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ON THE TABLETS FROM THE 'ROOM OF THE LADY'S SEAT' AT KNOSSOS

In his annual report in the BSA for 1900–01 which concerns the progress of his excavations at the Palace of Knossos, Evans announced the discovery of a few damaged tablets¹ amongst the material comprising a blocked doorway in the SW corner of what is now termed Room 48² – the 'Room of the Lady's Seat', sited to the north of the Throne Room in the West Wing (Fig. 1). Naturally, scholars have since then followed Evans in his location.³ With the identification of these tablets, along with others in the same region, as of the Linear B class,⁴ the conclusion has been drawn that the Throne Room area was still occupied in a period when such tablets were or had been in circulation.⁵ Whether the event of blocking the door could have been undertaken, say, in LM IIIa 1 after some putative LM II disturbance or renovation, or much later still in LM IIIb or IIIc, is not readily apparent from the fragmentary tablets themselves – and, since no associated ceramic finds are extant, the matter is not pursued further here. The simple presence of the tablets in a blocked doorway between rooms whose latest phase of occupation involved seven relayings of the plaster floors could be argued to support a later rather than an earlier date for the Linear B

* This note results from the preparation of a site report on work carried out in 1987 in a series of rooms on the north and west flanks of the Throne Room proper. It is offered simply as a corrective. The text has been read by Dr. J. Killen, whom I thank for this kindness and for more up-to-date observations on the nature of the tablet fragments concerned.

¹ Evans, BSA 7, 1900–01, 31: "under the rubble partition with which it was blocked were found some fragmentary remains of linear tablets . . .".

² According to Hood's enumeration in *The Bronze Age Palace at Knossos* 18.134 (48).

³ For example: Palmer OKT 109ff.; Olivier, LSC 20ff. Though Palmer, OKT 110 and 114, is aware of some tablets being found in 1901 under the blocked door in Room 49, he does not take the association further.

⁴ Evans, BSA 9, 1902–03, 52ff., first coined this division as a result of Halbherr's finds of Linear A material at Aghia Triadha; though their exact temporal relationship took him a while longer to appreciate.

⁵ Such a rationale underlies the work of Palmer and others, who propose a late date for the Destruction of the Palace.

archive, and further to bear on the controversy surrounding the timing of the Fall of Knossos. It follows that if — as will be shown below — Evans almost certainly made a mistake in assigning the position of these fragments, such questions may require some review.

The sequence of events that caused Evans to err opens in the excavation season of 1900. Late in April 1900, attention was turned to the western half of Room 48;⁶ the eastern portion had been dealt with slightly earlier in the month.⁷ In the course of a single day's work (on the 26th) there was revealed what Mackenzie described as a recess (0.95 mtrs. wide and 1.50 high) or 'cupboard' at the south end of the west wall: remains of burnt side-posts of wood set in a vertical groove lined with plaster as well as a lintel⁸ caused the whole room to be known as 'of the Cupboard'. On the 27th April, Evans comments on the similarity of Room 48's feature with one in the E-W Corridor of the Stone Basin (Room 49) to the north: this was also termed a 'cupboard'.⁹

In 1901, however, Evans finally determined that the structure "at the end of the Corridor behind the Ante-Chamber turns out to be a blocked doorway with wooden posts. Under the later wall here are some tablets in a much decomposed state."¹⁰ The Corridor in question is Room 49, of course; what exact feature is meant by 'the later wall' is not absolutely clear — blocked door or added support along the west part of the south wall of the Corridor? The former is taken to be correct here. As for Room 48, to judge from other activities in the Rooms around the Throne Room in this same year, there is a strong likelihood that its 'cupboard' was recognized for what it was, a blocked door . . . and removed. Certainly the name of the Room as it is recorded in contemporary writings is now connected to the stone seat in the room,¹¹ not at all to the so-called 'cupboard'.

It is suggested here that the similarity and physical proximity of the two locales were responsible for the consequent confusion. Though the entry in his site notebook for 1901 openly declares that it is the 'cupboard' (= 'blocked door', or 'later wall') in Room 49 which yielded the tablets, by the time Evans got round to writing up the BSA version of the year's activities, he had muddled the two 'cupboards' in his mind and thereby transferred the

⁶ Mackenzie, Revised Notebook 1900, vol. 3, 26th April.

⁷ The exact date is not apparently recorded in the notebooks.

⁸ As footnote 6.

⁹ The description seems to have been borrowed by Evans for the Room 49/Corridor example; compare Evans, Notebook 1900 52 for 27th April, with Mackenzie, Revised Notebook 1900, vol. 3 for 27th April.

¹⁰ Evans, Notebook 1901 19.

¹¹ Evans, BSA 7, 1900–01, 31.

tablets to Room 48.¹² He may further have been confused by other tablets reputed to have been found in a 'blocked doorway' between Room 44/44a — but the actual existence of these is problematical too, for much the same reasons.¹³ This error, once made, proved durable, since no apparent problems or inconsistencies were raised to alert suspicion.

Another matter that might have contributed to the confusion is the fact that *one* 'tablet' was recovered in Room 48.¹⁴ This turned up at floor level (the latest in the white plaster series) at the south side of the Room, more or less opposite the west jamb of the door communicating with the E-W Corridor (Room 49). Evans' and MacKenzie's remarks for late April 1900 agree on its 'square bar' or 'prism' form, and on the fact that it carries signs in a script different from that of the tablets recovered earlier (known now to be in Linear B).¹⁵ The object is not now identifiable: it sounds like a Hieroglyphic bar, perhaps resembling P. 112 in *Scripta Minoa I*.¹⁶ The reason for its presence in a context so far removed from its likely period of use is unclear.¹⁷

Concerning the Linear B tablets recovered in 1901 from Room 49 and in the Rooms flanking the Throne Room, opinions differ. Once again, Evans has not made matters easy.¹⁸ Palmer wends his way through the conflicting

¹² See footnote 1. Also at the rear of a Notebook of Evans (of a sort used in 1900) was a list of tablets and findspots, which gives the information i) "under blocked door of room behind throne with other decayed tablets" — 1058–1059 (= D 747, X 748), and ii) "under blocked Doorway of Room W. of Throne" — 1087 (= U 746). This section, however, has to be an addition made in 1901. Cf. Palmer, OKT 5 ff. and 35 (End of 1900 Notebook) for all this confusion — not completely comprehensible now.

¹³ See ii) in previous footnote.

¹⁴ Mackenzie, Revised Notebook 1900, vol. 3 for 26th April — for plan and rough description; Evans, Notebook 1900 for 26th April — for a slightly fuller one.

¹⁵ Earlier found (Linear B) tablets, with which Evans and Mackenzie were familiar, come from the SW area (early April 1900), the South Propyleum (late March 1900) and, par excellence, the Room of the Chariot Tablets (early April 1900).

¹⁶ This identification is not suggested as an accurate one — merely as a potential likeness: Evans, SM I 176, pls. vii–x.

¹⁷ Most likely it had been included in the make-up of wall or ceiling, whence it had emerged in the general collapse.

¹⁸ Evans' allocations vary (Palmer, OKT 114 ff.): End of 1900 Notebook — 1087 (= U 746) from "under blocked doorway of Room W. of Throne"; the Hand List repeats the above, now placed in the "Room of the Cupboard"; and likewise Evans' Concordance. In SM II 40, he assigns 746–748 to "under blocked door of Room behind Throne", though confusingly the catch-headings in the line-drawings include only 747–748 as "under blocked door behind Throne Room". 743–745 are noted as South of the Corridor of the Bath, or of the Stone Basin: it is not clear where exactly these are from, though Olivier allocates them to Room 48 (see footnote 19).

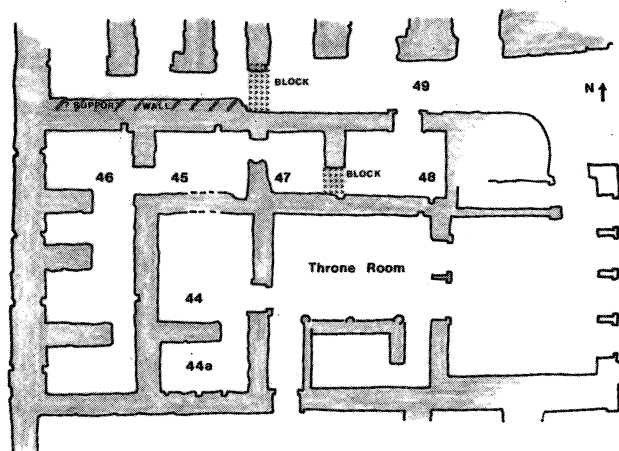


Fig. 1. Throne Room Area: Location of Rooms and other features

allocations:¹⁹ only U 746, he feels, can be placed with certainty in Room 48 (or, as now proposed, Room 49), though D 747 and X 748 are noted as having been added to this for some reason by Evans in *Scripta Minoa II*. Interestingly, Palmer refers once to this last pair as being conceivably assignable to within the Room 49 Corridor.²⁰ It is not clear on what authority he has taken this decision of allocation.

Olivier holds a more complex position:²¹ he effectively sees, with some reservations, *two* sets of tablets in Room 48, and more again in Room 44 (Room of the Inner Shrine — due west of and entered from the Throne Room). In Room 48 he places first X 743–744 and Oa 745, whilst in the doorway of Room 48/47 were unearthed, perhaps, D 747 and X 748;²² lastly U 746 is assigned to under the Blocked Door in Room 44/44a.

¹⁹ Palmer, OKT 58 and 114. There is a rather awful, if remote, possibility that U 746 might indeed belong to the doorway between Rooms 44 and 44a (to the south): the piece has been allocated to “blocked doorway of Room W. of Throne” in the end of Evans’ 1900 Notebook (Palmer, OKT 35), and early photography and plans make it clear that this doorway was NOT immediately recognized/opened by Evans.

²⁰ Palmer, OKT 58, in section “Under Blocked Door behind Throne Room”.

²¹ Olivier, LSC 23 ff. and plan on 21: H4 (743–745: south of Corridor of the Stone Basin); H5 (746: under blocked doorway of Room W. of Throne); H6 (747–748: under blocked door of room behind Throne).

²² He also entertains the possibility that 747–748 might come from Room 49, or even from the north end of the Long Corridor west of the Throne Room Area (LSC 24).

Matters may not be so simple though: attention to the actual wordings of the locations given to the tablets by Evans (and used by Olivier) raises doubts and ambiguities. 743–745 are designated rather loosely to 'south of the Corridor of the Stone Basin' – Rooms 48, 47 and 45 lie immediately to the south, whilst 44, 44a and the 46 group are in turn adjacent: Palmer does not make particular placements. 747 and 748 are "under blocked door of room behind throne", which might just indicate Room 44/44a, though Room 48 would be preferred.

The topics of the tablets are varied and not always very clear:²³ 743 – uncertain, opens with ethnic 'women at Amnisos'; 744 – unclear, possibly religious milieu, opens with reference to people/objects going to a place *ma-sa*; 745 – joins with Oa 7374 (of unknown findspot), and concerns the offering of linen cloth to the 'Mistress of the Labyrinth'; 746 – to do with the commodity *172, ?honeycomb; 747 – sheep at Phaistos, 'owned' by *Ja-di-je-u*; and 748 – unclear. Their scribal hands are not identifiable.

In this context, it is perhaps worth observing that as a whole the haul of tablets from the wider Throne Room Area is highly varied in its subject matter: sheep, cloth, cattle, shipbuilding, spices and rations/personnel. It also has ties with larger groups further afield in the same wing, namely the 15th Magazine and the Room of the Chariot Tablets. The picture is of a haphazard and fortuitous occurrence of pieces: Palmer even suggests that D 747 belongs to a series drawn up by an earlier generation of scribes.²⁴

The conclusions to be drawn are straightforward: none of the above tablets need have anything to do with Room 48, and are probably more at home in the region of Room 49. Thus Palmer's account seems closer to 'reality' than Olivier's. In terms of comprehending the site's history, this re-allocation has little to offer beyond freeing this portion of the Throne Room Area from all arguments for an LM IIIB or later occupation based only on this class of object. However, even if they do belong to a blocked door (deliberately done, or as a result of general structural collapse?) in Room 49, these tablets will continue to stand in exactly the same overall relationship to the palatial story as they did beforehand in Room 48.

²³ Taken from the transliterations offered by Killen & Olivier, *The Knossos Tablets*⁵ (supp. to Minos 1990), and the vocabulary supplied by Ventris & Chadwick, *DMG* 2nd ed. Palmer, OKT 114, gives additional commentary on 745, 746 and 747.

²⁴ Palmer, OKT 114.

Bibliography and Abbreviations

In addition to the normal set employed:

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| SM I | Evans, A. J. <i>Scripta Minoa: The Written Documents of Minoan Crete.</i>
1. The Hieroglyphic and Primitive Linear A Classes (Oxford, 1909) |
| SM II | Evans, A. J. & Myres, J. L. <i>Scripta Minoa: The Written Documents</i>
<i>of Minoan Crete, 2. The Archives of Knossos</i> (Oxford, 1952) |
| OKT | Palmer, L. R. in: <i>On the Knossos Tablets: The Findplaces of the Knossos</i>
<i>Tablets</i> (Oxford, 1963) |
| LSC | Olivier, J.-P. <i>Les scribes de Cnossos: Essai de classement des ar-</i>
<i>chives d'un palais mycénien</i> (Rome, 1967) |
| DMG 2nd | Ventris, M. & Chadwick, J. L. <i>Documents in Mycenaean Greek</i> –
2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1973) |