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AN EARLY INSCRIPTION ON STONE AT KNOSSOS

While working at Knossos in the early part of 1988, with the kind permission of the Greek Archaeological Service, and thanks to the hospitality of the Staff of the Taverna at Knossos, I noticed a large limestone slab inscribed with four signs.

The limestone block in question stands (Fig. 1, Pl. I) at the extreme NW corner of the Palace, leaning against the end of a massive founda-

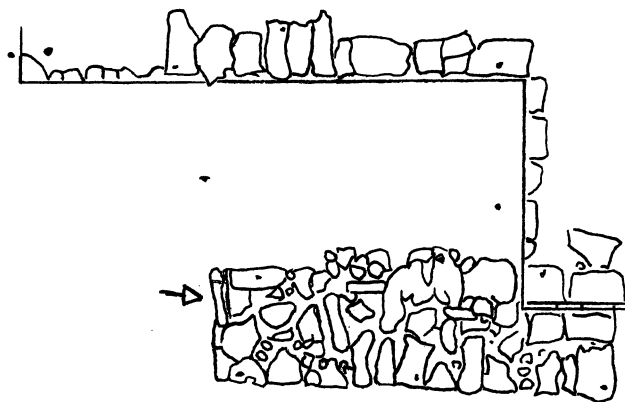


Fig. 1. North-West corner of the Palace of Minos. The arrow indicates location of the inscribed slab

tion wall or platform. Evidently the block is no longer in situ, for it is supported by a fill of smaller stones behind and underneath it, and traces of some securing mortar are still visible on its back and base. Nevertheless, we cannot but assume, if only on grounds of its size, that it might still stand at or near its find-spot. It stands some 69 cm high at the left, 78 cm at the right, and is some 128 cm in width and about 19 cm thick. I calculate its weight as approximately 470 kg. There is a crack running through the middle of the block from the left to the

right, roughly parallel to the base. The text is about 50 cm high and 86 cm wide.

Arthur Evans, in PM I 131 ff., assigned the block to MM I — the time of the First Palace — and referred to the inscription (Fig. 2, Pl. II) as a mason's elaborate mark. I assume that it was for these two reasons, the early date attributed to it, and its categorization as a series of masons' marks, that the inscription has not been included in the corpus of Linear A. Since, however, the group is unique among the masons' marks through its length, I decided to look more closely at its dating, and to compare it with other inscriptions on stone which have been accepted as Linear A.

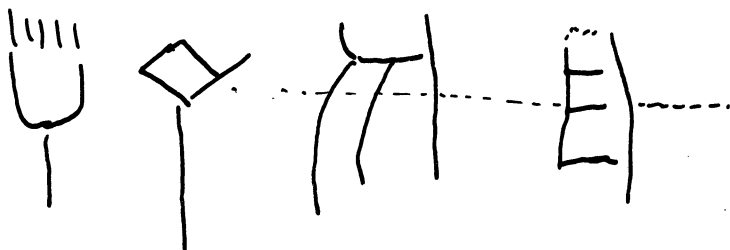


Fig. 2. the inscription as copied at Knossos, March 5, 1988

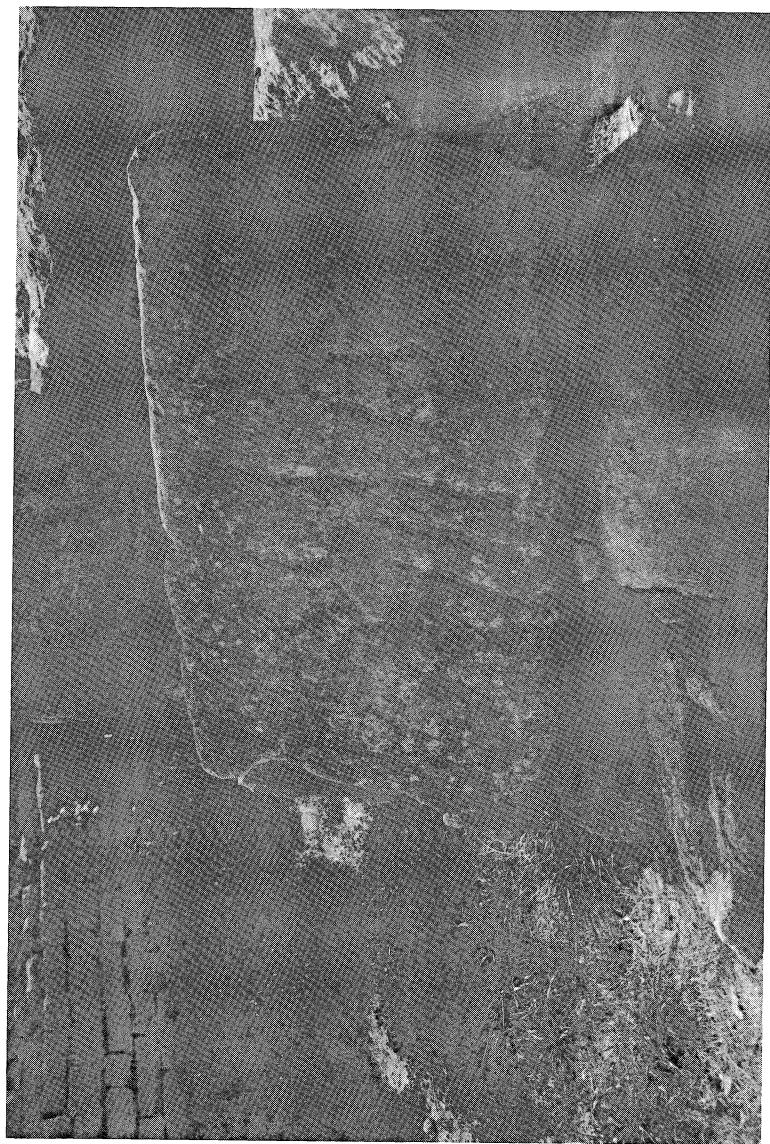
There is no mention of the inscribed stone in any of the five annual reports published by Evans in BSA 6–10. In the first season the extreme NW corner of the Palace had not yet been reached; the foundation wall appears on the plan of the second season's results, but there is no trace of the slab on the photograph (BSA 7, 1912, fig. 2). Though Sir Arthur did not make any mention of the circumstances or exact provenance of the block, the text in PM I suggests an excavation between 1906 and 1910, when he made a range of soundings to test the Enceinte of the East slope, whereas he made soundings along the West Facade near Mags. III–X in 1905.

In a letter of March 1988, Mr. Sinclair Hood kindly gave me his opinion that "... the loose block found near the NW corner ... was probably one of the early foundation blocks of the First Palace built in MM I ..."

In BSA 7, 5, Evans was undecided about dating the foundation wall, however. He first described it as "... an oblong structure of large limestone blocks which had the appearance of very primitive build ...",



Pl. I. The inscribed block, leaning against the end of the foundation wall at the NW corner of the Palace of Knossos.



Pl. II. The inscribed block at Knossos.

suggesting an interpretation as “being quite early in date”: but he continued, “... it is probable, however, from its position against the corner of the wall that this massive platform really was a later structure ...”

In PM II 590 Evans shows this structure as part of a possible NW Entrance system — though this interpretation was fiercely challenged by Graham (Palaces of Crete 118, 198). The Palace plans of MM I and MM II reproduced by Pendlebury (AoC figs 13, 20) and Schachermeyr (Min. Kultur figs 12, 43) do not show this foundation wall, though it makes its appearance on the plan of the LM I situation (AoC fig 30a). From the structural evidence at present, one might suppose that the tongue, pointing northwards without any understandable purpose, cannot be associated with the West Facade in its original function. I assume it to be part of the massive and continuous building activities in this area, even as late as LM III (Hallager, Mycenaean Palace at Knossos 47 etc.). In summary, there is no other choice at the moment but to associate the block with a projection to the North of the West Facade. Based upon Hallager’s study of pottery from there (MPK 43 ff.), giving evidence of a MM II construction, Pendlebury’s (AoC 97) mention of its remodelling in MM Ib, and Evans’s observations of “... an original structure dating from the close of the First Middle Minoan Period ...” (PM I 129), a date within MM II, probably near the transition MM Ib/MM II (that is between the first and second building phases) would seem reasonable. Such a date would accord with that of the earliest texts from Phaistos (Raison-Pope, *Corpus transnum.* 1980, 269) or even with that of the even earlier traces of Linear A from Archanes (AR 22, 1975/76, 29; Kadmos 16, 1975, 181).

The following inscriptions on stone may be compared (Fig. 3):

- a. KN Z 16 from the entrance of the Kefala Tholos Tomb (GOR. IV 138, *Corpus t. n.* 260):
L 52 — 56a — (.)
- b. The inscription from the Royal Tomb at Isopata, like that here under consideration not included in the Linear A corpus, and (falsely) considered by Evans as masons’ marks
- c. MA Z 11 (GOR. IV 140, *Corpus t. n.* 260), dated to MM III:
L 91 — 57 — 92

It should be remarked, that this last, the Malia inscription, like the one which is the main object of this study, was found in the NW corner of the Palace, not far from a deposit of hieroglyphic sealings of MM II date (AoC 140).

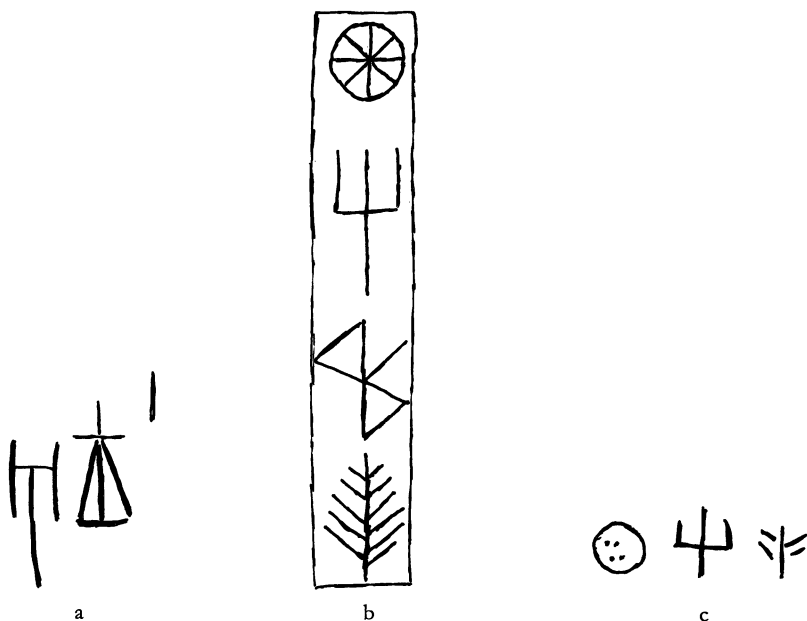


Fig. 3.

a. KN Z 16, after Hood.

b. The Isopata Inscription, after Evans, PH Tombs.

c. MA Z 11 (GOR IV 140).

The inscription on our stone slab consists of four rather archaic linear signs, in this combination without parallel in the Linear A corpus. In its length it matches the — also unclassified — inscription from Isopata, whereas MA Z 11 comprises three and KN Z 16 only two signs. The only evident common feature of the contents of these inscriptions is that those from Malia and Isopata have two signs in common.

This inscription from Isopata, classified by Evans as mason's marks (prehistoric Tombs of Knossos, 1906, 166 ff., fig. 14) and thought to be exceptional by Hood (Function 209) deserves further notice: I think, it is incorrect to read this inscription horizontally from left to right (as published by Evans); rather, it should be put upright, along the axis as here drawn, and be read from the top to the bottom.

The wheel, then the first sign, obviously represents an elaborate design of L 29, the second is to be compared with L 57, the following labrys is the well-known L 52 and the fourth without any doubt L 92.

An elaborate form of L 29 — though in a different layout — can be observed in IO Z 6 (Kadmos 24, 1985, 89 ff.), where we possess an identical L 57 as well.

In its Isopata design the labrys has a parallel in GR Z 1 (Corpus t. n. 31 and IXTLA 49, 126), a text discarded in GOR. Other elaborate, though different, forms are known from IO Z 2, IO Z 3, IO Z 7 (all Kadmos 24) and KO Z 1 (GOR. IV 18).

In its Isopata pattern, the sign 92 with its six branches is unique, the number of the branches normally being smaller in the Z-series. If included in the Linear A corpus (I would plead for this), the text L 29 — 57 — 52 — 92 finds some parallels in MA Z 11's L 91 — 57 — 92. It may be worth observing that L 29 and L 91, when transliterated into orthodox Linear B values, give the similar sounds *ka* and *qe*.

Our NW-corner inscription, which should also be included in the Linear A corpus, under the chapter Knossos, is not easily interpreted; I suggest the following reading:

- Sign 1 (from left) is the most difficult one to interpret: it recalls sign 55, though in a variant form not included in IXTLA (p. 49). The 'hachures' between the two horns, however, are puzzling. These shift the sign into the vicinity of P 29 of the Minoan hieroglyphic syllabary (Scripta Minoa I fig. 102). In Linear A we can safely exclude sign 34, as this bears not the slightest similarity to our sign. IXTLA 52, line 4, sign 2 presents, in form *ad* of the Linear A sign 100a, another candidate, though the number of its 'fingers' does not exactly correspond.
- Sign 2 (from left) seems less problematic. It is very close to form *a* of sign 48b (IXTLA 49, line 1), though the evidence regarding this sign is rather thin still. A classification as 79 or 162 can be ruled out because of the structural differences.
- Sign 3 of the sequence resembles Linear A sign 93 in its form *c* (IXTLA 51, line 3, 11th sign). This variant has been attested on HT texts from Khania and Tyliossos. At Knossos it appears in KN Z 10, from the House of the Frescoes, coincidentally near the site of our inscription.
- Sign 4 though in this variant not attested in IXTLA represents, without any doubt, Linear A 32.

A reading L 55 — 48b — 93 — 32 seems possible, though 100a instead of 55 would be the more attractive solution because of the likely vowel-value at the beginning of the word.