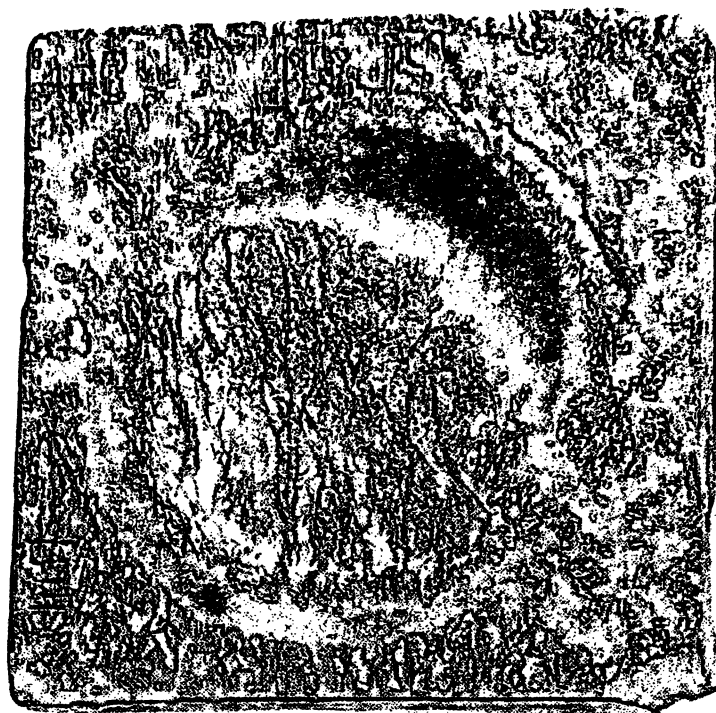
Fig. 2. Inscriptions from Zakro (ZA), Apodoulou (AP), Vrysinas (VRY) and Troullos (TL).

incised near one corner, while the main part of the inscription, in which seventeen signs are separated in three groups with punctuation marks, begins at the next corner and extends to about the middle of the third side. The inscription reads as follows:

L 52-32 | 52-74-100-88-75-32, 32-59-95-6-54, 97 | -26-29-26-57-100



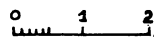
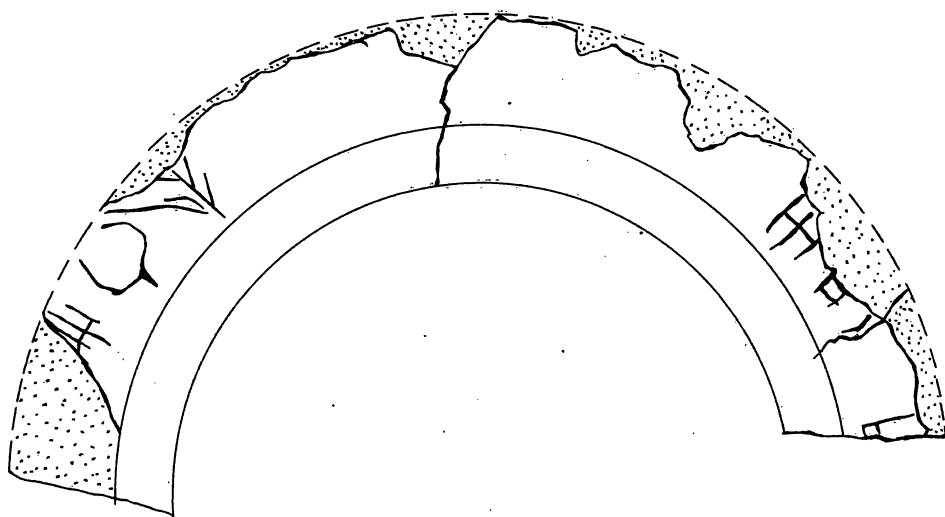
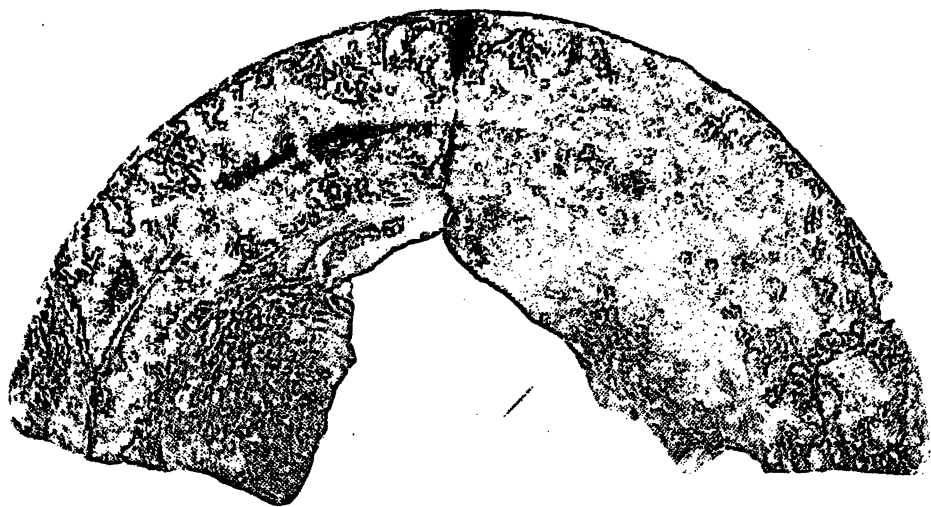
Pl. I. SY Za 1



Pl. II. SY Za 2



Pl. III. SY Za 2. Enlarged photograph of main inscription



Pl. IV. SY Za 3

The ductus is from left to right, except in the last five signs which were placed one below the other.⁹ The signs are unevenly spaced and placed at varying distances from the edge of the rim, while their height fluctuates between 1 and 2.2 cm. A few, such as L 52–32 of the first group or L 29 of the last, are carefully formed, but most appear to have been carelessly and even clumsily executed. The fact that they are all readily identifiable indicates, however, that the craftsman who carved the inscription was not careless or inept but rather frustrated by the peculiar composition of the stone. As the photograph shows, the lines of the signs that were more or less parallel to the dark veins of serpentinite are deeply carved, while strokes that were perpendicular or oblique in relation to the veins are faintly or repeatedly incised or have slipped off control. The difficulties that the craftsman encountered in incising most of the text must have led him to position the last five signs of the inscription one below the other, so that he could follow the direction of the veins of the stone, as he had done on the previous side. It is, in fact, tempting to suppose that these problems also forced the craftsman to interrupt the inscription after carving the first group of signs, L 52–32, and continue it on the next side of the vessel. This does not, however, appear correct, since L 52–32 are not written at the corner (as the first signs of the next group) but at a distance of 2.2 cm. from it. The factors which may have determined the position of L 52–32 will be discussed below in Section C.

The signs:

1. L 52
2. L 32 Both signs are carefully incised and of common form.
3. L 52 In its second use the sign is closer to the form of the double axe.
4. L 74 Well-known form.
5. L 100 Simplified and rather angular form close to that of KN Za 10b.
6. L 88 The preserved lower part of the sign is similar to that of KO Za 1a.
7. L 75
8. L 32 Although their upper part is worn, signs 7 and 8 can be easily identified, since their form is well known and has good parallels in other inscriptions on stone objects.

⁹ Such a change in ductus does not seem to occur in other inscriptions of this type. The first sign on TL Za 1 b is drawn perpendicular to those that follow, but this was presumably done because it is the last sign of a group for which there was no room on the preceding side of the vessel.

9. L 32 Same as above.
10. L 59 This variant, somewhat transformed by the unintentional extension of the right vertical bar, is not common. The simpler, better known version of the sign appears in two other inscriptions on stone vessels, TL Za 1a and PR Za 1a.
11. L 95 This unusual variant is close to the abstract version of the sign which appears in the tablets from Chania.¹⁰ The oblique lines forming an obtuse angle in the interior of the sign are an additional element and must represent the eyebrows which appear in more naturalistic versions of the 'cat's' face.¹¹
12. L 6 Well-known form. A similar example occurs on KO Za 1b.
13. L 54 This is the second occurrence of this version of L 54 in an inscription of this type. The first, on KO Za 1b, is also used at the end of group. In KO Za 1b the sign has retained the more regular outline of the linear version, whereas here it comes closer to some examples of L 49, e. g. in HT 123a. 6, because it was scratched in outline rather than carved into the stone.
14. L 97 Simplified and clumsily incised but clearly recognizable version similar to that used in MA 2.3.
15. L 26 Well-known form with many parallels on inscribed stone objects.
16. L 29 An unusual variant with S-shaped internal strokes which has, however, a close parallel in KO Za 1c.
17. L 26 As above.
18. L 57 Common but poorly executed form. The vertical bars, elongated in fine incision, are confused with the preceding and following signs.
19. L 100 Well-known but poorly executed version.

The groups:

The first two signs, L 52–32, as a separate group are known only from the fragmentary inscription from Syme, SY Za 3, published below. They occur in sequence just before the last sign of KN Zf 13. The second

¹⁰ I. A. Papapostolou, L. Godart and J.-P. Olivier, Γραμμική Α στο μινωικό ἀρχαίο τῶν Χανίων, Rome 1976 (*Incunabula graeca* LXII) xxxviii, fig. 20.

¹¹ As in AR Zf 1 and 2, KO Za 1d, PH 7a. 3.

group, L 52-74-100-88-75-32, has already been discussed in connection with SY Za 1.

The third group, L 32-59-95-6-54, does not occur elsewhere. The sequence]32-59 occurs on a small fragment of KN 32b. 3, while the sequence]32-59-95[appears in the middle of HT Zd 157.

The first five signs of the last group, L 97-26-29-26-57-100, are known as a group on other inscriptions, where they are followed by L 100-56-26-95-57-55-92. These groups appear together at the end of KO Za 1 and can be restored at the end of TL Za 1. Variant or incompletely preserved examples occur in AP Za 2, PK Za 8, 10, 11 and 12. Finally VRY (Vrysinas) Za 1 preserves the last signs of the second group.¹² SY Za 2 gives a new example of L 97-26-29-26-57 at the end of a text but with the addition of a final L 100. It seems reasonable to suppose that this variant may be conditioned by the absence of the second group of this 'formula.'

3. SY Za 3 (Pl. IV)

Fragmentary circular libation table of serpentinite restored from two pieces (HM 3757 and SY 30/81).

Preserved height: 0.053 m. Diameter: 0.14 m.

One piece was found in 1976 west of the monumental Neopalatial structure in a deep stratum of the sacrificial deposit with MM III-LM I pottery.¹³ The other was discovered in 1981 at a distance of about twelve meters from the first, south of Room 6 of the central Neopalatial building, in a surface level.

The inscription is incised on the rim of the vessel in very fine strokes and faces inward. Six signs are visible, three at the beginning and three at the end of the text:

L 52-32, [] 32 [] 57-55-92

¹² It should be noted that in PK Za 10 the sequence L 100-56-26-76-26 is separated from 56-[55-92] by a punctuation mark. It is possible that L 100-56-26-95 and 57-55-92 are also separated on KO Za 1d, but the mark before L 57, unlike the others used for punctuation in this text, is very faint and may have resulted from the wear of the stone. In VRY Za 1 the transition from L 95 to L 57 coincides with the corner of the fragment and there is no punctuation mark. The Syme inscriptions do not furnish any information on this point and the sequence L 100-56-26-95-57-55-92 will be here referred to as one group, although this supposition may eventually not prove correct.

¹³ Praktika 1976, pl. 226d.

The signs:

1. L 52 Well-known form.
2. L 32 Although the upper part of the sign is missing, the restoration is secure.

A punctuation mark, like a short vertical stroke, follows. After a gap the beginning of another sign is visible.


3. L 32 The restoration is probable, although the traces of the lower horizontal bars are faint.
4. L 57 Well-known form.
5. L 55 Clearly incised in a series of straight lines rather than in continuous curves.
6. L 92 Clear with very finely incised oblique bars.

The groups:

The sequence L 52–32 occurs in SY Za 2. If the traces of the next sign belong to L 32, then it is likely that in this text also L 52–32 was followed by a variant of L 52–74–100–88–75–32 in which L 32 was substituted for L 52.

The last three signs of the inscription,]L 57–55–92, can be safely restored as the last part of group L 100–56–26–95–57–55–92. This group, preceded by L 97–26–29–26–57, occurs at the end of two inscriptions of this type that have already been mentioned. The restoration of this two-part 'formula' at the conclusion of SY Za 3 seems probable. If the beginning of the inscription is restored following that of SY Za 2, then the text of SY Za 3 can be reconstructed as follows: L 52–32, [] 32[–74–100–88–75–32, . . . , 97–26–29–26–57, 100–56–26–95–] 57–55–92. On the basis of the diameter of the vase, the dimensions of the preserved signs and the relatively regular spaces that separate them, it seems probable that the inscription contained five (or at most six) groups of signs. This is in accordance with the composition of SY Za 2 and probably also with that of SY Za 1, which, as the diameter of the libation table and the extent of the preserved rim indicate, must have also been relatively short.

C. Comparative study (Figs. 1 and 2)

If the proposed restoration of SY Za 3 is valid, some additional observations on the Syme inscription can be made. SY Za 2 and 3 follow what may be called a pattern. In both texts a group of two signs, L 52–32 , precedes a sequence composed of an initial 'formula' L 52/32–74–

100-88-75-32 $\Upsilon/\text{B}\text{C}\text{P}\text{A}\text{B}\text{B}$ (which, for convenience, will be here designated as A): this is separated by one or two further sign-groups from a final 'formula' (here B) which appears in two versions, L 97-26-29-26-57-100 $\text{F}\text{I}\text{O}\text{I}\text{P}\text{P}$, or L 97-26-29-26-57, 100-56-26-95-57-55-92 $\text{F}\text{I}\text{O}\text{I}\text{P}\text{P}\text{P}\text{A}\text{I}\text{B}\text{P}\text{P}$.

Although the first element, L 52-32, is at present confined to these two texts from Syme, the rest of the pattern can also be seen in KO Za 1 and TL (Troullos) Za 1 (Fig. 2), in which three and two sign groups respectively intervene between the same initial and final 'formulas.' The intermediate groups in KO Za 1 and TL Za 1 are variables not only in number but also in frequency, since they include the familiar L 32/52-31-31-53-84 $\Upsilon/\text{B}\text{Y}\text{Y}\text{I}\text{P}$ as well as other groups unknown from other inscriptions.

The other inscriptions which contain 'formulas' A and/or B are fragmentary or poorly preserved. We cannot therefore be sure that A and B always appeared in conjunction. B occurs at the end of PK Za 8, and as [L 97-26-29-26]-57, 100-56-26-76-26, 57-[55-92] at the end of PK Za 10 (Fig. 1). In VRY Za 1, its second component, [L 100]-56-26-95-57-55-92, is followed by a punctuation mark which may indicate that the inscription continued after it. This is not however certain, since in AP (Apodoulou) Za 2 (Fig. 2) a punctuation mark appears at the end of the text. The position of 'formula' B in AP Za 2 on the fragmentary jar from Apodoulou is also unclear. In PK Za 11 and 12, where A and other variants of B (L 97-26-55-29-26-78, 100-56-26-76-26[]57-55[] and L 97-26-57-29[]32-57 respectively) are separated by several sign-groups of varying frequency, one or more groups of signs follow B at the end of the text.

It thus appears that, just as the components of B can vary, so can its position within a text. In contrast, the initial position of 'formula' A (and of its variant L 52-74-100-88-75-44 $\Upsilon\text{C}\text{P}\text{A}\text{B}\text{A}$) is maintained in all its occurrences. The single exception, the related group L 52-74-100-88-102-29 $\Upsilon\text{C}\text{P}\text{A}\text{I}\text{B}\text{O}$ in ZA Zb 3.2 (Fig. 2), occurs on a pithos which does not belong to the class of small, presumably votive, objects discussed here. In the latter, the pattern "A - one or more sign groups - B" seems flexible in admitting variable groups both between the two 'formulas' and probably also after B, but has one constant feature in its beginning.

The occurrence of L 52-32 at the beginning of SY Za 2 and 3 thus becomes particularly noteworthy, since it clearly indicates that this group could not, for some reason, be inserted in or appended to the main 'formulaic' part of the text. Whether L 52-32 was excluded for emphasis

or because it represented a special term, cultic or otherwise, which could not be fitted into an accepted pattern cannot be determined. If, however, the position of L 52–32 at the beginning of SY Za 2 and 3, albeit inexplicable at present, be taken as granted, the realization that these two inscriptions fit a pattern which had one fixed rule indicates that, at least in SY Za 2, L 52–32 was treated as a separate, distinct element in the text in order that 'formula' A could maintain its traditional initial position.

The fact that this distinction is less obvious in SY Za 3 than in SY Za 2 may be simply due to the different shapes of the vessels on which the inscriptions were carved. On the rectangular surface of HM 3429, L 52–32 could be isolated on one side of the vessel. The circular rim of HM 3459 did not lend itself to such a clear separation; the vertical punctuation mark and relatively wide space that separate L 52–32 from what follows can be considered as a compromise solution to this problem. Too great a gap between the group and the main part of the inscription would have rendered the relationship of L 52–32 to the rest of the text ambiguous. There is, in any case, hardly any evidence that the craftsmen exercised the sort of care and planning that would ensure a perfectly balanced distribution of signs and sign-groups on the objects they were called upon to inscribe. The alternative explanation for the arrangement of SY Za 3, namely that a group beginning with L 32 but different from L 52/32–74–100–88–75–32 came after L 52–32, is of course possible, but seems less likely.

D. Conclusion

The most significant contribution of the new material from Syme is the addition of a completely preserved inscription to the few already known. The occurrence of group L 52–32 in two of the texts should also be noted. To sign-groups already familiar from other inscriptions, two certain and one probable examples of L 52/32–74–100–88–75–32 and one each of L 97–26–29–26–57 and 100–56–26–95–57–55–92 can now be added. In the first of the latter two groups, which at Syme occurs in a variant form with the addition of a final L 100, we gain a secure example of its use separately from the second at the end of a text.

The close relations of the religious texts in Linear A have often been emphasized. The connections of the complete texts discussed above are a good example of this interdependence. It is surely significant that KO Za 1, TL Za 1 and SY Za 2, which appear on three different types of objects found at widely separate places, are structured in a closely

similar manner; and also that these texts share a number of individual elements both with each other and with further, less well-preserved, inscriptions. Three of the six groups of KO Za 1 are known from other inscriptions. This is also true of four out of five groups in TL Za 1 and three out of four in SY Za 2. If these texts be indeed of votive type, as is generally accepted, then the main part of the shortest, SY Za 2, from which group L 52-32 has been deliberately separated, may well represent the most concise expression of dedication.