

TWO NEW ROUNDELS WITH LINEAR A FROM KHANIA

During the Greek-Swedish Excavations of 1982 and 1983 at the Plateia Ag. Aikaterini, Kastelli, Khania two fragmentary roundels with Linear A inscriptions were discovered¹.

1. KH Wc 2117² = GSE 82, TC 23 = Mus.nr. 2117 (Plate I)

a) Context:

The roundel was found on a floor of LM III A date (Plate IV a) in an area which we suspect to have been an open courtyard constructed in the LM II period and in use until LM III B1. In this courtyard fourteen floors had accumulated to a depth of 50 cm³. Even though the roundel was found *on* one of these floors, we do not consider this the original context. The fragmentary state, the worn surface, and the very worn broken edge indicate that it had been moved around in different soils for some time, and it may originally have belonged to the Late Minoan I B destruction level. Moreover, the physical appearance of the roundel is very similar to that of several of those previously found in Khania, which are now considered to be of Late Minoan I date⁴.

¹ The excavations were under the general direction of Dr. Yannis Tzedakis, General Director of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities. The authors of this article, Mrs Maria Vlasakis and Dr. Erik Hallager, were responsible for the excavation on the site and are most grateful to Dr Tzedakis for his permission to present a separate publication of these two roundels.

² A small fragment of a roundel (KH Wc 2116) with only part of the edge preserved was found among the pottery material of the 1974 excavation. No inscription is preserved, but there is most of a seal-impression representing a jumping bull. The piece was found in a large LM III A1 pit, but may well — like KH Wc 2117 and 2118 — be of an earlier date.

³ See forthcoming reports in AA and AAA.

⁴ Παπαποστόλου, I.A., L. Godart and J.-P. Olivier, *Γραμμική Α τῶν Χανίων*, *In-cunabula Graeca*, Roma 1976, p. XIII; and Hallager, E. and M. Vlasakis, KH Inscriptions 1976, AAA 9, 1977, 218–219.

b) Description:

Roundel, fragmentarily preserved. Clay brick-red throughout, finely gritted, fired very hard. The obverse and the edges display a smooth, polished surface, whereas the surface of the reverse is very worn or possibly was never smoothed. Unusually, no fingerprints can be identified on this roundel. On the obverse, remains of one Linear A sign: on the reverse also, remains of one Linear A sign. On the edge, impressions (three completely and one fragmentarily preserved) from the same seal, portraying a nude woman with long hair by a pole, alongside which stands an oval object. Dimensions: estimated diam. 5.8 cms; th. 1.2 cms; l. and w. of seal-impression 1.66 and 0.86 cms.



c) The Inscriptions:

On the obverse, remains of one Linear A sign. Even though worn at the breaks it is seen to consist of two parallel vertical strokes crossed by at least two, and probably three, horizontal strokes. No reading is certain, but L 1, L 32 or even L 99 may be suggested. We have no means of telling whether or not the sign is isolated or part of a sign-group. A medium-pointed stylus was used to incise this sign, which is placed in the centre of the roundel. On the reverse, too, one sign is partly preserved. In this case the reading Lc 36 seems certain: only the 'stern of the ship' is missing. The sign occurs once on a tablet from Hagia Triada, and is already well attested on the Khania roundels⁵, though in all cases with other seal-impressions⁶. Palaeographically the Khania form of Lc 36 differs from that of Hagia Triada in that at Khania the two component signs (L 35 + 87) are not separated but combined as a single symbol.

⁵ HT 8b.5 see Godart, L. and J.-P. Olivier, *Recueils des inscriptions en Linéaire A (GORILA)*, 1. *Tablettes éditées avant 1970* (Études Crétoises 21,1), Paris 1976, 16–17. The Khania roundels are: KH Wc 2058, 2059, 2060, 2061 and 2062. See Παπαποστόλου, Godart and Olivier 1976 (supra n. 4), 172 and LXII.

⁶ Παπαποστόλου, I. A., *Τα Σφραγίσματα τῶν Χανίων*, Athens 1977, 162. KH Wc 2058, Motive 10: "Animal which gives suck to new born", p. 52, Plate 20–21.

KH Wc 2059, Motive 28: "Goddess in front of altar", p. 73f., Plate 38–39.

KH Wc 2060, Motive 26: "Hunting scene", p. 68, Plate 36–37.

KH Wc 2061, No sealing preserved.

KH Wc 2061, Motive 5: "Animal scratching its neck", p. 46f., Plate 16–17.

It is remarkable that the sign on the reverse of KH Wc 2117 has been incised with a very thin pointed needle, like (for example) the signs on KH Wc 2037–2040. The two signs on this last roundel have definitely been incised with two different implements⁷, in both cases before the object was baked. The significance of this procedure is obscure, since we cannot tell if the signs were written at different times and/or by different scribes. But at least we can now pose the question.

d) The seal-impression (Plates I and III):

The motive has been engraved on an amygdaloid seal of the elongated shape which came into use at the end of the LM I period. It depicts a religious or cult scene. The nude woman has long hair, large breasts, and rounded thighs and abdomen. In a 'free motion'⁸, she bends her head downwards, while raising her right arm to the forehead in a characteristic gesture⁹. The style of the female figure is entirely naturalistic.

⁷ From the published photographs and drawings it is not possible to distinguish with certainty whether or not the same may be the case with the other roundels inscribed on both sides. They are: GO Wc 1; HT Wc 3004, 3005, 3006, 3008, 3009, 3012, 3014, 3015, 3016, 3017, (3018), 3020; KE Wc 2; KH Wc 2070; KN (?) Wc (24), KN Wc 26; MA Wc (5); PH Wc 37, 39, 40. The above is based on GORILA (supra n. 5) 2 (Et. Crét. 21,2, Paris 1979), and 3 (Et. Crét. 21,3, Paris 1976).

⁸ Biesantz, H., *Kretisch-Mykenische Siegelbilder*, Marburg 1954, 57ff. distinguishes three types of motion on Minoan figures, the "gehemmte", "nachlassende" and "erstarende Bewegung" (enchained, free and loose motion) in connection with the three periods of Minoan civilisation. The "free motion" is the same as Sakellariou's style A in *Μυκηναϊκή Σφραγιδογλυφία*, Athens 1966, 104ff.

⁹ This gesture is usually adopted by adorants in prayer to the deity. See Picard, Ch., *Les Religions préhelléniques*, Paris 1948, 87–88; Matz, Fr., *Göttererscheinung und Kultbild im minoischen Kreta*, Akad. der Wiss. und der Litt. (Abhandl. der Geistes- und sozialwiss. Klasse) 1958, 7, Mainz 1958, 411, who considers it a praying gesture. (Compare the two bronze statuettes in Figs. 17 and 18; the male from Tylissos, the female in Berlin. They make a similar, but not identical gesture, because of the different position of the head. The gesture of the woman is closer to that of our seal-impression and that of the man recalls the bronze statuette from Hagia Triada which Schachermeyr, in *Die minoische Kultur des alten Kreta*, Stuttgart 1964, 135 and Pl. 22d, interprets as a gesture of the inferior to the superior. He adds that the same gesture is common in the cult-scene signet rings and has a softer rendering in the Berlin statuette). Σακελλαράκης, Ιω., *Τὸ θέμα της φερούσης ζώνος γυναίκος εἰς τὴν κρητο-μυκηναϊκὴν σφραγιδογλυφίαν*, AE 1972, 253–254 and note 10, also considers it to be a cult gesture. For the Berlin statuette see also Evans, A., *The Palace of Minos at Knossos* (PM) 1, London 1921, 508, Fig. 365: "we may have here to do with a priestess or votary rather than with the divinity itself."

In this position she stands in front of a high pole with an oval base¹⁰ and with a stem which gradually thins upwards and bends in towards the middle of the scene. The height of the pole may exceed that of the woman and it may disappear outside the limit of the seal-impression¹¹. Its inclination is due either to its thin and elongated shape which makes it top-heavy or to the artist having first engraved the woman in the centre of the seal and finding that the only way to extend the height of the pole over the woman was to bring it as close as possible to her. In fact the pole is so close that the woman touches it with her right hand.

The lower right edge of the impression has an obscure and uneven appearance. It seems to depict part of a rocky landscape, on which the pole has been fixed. It may be the slope of a hill, indicated by the sloping area which lies between the rocks in the lower part and the oval-shaped boulder seen in the middle on the extreme right edge of the impression¹².

The whole scene is enigmatic and the only thing clear is that the elements in this unique combination form a religious or cult scene.

Such an interpretation is confirmed by a golden signet ring from Knossos¹³ (Figure 1, below). A lady is depicted on a platform, in almost the same attitude, but now in long clothing in front of a free-standing high pole, which also grows gradually thinner and in addition has an obvious inclination towards the centre of the scene. Part of an enclosure for the sacred tree can be distinguished next to the pole. In front of the

¹⁰ See Rutkowski, B., *Frühgriechische Kultdarstellungen* (Mitteil. des Deut. arch. Inst., Athen. Abt. 8. Beiheft), Berlin 1981, 72 for the use of oval bases, as well as round and stepped ones, in erecting standards in cult scenes.

¹¹ We are most grateful to Chr. Boulotis, who kindly helped us to distinguish the scene.

¹² For the same problem of distinction of a field, see Παπαποστόλου 1977 (supra n. 6), 80, Pl. 43 (roundel KH Wc 2093).

¹³ Καρδαρά, Χρ., 'Υπαίθριοι στύλοι καὶ δένδρα ὡς μέσα ἐπιφανείας τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ κεραυνοῦ, AE 1966, 179–180, 188–189 and Fig. 29; Schachermeyr 1964 (supra n. 9), Fig. 71i and p. 151 interprets the scene as an epiphany of the deity, with a young male god, an adorant (or goddess) and column-and-tree sanctuary; Matz 1958 (supra n. 9), 391–392 calls the lady an adorant, on the basis of her gesture which he interprets as a prayer to the deity or a sudden reaction because of his appearance. He also connects the free-standing pole with the standards of the double axes at the Hagia Triada sarcophagus. Schachermeyr 1964 (supra n. 9), p. 159 also interprets the poles on a fragment of a Knossian stone vase as bases for double axe standards. Ἀλεξίου, Στ., Μινωικοὶ ἱστοὶ σημαίων, Κρ. Χρ. 17, 1963, p. 342–343 rejects this opinion; Higgins, R., *Minoan and Mycenaean Art*, London 1967, Pl. 238 states that it is a cult scene with a woman praying at a pillar shrine and a small winged god in the air; Evans, A., *Mycenaean Tree and Pillar Cult and its Mediterranean relations*, JHS 21, 1901, 171 suggests that the pole represents "the male form of the aniconic image"; Picard 1948 (supra n. 9), 195 says "Une colonne isolée rappelle les mâts du larnax d'Haghia Triada".

lady, a figure referred to as the 'male god' appears in the air, on a smaller scale.

Chr. Cardara¹⁴ interprets the scene as a possible 'epiphany', the lady as a fertility goddess (a local personification of the earth), the pole as an aniconic effigy of her consort and the gesture of the woman as a prayer of the earth to the god of the thunderbolt and rain, to come and fertilize her¹⁵. Other scholars give different interpretations, but all related to ceremonies of prayer to the deity.

The free-standing poles have been the subject of a special study by Chr. Cardara¹⁶. Her analyses lead her to interpret them as aniconic images of the god of the thunderbolt and rain in the Mediterranean and the Near East. Her view is related to the height of the poles made of wood or other material (particularly metal) which would attract thunderbolts, especially when erected on high places. Low poles may be symbolic images of the large functional ones. Alexiou in two articles¹⁷ interprets them as wooden masts for flags erected in sacred places, especially in palace shrines and peak sanctuaries, and compares them to the flags of Egyptian shrines. Marinatos in turn ruled out their interpretation as pillars or columns and connected them with Anatolian banners¹⁸.

As for the nudity of the female figure, it is well known that nude women are rarely depicted in Minoan art, but they are not absolutely absent and may have connection with fertility and related ceremonies. A nude woman appears on a gold signet ring from the Phaistos necropolis pulling and shaking the sacred tree. On another ring from the same necropolis a nude woman, probably a goddess, sits in front of a column¹⁹. The goddess on the sealing 1528 from Khania²⁰ who sits in

¹⁴ Καρδαρά 1966 (supra n. 13), 188–189.

¹⁵ Cf. also Pausanias I. 24. 3, where he records that at the Acropolis of Athens there was a statue of Gaia praying to Zeus to cause rainfall.

¹⁶ Καρδαρά 1966 (supra n. 13), 149–200. She adds that the representations of such poles disappear about 1450 B. C. at the same time as the use of the peak sanctuaries (p. 185).

¹⁷ 'Αλεξίου 1963 (supra n. 13), 339–351 and 'Αλεξίου, Στ., 'Ιστοὶ μινωϊκῶν ἱερῶν καὶ αἰγυπτιακοὶ πυλῶνες, AAA 2, 1969, 84–88. His examples are the poles on the miniature fresco from Knossos, on a fragment of a stone vase from Knossos, on the stone rhyton with boxers from Hagia Triada, and on the stone vase with the peak sanctuary from Zakro. None of them are later than the LM I B phase. He also interprets the oblong blocks on the poles as their supports on the wall, which appear in all the representations.

¹⁸ Marinatos, Sp., Kreta und das mykenische Hellas, München 1959, 97, No. 106.

¹⁹ Kenna, V.E.G., The seals of Kalyvia Messara, Kq.Xq. 17, 1963, 327–338, Pl. 1B, Figs. 3–4. A nude female figure also appears on the 'Ring of Minos', pulling down

the middle of the scene, flanked by two dressed women, may also be nude. She, too, raises her left hand in front of her face. Papapostolou thinks that this gesture has to do with an attribute of the goddess which demands nudity. Schachermeyr²¹ interprets the nude goddess with doves on the gold plates of the Mycenaean Shaft Grave III as the love-goddess, while Picard attributes to her an oriental origin²².

In conclusion, the female figure on our seal-impression may be either a goddess in a religious scene or an adorant in a cult scene. The gesture of the hand and the nudity may indicate an adorant who prays for the epiphany of the deity.

2. KH Wc 2118 = GSE 83, TC/5 = Mus.nr. 2118 (Plate II)

a) Context:

This roundel was found under much the same circumstances as KH Wc 2117. It was discovered in the same courtyard but between some of the earlier floors that belong to the Late Minoan III A1 period²³. The actual level was rather disturbed, but KH Wc 2118 was sealed between the earliest floor of the courtyard and the fourth. The deposit in which it was found contained pottery of the LM I, LM II and LM III A1 periods (Plate IVb), and we believe, for the same reasons as with KH Wc 2117, that this roundel also may originally have belonged to the LM I B destruction level. It should further be noted that this roundel bears the same inscription and the same seal-impressions as several others found at Khania and considered to be of LM I date²⁴.

b) Description:

Roundel, almost completely preserved. Brick-red throughout. Apart from a few large sand-grains it is finely gritted; it also contains small

a branch. Evans calls her "a minister of the divinity", PM 4.2, London 1935, 949–951, Fig. 917.

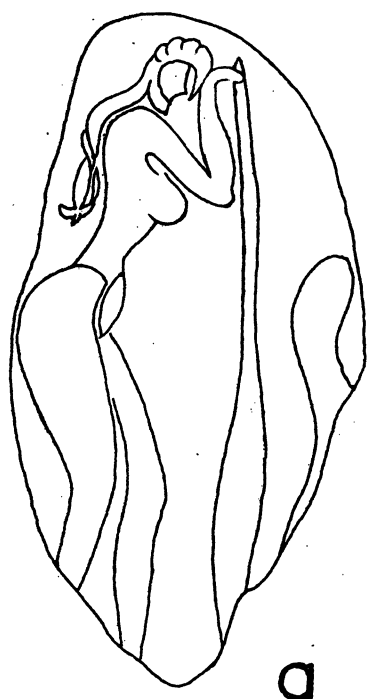
²⁰ Παπαποστόλου 1977 (supra n. 6), 78, Pl. 40.

²¹ Schachermeyr 1964 (supra n. 9), 153.

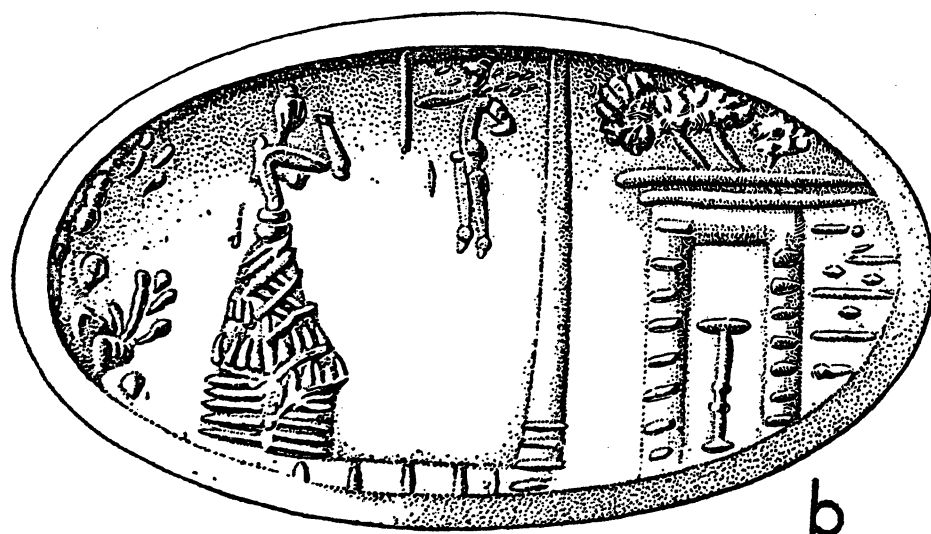
²² Picard 1948 (supra n. 9), 110. For the nude female figures of Minoan Crete see also Σαπουνά-Σακελλαράκη, E., *Μινωικών Ζώμα*, Athens 1971, 9–10, n. 5; 87 and 198 n. 2; Picard 1948 (supra n. 9), 194; Willetts, R. F., *Cretan Cults and Festivals*, London 1962, 76; Rutkowski 1981 (supra n. 10), 110.

²³ See supra n. 3.

²⁴ See supra n. 4.



a



b

Fig. 1 a) Seal-imprint from the Khania roundel KH Wc 2117

b) Gold signet-ring from Knossos, in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

bits of white lime. Fired very hard. Both sides and the edges originally smoothed, but now worn and partly broken in places. Fingerprints are found on both sides. On one side a completely preserved Linear A sign is incised. Along the preserved part of the edge there are six identical seal-impressions showing two sitting lions, one behind the other. None of the impressions is completely preserved. Measurements: max.diam. 5.4 cms; th. 1.4–1.6 cms; l. and w. of seal-impression ca. 0.9 and ca. 1.4 cms.

c) The Inscription:

This roundel is incised with only one sign, which is completely preserved, L 80. This sign has previously been recognized by Raison and Pope in sign-groups on seven Linear A inscriptions from different places in Crete and once as an ideogram²⁵; as an isolated sign it occurs three times on the nodules from Hagia Triada²⁶ and it is known on ten other roundels at Khania²⁷. Apart from the 'tripod-sign' L 182 it is the most common sign found on roundels in Khania. Raison and Pope's identification of L 80 on HT 113.3 as an isolated sign, if correct²⁸, might help us to understand the inscriptions on the roundels and the nodules. The position of L 80 on HT 113.3 means that it is either an ideogram or an isolated sign standing as an abbreviation for a commodity or for 'someone' who receives or delivers a commodity (since it is both preceded and followed by numerals). If it be conceded that the L 80s on the tablets and the roundels are really identical and have the same significance, we would have valuable evidence of identical and identifiable signs on the tablets on the one hand and on the roundels and nodules on the other²⁹.

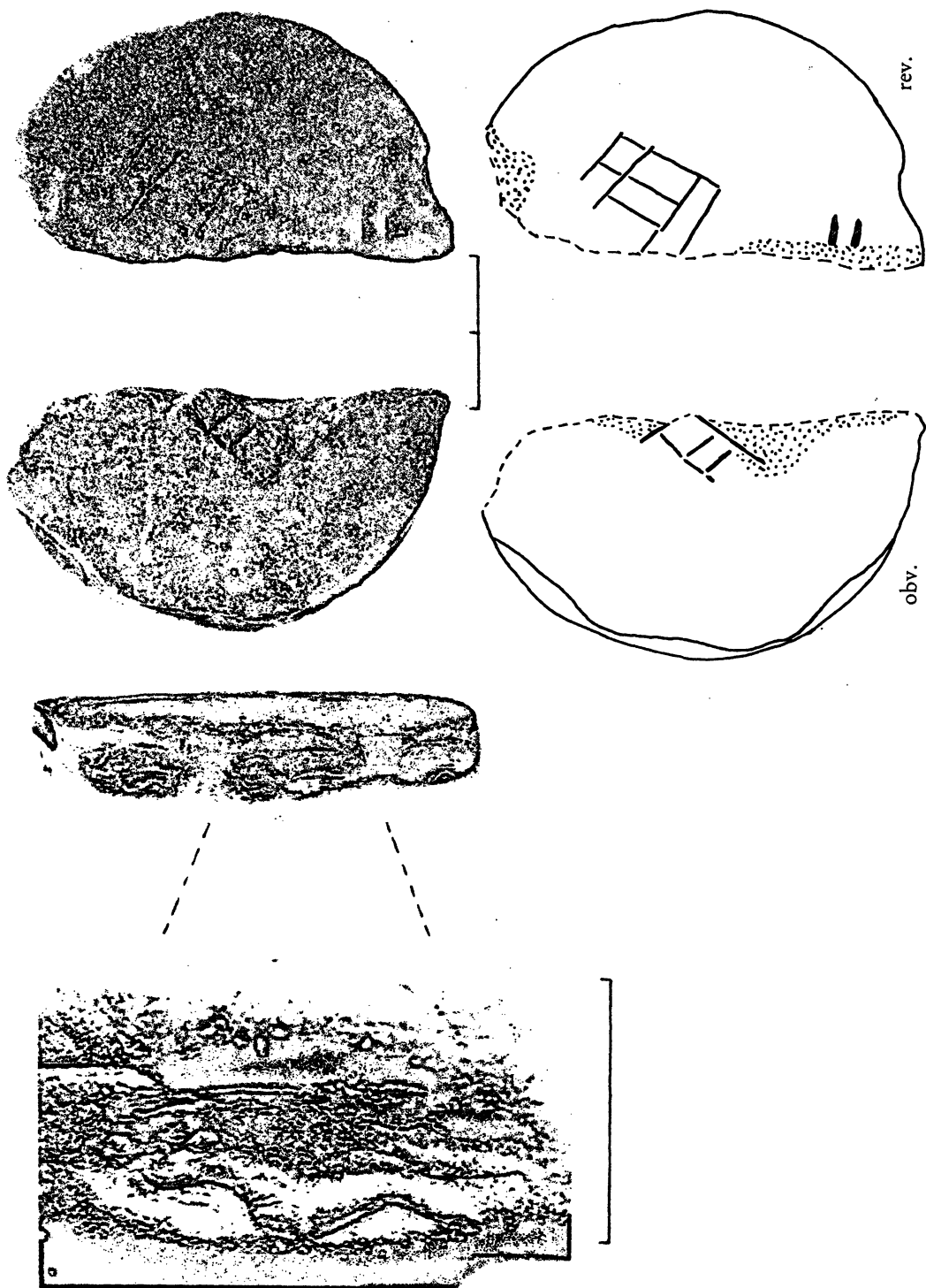
²⁵ Raison, J. and M. Pope, *Index du Linéaire A* (Incun. Gr. 41), Roma 1971, 195 and Raison, J. and M. Pope, *Corpus transnuméré du Linéaire A* (Bibl. des cah. de l'inst. de ling. de Louvain 18), Cabay 1980, where KN Z 12 has been omitted. The others are: HT 93a.6–.7, HT 144; PH 2.2; PK 1.2 et .4bis; TL Z 1.

²⁶ HT Wa 1279–1281, see Godart–Olivier 1976 (*supra* n. 7), 28 and XXVI.

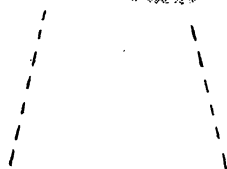
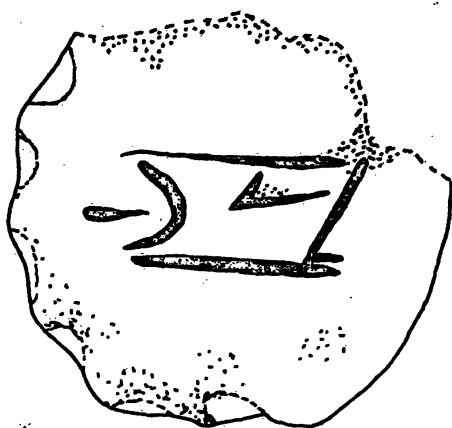
²⁷ Nrs. 2001 and 2002 (Hallager, E., *Linear A and Linear B Inscriptions from the excavations at Kastelli, Khania 1969–1972*, *Op. Ath.* 11, 1975, 53–86); Nrs. 2033, 2034, 2035, 2101, 2104, 2105 and 2110 (Παπαποστόλου, Godart, Olivier 1976 [*supra* n. 4]); No. 2115 (Hallager–Vlasakis 1977 [*supra* n. 4]).

²⁸ Also Godart–Olivier 1976 (*supra* n. 5), 185 consider this to be most likely an isolated sign, but it should be noted that they also consider the possibility that it may be the first sign in a sign-group L 80–51.

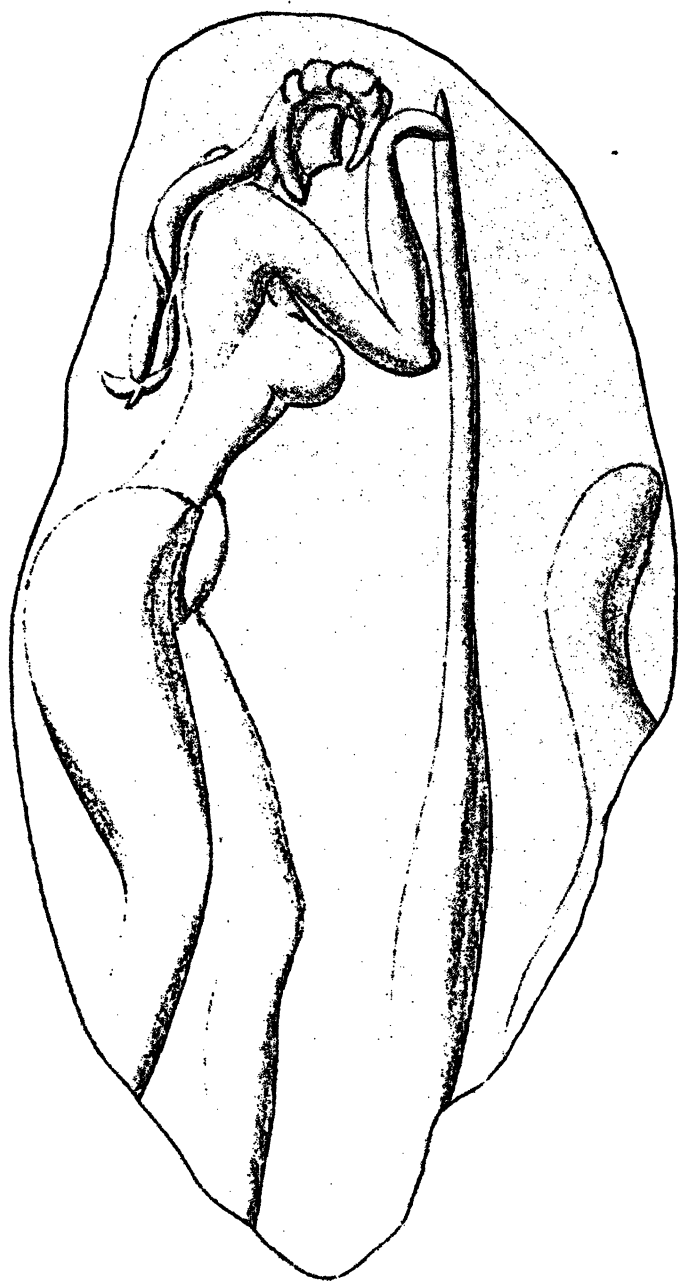
²⁹ Olivier, Jean-Pierre, *Une rondelle d'argile d'Haghia Triada (?) avec un signe en Linéaire A*, *BCH* 107, 1983, 80, esp. n. 34 and n. 35.



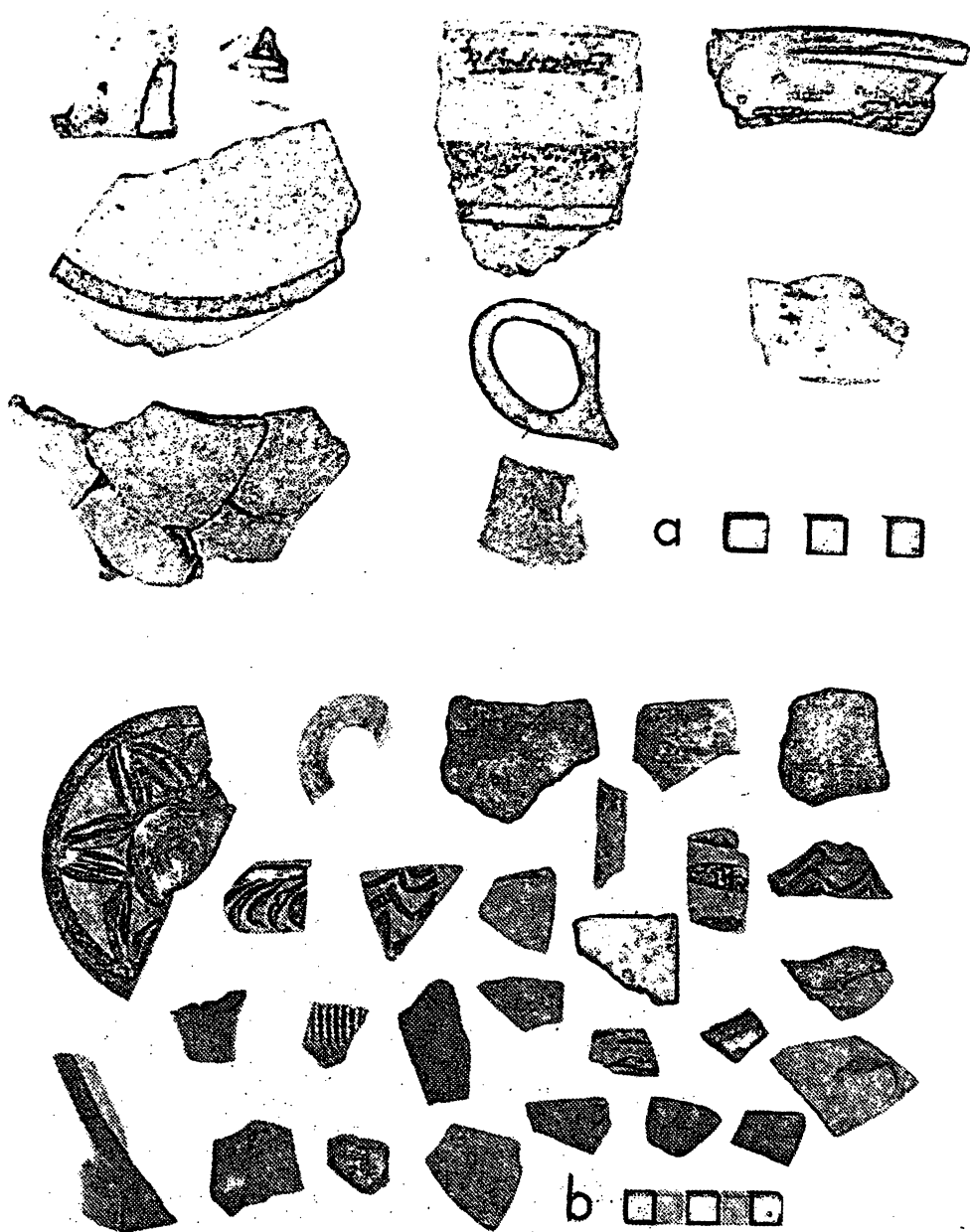
Pl. I. Clay roundel from Khania, KH Wc 2117



Pl. II. Clay roundel from Khania, KH Wc 2118



Pl. III. Seal-imprint from the Khania roundel KH Wc 2117



Pl. IV. Selection of pottery associated with
a) KH Wc 2117
b) KH Wc 2118

The sign is incised with a medium-pointed stylus. Palaeographically the sign on KH Wc 2118 reminds one very much of that on KH Wc 2033. In contrast with the remaining L 80s they have two characteristics in common: the lower horizontal stroke slopes markedly downwards to the right, so that the right vertical stroke is much longer than the left; and the 'head' of the sign is here only a single stroke. This evidence is of course not sufficient for conclusions about scribes or 'hands', but it may be worthy of note that at least two of the L 80s (on KH Wc 2035 and 2110) must have been written by two scribes different from those who wrote the others³⁰, even though all the sealings involved (with the exception of KH Wc 2033) have the same seal-impression on their edges. This observation indicates, in the author's opinion, that the inscriber of the roundel and the owner of the seal were not necessarily identical³¹. They were in fact different in the case of at least some of the nodules³². The seal-impression connected with the sign L 80, and until now only found on roundels, is not confined to this inscription only. It occurs twice in association with L 182, once with L 183, three times with L 48, and three times on roundels where no inscriptions have been preserved³³.

d) The seal-impression:

This comes from the well-known amygdaloid seal with the representation of the two recumbent lions in an antithetic pose, impressions of which have already been found on eighteen other items from Khania³⁴. The same – naturalistic or purely decorative – motif also appears on seals from the rest of Crete and from the Mycenaean mainland, of earlier

³⁰ Godart and Olivier also propose different groupings for this sign in the KH inscriptions. Παπαποστόλου–Godart–Olivier 1976 (supra n. 4), LVIII.

³¹ Παπαποστόλου–Godart–Olivier 1976 (supra n. 4), LXIV.

³² Godart–Olivier 1979 (supra n. 7), LXI. See also Olivier 1983 (supra n. 29), 78–91.

³³ The 19 roundels with the 'sitting lion' motif are:

Sign KH Wc number

L 48 2003, 2063, 2102

L 80 2001, 2002, 2034, 2035, 2101, 2104, 2105, 2110, 2115, 2118

L 182 2019, 2020

L 183 2084

? 2083, 2085, 2086

³⁴ Παπαποστόλου 1977 (supra n. 6), 56–57, Pl. 1, 24a, 25a–b, with a detailed description; also *Corpus der Minoischen und Mykenischen Siegel* 5, Klein. Griech. Samml. 1, Bearb. Ingo Pini, Berlin 1975, No. 236, p. 193. See also supra n. 33.

and later dates³⁵. Its style of execution is due to a tendency to abstraction³⁶ which keeps pace with the naturalism at the end of the LM I B phase³⁷.

3. Comments

The two roundels discovered during the Greek-Swedish Excavations in 1982 and 1983 fall naturally within the group of roundels found at other excavations in the Kastelli area. Identical seal-impressions and similar signs clearly indicate that they are more or less contemporaneous and that they are somehow connected. Most regrettably none of them appear to have been found in their original context. We still do not know the function of the roundels within the Linear A archives and administrative system³⁸, but it is to be hoped that the ever-growing number of roundels being found at Khania may one day permit us to be more specific on the problems of the 'writers' and owners of seals, the meanings of the signs, and the function of these roundels in more general terms.

³⁵ Παπαποστόλου 1977 (*supra* n. 6), 57, n. 2.

³⁶ For the abstract style see Παπαποστόλου 1977 (*supra* n. 6), 112–113.

³⁷ The same can be seen in the pottery decoration, where naturalistic plant motifs co-exist with others, absolutely schematic, of the 'alternating style'.

³⁸ See also Olivier 1983 (*supra* n. 29), 80–81.