

JOHN BENNET

## TWO NEW MARKS ON BRONZE AGE POTTERY FROM KOMMOS\*

In this brief article I present two new marks on Bronze Age pottery from the site of Kommos in south-central Crete<sup>1</sup>. Scholars have recently begun to appreciate the importance of marks of this type, since they are closely bound up with the process of manufacture and distribution of ceramics within and beyond the Aegean, and, in some cases, show a relationship with the Aegean and Cyprio-Minoan scripts. The timely publication of new examples is, therefore, of considerable importance in extending our understanding of this and other “para-textual” phenomena of the Bronze Age Aegean<sup>2</sup>.

---

\* I am grateful to Professor Joseph W. Shaw for permission to publish these marks. The following special abbreviations are used:

Bennet = J. Bennet, “Marks on Bronze Age Pottery from Kommos”, forthcoming in: J. W. and M. C. Shaw, eds., *Kommos I.2*, Princeton 1995.

Döhl = H. Döhl, “Bronzezeitliche Graffiti und Dipinti aus Tiryns II: Nach dem Brand eingeritzte und gemalte Zeichen”, *Kadmos* 18, 1979, pp. 47–70.

GORILA = L. Godart and J.-P. Olivier, *Recueil des inscriptions en linéaire A*. Volumes 1–5 (*Études Crétoises* XXI, 1–5), Paris 1976–1985.

Olivier = J.-P. Olivier, “Tirynthian Graffiti. Ausgrabungen in Tiryns 1982/83”, *Archäologischer Anzeiger*, 1988, pp. 253–268.

<sup>1</sup> For a preliminary report on the most recent work at the site, see J. W. and M. C. Shaw, *Hesperia* 62, 1993, pp. 129–190, with extensive reference to earlier work. An excellent illustrated account of work at the site up to 1990 is contained in J. W. Myers, E. E. Myers and G. Cadogan, eds., *The Aerial Atlas of Ancient Crete*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1992, pp. 148–153.

<sup>2</sup> Recent publications of marks of this kind include: L. Godart and J.-P. Olivier, *Écriture hiéroglyphique crétoise*, in: J.-C. Poursat, L. Godart and J.-P. Olivier, *Fouilles exécutées à Mallia. Le Quartier Mu I (Études Crétoises XXIII)*, Paris 1978, pp. 28–217; H. Döhl, *Kadmos* 17, 1978, pp. 115–149; Döhl; A. H. Bikaki, *Keos IV. Ayia Irini: The Potters’ Marks*, Mainz 1984; Olivier; M. Tsipopoulou, *Kadmos* 29, 1990, pp. 92–106; N. Hirschfeld, “Cypriot Marks on Mycenaean Pottery”, in: J.-P. Olivier, ed., *Mykenaiika (BCH Supplément XXV)*, Paris 1992, pp. 315–319. For recent work on marks on MH pottery, see J. Rutter, *American Jour-*

I have published the thirteen examples of marks on pottery known to date from Bronze Age Kommos<sup>3</sup>, and add these two new examples which came to light after the typescript of my contribution went to press. For the sake of consistency, I present below the two new marks as the next in the sequence of catalogue numbers (14 and 15) and in catalogue entries of identical format to those in the Kommos publication.

### The Marks

14 (C 5397, 5B/3:7). Fragmentary handle with mark. Pl. 1a, Fig. 1a. Max. dim. 19.0. Coarse red, very dense fabric (5 YR 6/6) with gray core. Medium to coarse white, red and gray inclusions. Handle and shoulder fragments of stirrup jar of Chaniot fabric. Exterior is self-slipped, slightly gritty and badly worn, with possible traces of black paint.

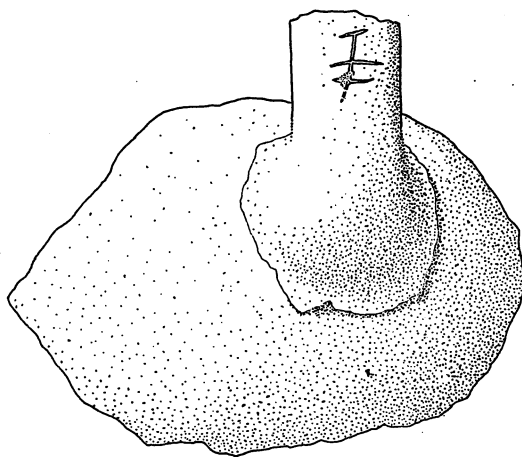


Fig. 1a. Kommos Mark 14 (scale 2 : 1). J. Clarke.

---

nal of Archaeology 97, 1993, p. 776, n. 131. A parallel phenomenon is the interest in sealing systems: see, for example, T. G. Palaima, ed., *Aegean Seals, Sealings, and Administration*, *Aegaeum* 5, Liège 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Bennet.

LM III A2 from Hilltop, W area of Court 2.

Mark: single mark incised after firing, or just possibly at bone dry stage before firing. Preserved height 1.5. There are good parallels for marks incised probably after firing on stirrup jar handles elsewhere in the Aegean, including Kommos (Bennet, no. 12) and Tiryns (Döhl, catalogue nos. 81–85 and n. 57, no. 1 [from Mycenae]; Olivier, nos. 16–18, 20–23). The mark (a vertical crossed by three horizontals, one at the top, one in the middle, one on the bottom) does not resemble any sign belonging to the Linear B syllabary, but the form here bears at least a superficial resemblance to marks on vessels from Tiryns published by Döhl (particularly his catalogue nos. 81 and 84; possibly also no. 82) and Olivier (his catalogue no. 23, although the similarity is less close). It should be noted that Döhl's nos. 81–82 and the example he illustrates from Mycenae have marks preserved on both handles, a possibility unverifiable for Kommos 14 with only one handle preserved.

Reference: L. V. Watrous, *Kommos III. The Late Bronze Age Pottery*, Princeton 1992, p. 82 [cat. no. 1408], pl. 36.

15 (I 75, 75A/B/7:26). Fragmentary sherd, preserving rim, neck and shoulder areas of vessel, with remains of two marks, partially preserved. Pl. 1b, Fig. 1b. Max. dim. 8.0. Medium coarse fabric (7.5 YR 7/4) with gray core and angular brown and gray inclusions.

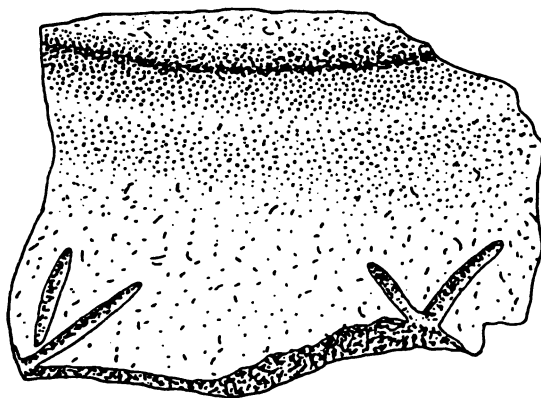


Fig. 1b. Kommos Mark 15 (scale 1 : 1). J. Clarke.

Fragment of globular-bodied jug with very short neck and small, everted rim; wall quite thin. Undecorated, possibly non-local fabric.

LM III A (latest) level just north of north-eastern corner of LM III building P.

Marks: The two marks were incised into the clay of the vessel before firing, but probably not when it was damp. Preserved height 2.0 and 1.2. Unfortunately, neither mark is complete. The left-hand mark (a) appears to be composed of a vertical stroke, crossed by a diagonal stroke; the right-hand one (b) is composed of two diagonals: one running from left to right, the other crossing it from right to left in the same order as the left-hand mark. The closest parallels for this type of marking are two other fragmentary pieces from Kommos of similar coarse vessels (Bennet, catalogue nos. 8 and 9; possibly non-joining parts of the same vessel), each bearing a single mark, perhaps Linear B *i* and *ra* respectively. Parallels also exist for such marks in Linear A inscriptions on pithoi at Agia Triada (HT Zb 158b) and Phaistos (PH Zb 4)<sup>4</sup>. Mark (a) resembles AB 27 (Linear B value: *re*) more closely than it does AB 28 (Linear B value: *i*), in which the diagonal does not normally meet (let alone cross) the vertical. Given the relative simplicity of the sign, however, this should not be regarded as a conclusive identification. Mark (b) is more difficult to relate to any members of an Aegean syllabary, given its partial preservation: possibilities are AB 30 (Linear B value: *ni*), assuming we only have the top left of the sign, the rest being lost beyond the break to the right; AB 31 (Linear B value: *sa*), but in a form closer to Linear A forms of the sign<sup>5</sup>; the upper left part of AB 67 (Linear B value: *ki*), which normally has a double stroke marking the “handle” of the sign, although variants exist with a single stroke<sup>6</sup>. If the marks do form part of an inscription, their separation (3.0) is unusual, but the distance may not seem so out of proportion if we remember that the signs were originally perhaps twice as high as they are now preserved.

### Discussion

Both of the new marks have parallels among the existing corpus of marks from Bronze Age Kommos:<sup>7</sup> 14 is paralleled in Bennet

<sup>4</sup> GORILA 4, pp. 65, 93.

<sup>5</sup> GORILA 5, p. xxxiv.

<sup>6</sup> Notably in variants by hand 117 at Knossos: J.-P. Olivier, *Les scribes de Cnossos* (Incunabula Graeca XVII), Rome 1967, table XVIII.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the Kommos corpus as a whole, readers are referred to Bennet.

catalogue no. 12 (a stirrup jar handle, with a mark closely resembling Linear B *je*); Bennet nos. 11 and 13 (a Canaanite jar handle), while not on stirrup jars, are marks made after firing on vertical strap handles. As was noted above, the best parallels for 15 are at Kommos itself (Bennet nos. 8 and 9).

In terms of chronology, 14 (LM III A2) fits well with the chronology of similar marks at Kommos (12 and 13: LM III A; 11: LM III A1) and elsewhere in the Aegean.<sup>8</sup> 15 (LM III A [latest]) presents more problems. The Kommos parallels (Bennet nos. 8 and 9) were unfortunately surface finds on the site and cannot be more closely dated than "Bronze Age". However, if the marks on those pieces can be convincingly related to the Linear B script, then the likelihood is that they should be dated to LM III, as 15 may be. However, closer parallels exist for deeply-incised inscriptions on coarse-ware vessels during the Neo-Palatial period, and 15 may be a piece from an earlier level incorporated into a level containing material as late as LM III A. If all three (8, 9, and 15) can be convincingly demonstrated to be inscriptions in the Linear B script, they would represent our first three known examples of the use of the script on vessels in a medium other than paint.

Finally, the find spots of 14 and 15 are consistent with the corpus already published (Fig. 2). 14 was found on the Hilltop, the northernmost part of the site. No specific parallels exist from there, but Bennet no. 12 was found near a house in the Central Hillside area, not far to the south. 15 comes from close to the northeastern corner of the large building P. The discovery of a new mark here is not surprising, since the majority of the original corpus (8 marks) comes from the southern part of the site, including two Canaanite jar handles (Bennet nos. 7 [incised before firing] and 13 [after firing]), a discovery that is not surprising given the likelihood of commercial activity in this region of the site<sup>9</sup>. The closest parallels to 15, however (Bennet nos. 8 and 9), were surface finds in the Hilltop area, and, since it was

<sup>8</sup> See also the remarks by Hirschfeld (*supra* n. 2) p. 315, who summarizes: "With few exceptions, the Aegean vessels with incised marks which can be closely dated by either ceramic typology or stratigraphical context fall within LM III A-B."

<sup>9</sup> On non-local pottery at Kommos as an indicator of exchange, see, for example, L. V. Watrous, *Kommos III. The Late Bronze Age Pottery*, Princeton 1992, pp. 169–183; on the likely functions of the structures in the southern part of the site, see J. W. and M. C. Shaw (*supra* n. 1) pp. 187–189.

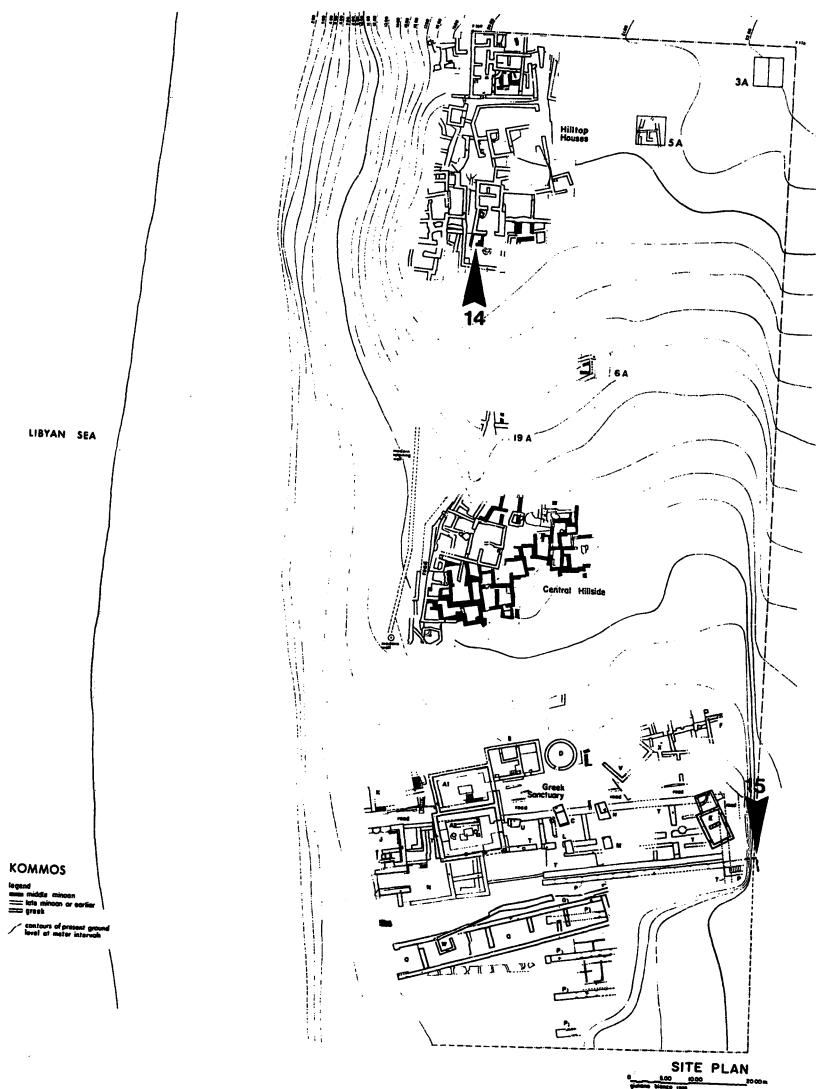
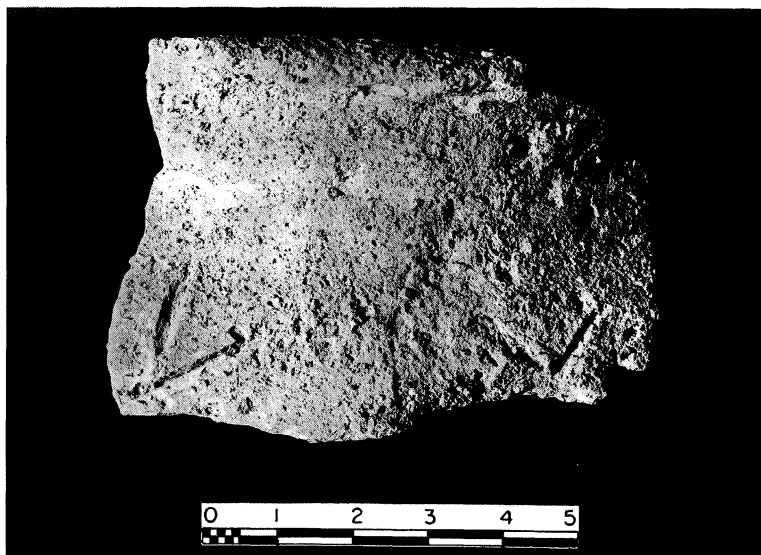


Fig. 2. Plan of Kommos (1985) by Giuliana Bianco, showing find spots of marks 14 and 15.



Pl. 1a. Kommos Mark 14 (scale 1 : 1). Photo T. Dabney.



Pl. 1b. Kommos Mark 15 (scale 1 : 1). Photo T. Dabney.





incised before firing on a coarseware vessel, it may have been marked on Crete, if not actually at the site of Kommos<sup>10</sup>.

One final point worth noting relates to 14. As I noted above, there are close parallels in the location of the mark (on a stirrup jar handle) and its specific form with examples from Tiryns. 14 probably comes from a Chaniot stirrup jar<sup>11</sup> and recent re-study of the piece suggests that it may once have been covered with a dark slip, suggesting that it may originally have had light-on-dark decoration. The significance of the decoration is that a number of stirrup jars found at mainland sites – including Tiryns – have light-on-dark decoration, and fall almost exclusively into one Chaniot clay composition category<sup>12</sup>. None of the published incised marks on Tiryns pottery have light-on-dark decoration, however, but the existence of a Chaniot stirrup jar fragment with a mark similar to an example from Tiryns (where Chaniot vessels have also been found) appears to have some significance.

In conclusion, the marks published here augment the number of marks on pottery attested at this important site in south-central Crete and add to the growing corpus of such marks attested in the Aegean and on Cyprus. It is possible that piece 15 (along with the existing catalogue nos. 8 and 9) may represent a new type of Linear B inscription, although the uncertainties are such that this hypothesis will need confirmation in better preserved and more securely dated material.

---

<sup>10</sup> Excavations in 1993 have revealed more of the LM I “palatial” structure T in the southern area of the site: J. W. Shaw, *American Journal of Archaeology* 98, 1994, pp. 305–306. It is tempting to associate marked vessels – such as 15, if one assumes it is of earlier date than LM III A – with administrative functions centered on this structure.

<sup>11</sup> See Reference in catalogue entry above (p. 103).

<sup>12</sup> Re-study reported by M. C. Shaw (personal communication 28.i.92) and J. Rutter (Kommos catalogue card). For the light-on-dark group of Chaniot stirrup jars, see, for example, H. W. Catling et al., *Annual of the British School at Athens* 75, 1980, p. 82.