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A FRAGMENTARY LINEAR A INSCRIPTION
FROM PETSOPHAS, PALAIKASTRO (PK ZA 20)*

Judging from its architecture and finds, Petsophas, the peak sanctuary of Palaikastro, must have been, together with Iuktas, one of the most important mountain sanctuaries of Minoan Crete.¹ That its pre-eminence should in some way or other reflect the importance of the Middle and Late Minoan town at the foot of the mountain seems obvious; and this importance has recently been confirmed by the discovery of a chryselephantine statue in one of the Late Minoan I B buildings.² At the time of the 1962–1963 excavations by the British School under the direction of L. H. Sackett and M. R. Popham, a fragment of a veined serpentine “libation table” was picked up on the lower slopes of Petsophas. It most likely came from the peak sanctuary or from the cave at the foot of the mountain. Although some scratches were noted on the fragment at the time of its discovery, no further attention was given to it, which is understandable in view

* I thank L. H. Sackett for bringing this inscription to my attention, and L. H. Sackett, M. R. Popham and the Managing Committee of the British School for permission to publish the fragment. Dr. C. F. Macdonald, the Knossos Curator, was very helpful in locating the object in the Stratigraphical Museum, where it is preserved in a tray containing the stone objects of the 1962–1963 campaigns.

¹ For peak-sanctuaries in general, see A. Peatfield, “The Topography of Minoan Peak Sanctuaries”, *BSA* 78, 1983, p. 275–278, and for Petsophas, the recent monograph by B. Rutkowski, *Petsophas. A Cretan Peak Sanctuary*, Warsaw, 1991, where references are given to all finds, including the inscribed objects.

² For its discovery, see J. A. MacGillivray, L. H. Sackett *et alii*, “Excavations at Palaikastro, 1987”, *BSA* 83, 1988, p. 267 and for the excavations of 1988 and 1990 in *BSA* 84, 1989, p. 426–428 and *BSA* 86, 1991, p. 129 and 141–144. For the importance of Palaikastro as a possible palatial settlement, see J. Driessen – J. A. MacGillivray, “The Neopalatial Period in East Crete”, *Aegaeum* 3, 1989, p. 99–110 and J. A. MacGillivray – J. Driessen, “Minoan Settlement at Palaikastro”, in: P. Darcque – R. Treuil (eds.), *L’habitat égéen préhistorique* (BCH, suppl. 19), Paris, 1990, 395–412.

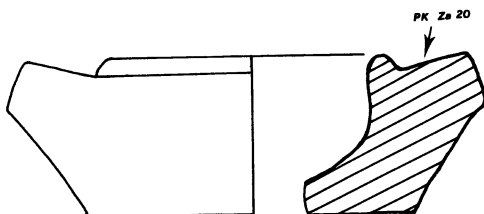


Fig. 1. Profile (scale 1 : 2).

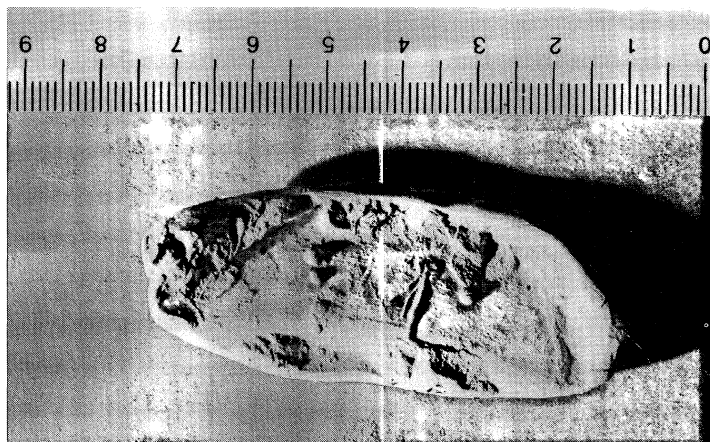


Fig. 2. Inscription of PK Za 20 (scale 1 : 1).

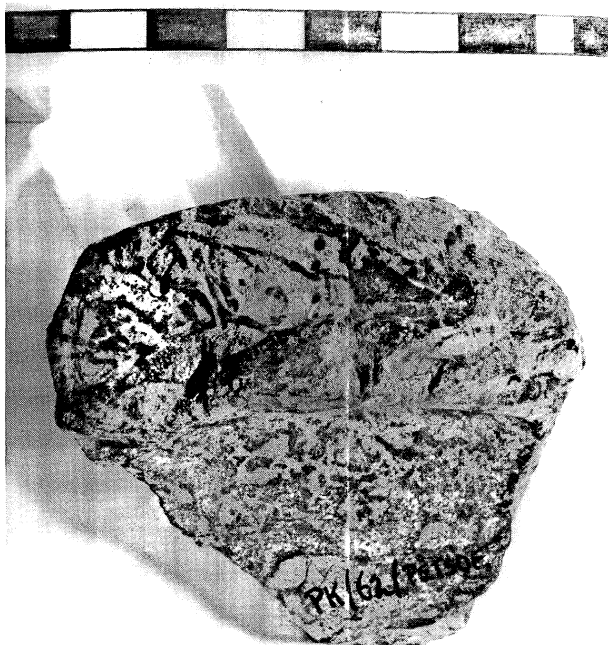
of its bad state of preservation. Nevertheless, given proper lighting, the inscription can still be read as the Linear A sign group AB 10-06-77, which, giving it its Linear B values, would read] . Ū . NA . KĀ [.

The fragment is from the shoulder and side of a small square “libation table” with a circular depression and an angular rim and downward sloping sides (height: 4.5 cm.; width: 5.5 cm.; original diameter: 11 cm.). Many different types of these so-called “libation tables” exist, but the one under discussion appears to belong to Warren’s type 26:1:A.³ There is some variation in the positioning of Linear A inscriptions on such objects, where they can be placed on the rim, edges or sides. The inscription on Za 20 is carefully made

³ P. M. Warren, *Minoan Stone Vases*, Cambridge 1969, 62–68.



Pl. 1. PK Za 20: photograph of plasticine impression (scale 1 : 1).



Pl. 2. PK Za 20: photograph (scale 1 : 1).

and situated on the flat downward sloping outer rim with the U (AB 10) and NA (AB 06) starting from the inner rim, that is, facing inwards; but this is not unusual (see e.g. SY Za 2, Za 3).

Together with two recently published vase inscriptions, found during the new excavations in the town site, the present "rediscovery" brings the total number of inscriptions from Palaikastro to 16 (although 21 numbers have been assigned).⁴ The interest of the present inscription lies in two features: it provides the first example of a sinistroverse inscribed U (AB 10) and, secondly, it adds another example to the corpus of the so-called "libation formulae".⁵

The three preserved signs agree in general with their equivalents in the inscriptions found on Petsophas and elsewhere. Thus, AB 06, with a horizontal stroke underneath which four dots are incised is not unusual. Although the sign, when inscribed on clay, usually has a vertical stalk instead of the dots, inscriptions on stone usually show between two and five dots. Whether AB 77 had curved rather than straight spokes within the circle is difficult to tell but the first variant is more frequent on stone, whereas the other occurs mostly on Linear A clay documents. The first sign, AB 10, is peculiar in presenting, to my knowledge, the first example of a sinistroverse U in a dextroverse inscription⁶, although it is not uncommon for certain Linear A signs to change orientation, for example AB 01, AB 60. The dot to the left of AB 10 is probably a divider, although it cannot be excluded that it was an initial dot, indicating where one had to start reading, as perhaps on IO Za 3.

The publication of inscribed "libation tables" from Iuktas⁷ and Symi⁸ illustrates how most of the Linear A inscriptions found in the peak sanctuaries in general show little variation in the texts, and

⁴ There are at present one tablet (GORILA 1, 280), 11 stone vase inscriptions (GORILA 4, 22–44) and one painted inscription on a vase (GORILA 4, 126–127) from Palaikastro or its peak sanctuary. Two inscriptions on vases were published by the author in BSA 82, 1987, 153–154 (Zb 19) and BSA 86, 1991, 146–147 (Zb 21).

⁵ For a concise review of these "formulae", see I. Schoep, "Ritual, Politics and Script on Minoan Crete", in: *Aegean Archaeology* (forthcoming).

⁶ For a sinistroverse ω in a sinistroverse inscription, see Pl Zf 1. I thank J.-P. Olivier for this comment.

⁷ A. Karetsou – L. Godart – J.-P. Olivier, "Inscriptions en linéaire A du sanctuaire de sommet minoen du mont Iouktas", *Kadmos* 24, 1985, pp. 89–147.

⁸ P. Metaxa-Muhly, "Linear A Inscriptions from the Sanctuary of Hermes and Aphrodite", *Kadmos* 23, 1984, p. 124–135.

recent, as yet unpublished, finds stress this repetitive character. Although this makes the study of the material rather tedious, it does stress the importance of these so-called “ritual formulae” and may point to some kind of a unified ritual system as well as a single religious language throughout large parts of Crete. Our sign group may without much doubt be restored to 10-06-77[-06-41 or U.NA.KA[.NA.SI, a group which may have originally been used at Apodulou, on Kophinas and Iuktas, at Symi and especially on Petsophas itself.⁹ Although this particular sign group is attested on its own, it also forms part of a triad, formed by 10-06-77-06-41, 28-39-06-80, 41-26-04 (e.g. on Iuktas (IO Za 2), Kophinas (KO Za 1) and elsewhere), and it is this triad that forms part of the so-called “primary formula”, together with another sign group (08-59-28-301-54-57) which always precedes U.NA.KA.NA.SI (SY Za 1, IO Za 2, KO Za I, PK Za 11 etc.).¹⁰ Since it is likely that traces of a sign exist on the left edge of Za 20, it remains a possibility that this was also the case with the present inscription.

Of course, nothing can be said about the dating of this stray object, but, in view of the palaeography and type of vessel as well as of the important Neopalatial remains on top of Petsophas, there is nothing against a Middle Minoan III B – Late Minoan I A date.

⁹ J. Raison – M. Pope, *Corpus transnuméré du linéaire A* (BCILL, 18), Louvain-la-Neuve, 1980, 241; GORILA 4, 18–20 and especially Karetsou – Godart – Olivier (supra n. 7), p. 93–94: U.NA.KA.NA.SI occurs on SY Za 2, TL Za 1, PK Za 8, KO Za 1 and part of the sign group may occur on AP Za 2, IO Za 2, IO Za 9.

¹⁰ For a full discussion, see Karetsou – Godart – Olivier (supra n. 7), p. 133 where all variations are given, e.g. on PK Za 12.